

Blogs for 2020

Part Four



by Michael Erlewine

2020 Blogs
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Readable, but not finely edited (no time)

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THE FAMILY DHARMA WEEKENDS

[A time trip back into the 1980s and the Family Dharma Weekends out by the lake]

Something that troubled me when I was learning the dharma and having a family was how to combine the two. In other words, how to include children into dharma teachings and get-togethers? For example, at our monastery in upstate New York, KTD (Karma Triyana Dharmachakra) children were not allowed on campus. So, when we would come to the monastery, an 800-mile drive (each way), we would always bring our kids. After all, we never had a babysitter for some 21 years, other than our older kids (my daughter lotis) babysitting the younger ones. We just never had an event important enough for us to leave our kids with someone, ever

Anyway, every year we would make the 14-16hr trip (stopping overnight with the kids) to KTD, and find a motel down in Woodstock where we could stay and leave them with our oldest daughter lotis. It was tough running up and down the three-mile mountain road all the time, like lunch or whatever. During our trips to Tibet, we noticed that kids and family were an integral part of the scene. Of course, this all changed when Bardor Rinpoche (part of KTD) began having kids of his own and they were all over the place. Pretty soon after that, kids were allowed on the KTD campus

In the meantime, our center in Michigan, Heart Center KTC, began having what were called Family Dharma Weekends. These took place out at two cottages that

we owned on Horsehead Lake, about 13 miles from our home in Big Rapids, Michigan. We did this for a number of years, and either Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche or Bardor Rinpoche would come and officiate. These events often lasted 3-4 days and whole families would come as well as couples and individuals

There would be dharma teachings for the adults, lots of things for the kids to do, as well as swimming and boating, games, and really great home-cooked meals

In cleaning out my files I came across some photos from the Family Dharma Weekend in July of 1987 and I thought some of you might get a kick out of it

At this multi-day event we had teachings on “Tibetan Buddhist Festivals,” including the meaning of the New and Full Moon, eclipses, etc., “Dharma for Children,” and “Buddhism: The Path of Gentleness,” and “The Life of the Buddha,” plus a Manjushri Empowerment “The Lion’s Roar.”

We had a meditation area under a large canopy, and various activities going on. Rinpoche and his translator Ngodup Burkhar stayed in a small cabin, and the rest of us stayed in the larger cabin, or camped out. Some were in motels

These family-dharma weekends were special events for me that, after they ended, it took time to adjust to regular life again. Here are some photos from that weekend or perhaps from others

In there is a group photo of the Family Dharma Weekend in July of 1987. Not all the Lamas! At that time they were not yet lamas, but it just shows you what happens when you get around a great rinpoche

Dec 30, 2020, 9:04 PM

THE ECONOMY OF DHARMA

I am just naturally interested in the economy of effort, and for me this comes into play with dharma practice. How do we get to where we want to go from where we are? Take Shamata (Tranquility Meditation), stabilizing the mind, something that we all have to learn

What it comes down to for me is this mercurial thing we call "interest." What are we interested in enough to give it our undivided attention? Dharma aside, it can be important to know what in the whole world are we that interested in?

And it's kind of a circular argument. We follow or discover what interests us and stick to that to the exclusion of distractions. When we are keenly interested, distractions don't come up. However we manage it, allowing the mind to rest is necessary in order to accomplish Shamata (Tranquility Meditation)

Finding something the genuinely interests us seems a lot easier than having our goal in Shamata Meditation practice be "removing our distractions," and we try to sit there and work with our distractions. And as for trying "not to be distracted" as a replacement for our natural interest (whatever that might be) seems putting the cart before the horse. Can you see my point?

Trying to sit in Tranquility Meditation (Shamata), and somehow remain undistracted, is not as interesting to me as my natural "interest" itself in the dharma of whatever I am doing, especially if I can give myself the

time and leeway enough to discover that natural interest. I can assure you that, for each of us, interest is there if we can allow it to emerge

I probably discovered this from my childhood interest in nature and natural history, but this certainly was confirmed through some 40 years or so as a computer programmer, where programming requires concentrated interest to solve problems. And I was just naturally interested in solving those problems

Is there enough natural interest to go around or do we at some point have to learn to concentrate whether or not we are interested in the process? That's a question, but kind of a rhetorical one. The goal is to learn Shamata meditation thoroughly

I can see it both ways, but my natural inclination is to be interested in what I am doing to the exclusion of distractions. I know that works because I do it all the time. And this "natural interest" seems to stay that way going forward, an organic spring of inspiration. In fact, the process of finding or being interested is a valuable skill, IMO, to have

For me, the takeaway here should be that if we are finding it difficult to "cold-call" learn Shamata Meditation by rote practice, then we might do well to looking into what it is that we naturally are deeply interested in and try that, even if that interest is not overtly "dharma." Dharma, IMO, is everywhere and in everything

I write this because I, personally, had a terrible time learning Shamata Meditation, just as I had a terrible time learning algebra in school, but got all A's in Geometry. I practiced Shamata for 32 years and still knew I had not accomplished it enough to use it as a base for Insight Meditation (Vipassana.)

Then, one year my dharma teacher of 36 years, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, pointed out to a group of us: “Those of you who know how to use a computer may have a leg up on those who do not, because concentration can be learned on the computer,” something like that

When Rinpoche said that, a light went on in my head, for as a systems programmer, I totally knew how to concentrate and had to if I wanted my programs to work. From that comment, I realized I was already accomplished at the kind of attention needed to learn Shamata Meditation. My problem was that I was trying to “salt the salt,” as folks say. I was used to naturally being interested in what I concentrated on, and sitting there trying to deal with distractions, was too “uninteresting” for me to hold my attention

I already had an A+ grade in being able to concentrate. So, give it some thought. You may already know how to concentrate and can transfer that knowledge to sitting meditation easier than learn it from scratch. This is something I have observed

Dec 30, 2020, 1:05 PM

THE CRYSTAL CAVE OF GURU RINPOCHE

PART 4 of 4

Here is the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPek2KlNyfo>

This is the last blog in this series. Starting out, we crossed a small natural rock bridge above a rushing stream and began our climb. This is the Terchu or 'Rediscovered Water', a spring sacred to Guru Rinpoche. From here on, the way was indeed steep, with sheer drops on one side and a rock face on the other. The building and the cave high above us seemed far away, protruding out from the mountain side. We climbed on, with both Margaret and myself often plopping down to rest and staring out over the valley or looking down the steep drop. As we hiked, we began to come across bright strings tied to objects hanging from the rocks. Many pilgrims had been here before us and must have taken this very same path, there being no other. I imagined that perhaps Khenpo Rinpoche (not to mention Guru Rinpoche) had climbed in this same space

Exhausted, but exhilarated (and proud of ourselves), we finally made it to the top and a small level area next to the 2-story building that houses the Crystal Cave (Shel-Drak Drubphuk) and a small gompa and shrine. From here there is an incredible view of the entire Yarlung Valley below. Next, we climbed some steep ladder-like steps to our left and entered a tiny room, which contained a few more steps to an even tinier place, the cave itself. The cave was almost full, with three other pilgrims plus a monk from the monastery below who was in the midst of doing a Guru Rinpoche puja, complete with tsok, the ritual feast offering. There was

just enough room for the four of us to wedge inside. Here was the cave, with rough walls, containing a tiny shrine in which was a statue of Guru Rinpoche and before which were butter lamps. We brought a photo of the young Karmapa that we had just taken, which the attending monk at once happily put in the center of the shrine

When the puja was ended, the monk handed around pieces of tsok torna to everyone and then the pilgrims (and the monk) withdrew from the smaller cave room. We were able to do our prostrations and whatever other practice we felt like offering. It was special to be here and we asked for Guru Rinpoche's blessing, each in our own way

Afterward, we visited the small gompa next to the cave and the excellent shrine there. We looked out over the entire Yarlung Valley, knowing that we had come from the very bottom to here. The valley, which stretched on far below us, is said to be the place from which the entire Tibetan civilization arose. Indeed, it was vast and beautiful, awesome would be a better word. I could not imagine how in the wide world we could ever get from where we now were (on top) back to the plains below. It just seemed physically impossible

But back down we went, and it only took something over two hours and (for me) a couple of feet full of blisters to reach the abandoned village. My shoes could not take the constant pressure from bracing for the downhill climb and my toes suffered. I could feel it happening, but there was nothing I could do about it. Down we went and down we went, mile after mile

Our tractor was still there and we rattled back down the riverbed to town, just as the rains rolled in from the mountains. After some tea at the driver's home, the

rains slowed, and we climbed back into the tractor and were driven to and through Tsetang, to the amusement of everyone who saw us. Perhaps they had never seen westerners ride in the back of a tractor, as Tibetans do all the time. It was a slow cross-town ride through some rain and lots of huge puddles

Once back, I took a hot bath, changed my clothes, and went down to one of those dinners you just inhale. Beyond exhaustion, I was almost euphoric at having actually, despite obstacles, made the climb to the Crystal Cave on Crystal Mountain and made an aspiration to Guru Rinpoche, on his home turf

Dec 29, 2020, 11:32 PM

THE CRYSTAL CAVE OF GURU RINPOCHE

PART 3 of 4

Here is the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdlIRk12i7E>

Aside from all the heavy breathing, this place was gorgeous

From the little blurbs that I read, the next place to arrive at would be Lumo Durtrö, a female naga cemetery dedicated to Tamdrin, the horse-headed deity. This was a traditional Tibetan sky burial place, where bodies are cut up with sharp tools and fed to the vultures. However, this spot was not readily forthcoming

We climbed and climbed and climbed. Somewhere along in here we met a old man with skin like leather, coming down, who motioned to us to come close. He took what looked like a piece of quartz crystal from his pack and began to hack away at it, eventually handing each of us a small piece. It was rock candy, sugar. We thanked him and moved on. Those small pieces of sugar, something I would never eat normally, turned out to be just the thing and that little bit of energy meant a lot at that point. On we went and after a very long time our guide pointed through the mist to a distant stupa, high on the mountain. Groan. This was the place we should have reached an hour ago, itself just a stepping stone on our journey. Panting and struggling, we moved on

One of the strangest experiences in this kind of climbing is that, sooner or later, you do reach these far-glimpsed places. It just takes time and suffering. We reached the sky burial place and sure enough, there were human bones and meat cutting tools scattered around, a wrist and hand lying under a small bush. And clothes everywhere. Apparently, it is the custom to scatter the clothes of the deceased nearby. The place looked like a Good Will store after a hurricane. And this stupa was just a way station. We did kora (circumambulating) around the stupa and looked to see if there were any more human remains (fascinating) and marched on

After a very long time, the trail began to even out some and there were sections that almost resembled walking, but not quite and not for long. Margaret offered to help me carry my pack and we took turns for a while. We began to have glimpses of a monastery across a canyon that, believe it or not, our guide informed us we had to get to. It seemed so far away from where we now were. By this time, we were high up and our yak

herder began to find some of his yaks, but they were always on the other side of the canyon from him. He had a sling and was adept at winging rocks across the canyon and near the yaks. They hit with a pinging sound, but the yaks did not pay too much attention. Meanwhile, I couldn't even look around me half the time, so hard was I breathing. It was all I could do to look at the ground in front of me and put one foot in front of the other

The path turned into almost a rock staircase just before we reached Shel-Drak Monastery, which is dedicated to the famous Nyingma terton, Sangye Lingpa. We scrambled up and into a wide courtyard. The monastery front had a single large door, but it was closed and looked for all the world like it was abandoned. "What to do?" I asked our guide. Try opening the large door," he said and, sure enough, it swung open. We pushed inside and collapsed on a porch in a sunny inner courtyard, where we had lunch and butter-tea. It was only hard-boiled eggs, some bread, and a few cookies, but it tasted like ambrosia after the long hike. We were so tired. As it turned out, this gompa marked the end of the easy ascent. From here on it is almost straight up, like rock stairs. The good news is that in this last stretch it takes less than an hour of climbing to reach the cave. To be continued

[Photo my Margaret or me looking down from the Crystal Cave of Guru Rinpoche. You can see where we came from the valley far below.]

Dec 29, 2020, 10:32 PM

THE CRYSTAL CAVE OF GURU RINPOCHE

PART 2

Here is the video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvAwWHPkoV4&feature=youtu.be>

Our driver found the Tsechu Bumpa Stupa, one of the three main stupas in the Yarlung Valley area, whereupon we begin to knock on doors. We located one man with a tractor, but, since it was the harvest time, he had already agreed to work elsewhere that day. Things did not look good. But then he suggested that there might be one fellow, a newcomer to the area, who might be free. Knocking at his house aroused his fierce dog and brought his wife to the door. He was still asleep, but she would wake him

After some time, he came out rubbing his eyes and our guide gave him the pitch. I cannot understand Tibetan, but I could see by the way he was shaking his head that things were not going the way we had hoped. I told our guide to up the ante until he couldn't afford to refuse. This tactic worked; he agreed to take us and our own driver left us standing in the road, waiting for the tractor man to get his machine. Although it seemed from the outside like a garage, the man opened a garage door to what turned out to be a courtyard (with no roof), where the tractor was kept. Then there was the starting of the tractor and the fact that the cart (where we would ride) was filled with water, which had to be drained. That done, we climbed into the cart, sitting on empty feed bags and blankets that his wife brought out just before we were about to get our butts wet. She tucked a small bottle of butter-tea and some tsampa under the driver's seat (his lunch) and we were off, although at what seemed a snail's pace

The idea was to ride the tractor as far up the mountain as it would go, saving our legs for the really hard part. As it turned out, there really was no road where we were going. Instead, we followed the dry bed of a stream uphill, moving very slowly toward the mountains. After a mile or so, it became difficult for the tractor to pull us in the soft mud and we all had to get out and push. Pretty soon, we were spending more time pushing than riding and it was apparent that we could go no farther. So we left the driver and the tractor to wait for us, perhaps the whole of the day

I have no pictures from the first part of the trip, because we were shrouded in mist and then clouds. I can tell you that it was tough going even from the start, as in: all uphill and steep at that. Our first goal was to climb to the small village of Sekhang Zhirka perched on a ridge (call it our base camp), from which we would push off up the mountain to Crystal Cave, a hard 3-hour climb from the ridge. But reaching that village was a long haul from the valley floor, perhaps 5 kilometers and always going up. Even though I don't generally use caffeine, I had mental images of arriving there and having a nice warm cup of butter-tea, knowing that the long climb would burn off any bad side effects of the caffeine. At last, we did reach the village, which was more like a bunch of houses strung together, but there was no tea. Everyone had abandoned the town to move back down to the valley for the winter. By this time, we were breathing pretty hard. After a good sit, we moved on

From here on, it got really steep, something I thought it already had been. It is hard to describe, but in many cases we were just scrambling up steep slopes of boulders or the so-called path became just a wide staircase of strewn rock and boulders. My so-called (by me earlier that morning) light day pack soon began to

feel very heavy indeed. My wife and I just kind of dropped behind, while our daughter and the guide went ahead. After awhile, the two of us gave up any pretense of being tough and just began to sit down when we needed to, which was all the time. At the worst, we were resting every 20 or 30 feet, and I mean sitting down, resting

What can I say? I am getting old, etc., but it was tough. Our guide met a local man who was up here looking for lost yaks, hoping to drive them back down for the coming winter. He and the guide went on ahead and our daughter, who quickly passed them, left both of us in the dust. One of the guys took Margaret's pack, to make it easier for her. We were walking in the clouds or at least surrounded by them. In time, we climbed above the mist and clouds and began to be able to see more of the mountains around us. We were essentially walking up the spine of a great wide ridge on the side of a mountain, with a deep canyon across from us. To be continued

[Photo by Margaret or me of the Guru Rinpoche statue of the Crystal Cave.]

THE CRYSTAL CAVE OF GURU RINPOCHE

PART 1

[Photo of a sky burial in Tibet on the way up to She-Drak , the Crystal Cave of Guru Rinpoche.]

Here is the video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEb-eh5xYf8&feature=youtu.be>

One pilgrimage spot that everyone tried to talk me out of going to was the legendary Crystal Cave (Shel Drak) of Guru Rinpoche on Crystal Mountain, a key pilgrimage site for Tibetans, in particular those of the Nyingma Lineage. It is said to represent Guru Rinpoche's Buddha attributes. After all, this was Guru Rinpoche's first meditation cave in Tibet. It was here that he bound the demons and Bön influences under oath. Many termas were hidden and revealed here to practitioners like Orgyen Lingpa and others. I felt I had to go there

Both of the experienced Tibet trekkers that I knew said it was too hard and that neither of them had ever been there. Even our local guide had never been there and suggested that anything that I had read suggesting that it was doable, was probably written by someone who did not know how difficult this journey is. My will to reach the Crystal Cave was not as strong after hearing this and my resolution wavered

But then we visited Traduk Temple in the Yarlung Valley, some 7 kilometers South of Tsetang. As we wandered through this beautiful gompa, we came to one room with a striking gold statue of Guru Rinpoche. I remember reading that the original statue of Guru Rinpoche had been removed from the Crystal Cave for safekeeping and placed in a nearby monastery. This had to be it and, as the monk at the temple explained, so it was

It is perhaps the most inspiring image of Guru Rinpoche that I have ever seen. And seeing that statue rekindled my will to visit the cave where it had been and I again resolved to reach Shel-Drak

Something inside me just had to go to the Guru Rinpoche cave at Crystal Mountain. I informed my guide I was going, even if I had to hire a separate vehicle and go by myself. Resigned, our guide turned his attention to helping us figure how to do it

One thing I knew is that we had to start early, since it would be an all-day hike. Most of our party elected to not even try, staying instead in the Tsetang area, where our driver would shuttle them from gumpa to gumpa. Those of us who would try to reach Shel-Drak were myself, my wife Margaret, our 15-year-old daughter May, and our Tibetan guide

As for directions, all we knew was to drive to the Tsechu Bumpa, a well-known stupa in the village of Kato (on outskirts of Tsetang), try to find a local guide, and perhaps hire a tractor to carry us part of the way. Now the Tibetan (or Chinese) tractor is not the beast we all know by that name here in the U.S. What they mean by a tractor in Tibet is more what we would call a large Rototiller, the small 2-wheel, 2-cycle engines that can plow a field and (in Tibet) pull a cart. These tractors fill the streets and side roads of Tibet, pulling carts filled with vegetables, brush, or (most often) people

[Photo by Margaret of a sky burial stupa, where the vultures came and pick the bones. This sky burial is partway up from the valley on the way to She-Drak, the Crystal Cave. To be continued.]

Dec 28, 2020, 10:00 AM

FAILING INSIGHT

[Prose in the shape of a poem.]

When words become opaque instead of clear,
And I can no longer see,
From the window of language,
At where they point,

I know then that Samsara's bite,
Has brought me unwillingly to a conclusion

If I cannot get beyond myself,
And fail to reach an escape velocity,
Much less achieve anything like,
An exponential angle for launch,
I cannot avoid remaining,
Dualistically bound

All that's required,
Is to examine the stability,
Of a mind that is just upset,
Too imbalanced and not steady enough,
For the rocket of Insight to take flight

[This is a poem about Shamata (Tranquility Meditation),
and its necessity for Insight Meditation.]

'WAKE UP, WAKE UP, FRIEND OWL!'

That would be Thumper calling to us. Speaking of
waking up, what caught my attention many years ago

was the shape of the universe, that it had a shape. I was used to looking out at the night sky and seeing it filled with the pinpoint lights of the stars. Yes, the great arch in the sky of our Milky Way galaxy has shape, but shape made up of those pinpoints, but as to the rest of space, not so much

In the early 1970s, I spent a lot of time in the University of Michigan's physics library, not so much for the physics per se, but for the astrophysics. I was busy discovering for myself that the night sky very much had a shape, only our eyes cannot see it. And that is because the sky's shape is only visible at radio wavelengths and not at the wavelengths that our human eye responds to

I've created a little graphic (see below) to illustrate this. In the top part of the graphic is a depiction of the night sky at visible-to-us wavelengths. You can see the single stars shining in the sky as they do. In the lower half of the graphic is how same night sky as seen at radio frequencies. As you see, at radio frequencies, the night sky very much has a definite shape or form, something more form-like than the pinpoint stars

This information, being able to see the overall shape of our Milky Way galaxy, was very helpful. I share this with you to point out that the shape of things literally fills out the form of the pointillistic individual stars that we see with our eyes. That's the point

As for me, I went on to study the night sky in various wavelengths, not just the electromagnetic spectrum our eyes respond to, but as mentioned here, the infrared and radio frequencies on one end of the visual spectrum and the ultraviolet, X-ray, Gamma ray, and Cosmic rays on the other. I published a whole book on this in 1976 called "Astrophysical Directions," which is

still available as a free e-book, now called “The Astrology of Space” here:

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/The-Astrology-of-Space.pdf>

In this blog, I draw your attention to the shape of things and not just the “points” of things, and these shapes can very much improve our understanding. With that in mind, I now want to move on to looking at astrological natal charts with you. They too have a shape and learning to read that shape I find very meaningful, thus useful

And of course, you know me. I first learned about the shape of astrological charts from studying, that’s right, my own heliocentric chart. And it came about quite by accident. Well, perhaps I shouldn’t say by accident, because as a programmer programming astrology back in the early (and later) 1970s, I was systematically studying and computerizing anything astrological. Keep in mind, that back then astrologers were still creating charts by hand with log tables and look-up ephemerides. There were no home computers at that time. I had the honor of computerizing astrology and sharing those programs with my fellow astrologers

Actually, I was doing some of this before those home computers were available, using trig tables and whatever algorithms were possible using 4-function calculators and later programmable calculators. As mentioned, this was before we had computers that could do astrological calculations, but I’m at the verge of digressing here

Anyway, I was calculating my own heliocentric natal chart and drawing those planet positions in on a 360-degree chart form by hand. I did tens of thousands of

them. When, I finished the chart, now what to do with it? I had never seen my own helio chart and it was very different than my more familiar geocentric natal chart. Hmm, thought I, what's this all about?

Well, of course, I started right in with the helio chart, interpreting the planets, their aspects, and placement as I had always done with my geocentric natal chart. And I found that all these calculations (elemental balance, triplicities, and so on) made sense in the helio as they always had in the standard geocentric chart. This is all I knew how to do at that point

I would think obvious things like: My natal geo Mars is in Aries, but in my helio chart my natal Mars actually was in Aquarius when I was born. And so, I would think things like: my Aries Mars and quick temper actually might accomplish Aquarian goals, and so on. This is. Of course, typical of what we astrologers do, is it not?

Well, something happened as I continued to persevere in this same vein, exercising all my astrological rules and techniques on this new-to-me heliocentric natal chart. And somewhere along in that process, like the sun coming up, it dawned on me that this helio chart had something else going for it, something that I had never seen before, and I am a nitpicker

Keep in mind, that in the helio chart, we have no Moon. The Moon is part of the Earth system. And the same is true for houses. There are no houses in the helio chart, unless you want to consider the zodiac signs like houses, which some do. And here is why I showed you the radio sky and its shape or form

I began to see that these helio charts, without their Moon and houses, were singing a different tune, one I had never heard before. These helio chart patterns from

the planets had shape, much like the night sky has shape if you see it in the right light. And somewhere along in there, I just stopped (and please note this) doing all my little astrological tricks and habits on this helio chart, and instead, just began to contemplate the shapes in that chart that began emerging. They were like an ever-changing kaleidoscope, a living and pulsing entity that represented the solar system with its Sun and planets

These were whole-chart patterns. I remembered the seven Chart Patterns of astrologer Marc Edmund Jones, shapes like the Seesaw, Bowl, Bucket, Splash, Bundle, Locomotive, and Splay. Yet, in the helio chart, I found myself realizing that, using the simple Ptolemaic aspects (conjunction, opposition, sextile, , square, and trine) ,any pattern that appeared by linking the planets together one to another in their order around the wheel became a chart type. I ended up with about 60 clear chart types

And through all of these types, emerged a simple principle that stood out. Any given helio chart either has or does not have a clear Grand Cross or T-Square in the chart. I'm not talking about an individual square (90-degrees), but a T-Square (opposition with a planet square to the opposition ... or it didn't

And from this very simple observation of this T-Square or no T-Square, like a beating heart, a simple story began to unfold. The charts with the square formations (T-Square or Grand Cross), with its square construction became "The Loved One," the object that is easily objectified, while everything else, every other kind of pattern (without these) became "The Lover," the one who appreciates the loved one. In particular, the opposite of the Grand Cross was the Grand Trine, three

bodies separated by 120-degree aspects that formed a triangle. This Grand Trine pattern most effectively avoids sending a “cross” through the center of the solar system Sun

I imagine that I am threatening here to lose you in the details, but try to retain the whole gestalt I am building here, that each whole-chart pattern tells a story. It’s actually a simple story, with those who love and those who are loved, those who care for and those who are cared-for in this life. It comes down to that

I have books you can read on all this, which lay it all out much more gradually than what I can do here in a single blog. As I began to create the helio charts of my family, all the people I knew, and all the people of importance that I knew from books, they all told the same story. For some reason, these helio charts are seminal or profound. I realized this

These helio chart patterns and what they reveal did NOT show up or transfer to the traditional geocentric charts that I had used until that point, except as in a “through a glass darkly” manner. It became clear to me that looking at the solar system from where we are on Earth (geo) is not as virile or vital (whatever words you want to use) as looking at the system as it actually exists in space (helio). The shape of the solar system includes us as one part

I then went on a journey of discovery on which I still am traveling, trying all kinds of things. I did numerous helio charts of everyone I knew, drew them out, and filled the shelves with notebooks of them. For example, I did the charts of those I knew that I did not like and could not get along with. That was instructive, because when I had amassed a bunch of them, I could see that all these

people had the SAME chart pattern as my own natal helio chart pattern

And then I realized that was because I did not like myself all that much or anyone that was similar to me. Immediately on discovering this, I began to remedy that, to get to know myself and, heaven forbid, actually accept and like who I was. For me, that was one of the powers of the heliocentric chart

Of course, I could go on and on, however I will spare you. And I end by just saying that astrologers missed a crucial step when Copernicus pointed out to the existing astronomer/astrologers (some 500 years ago) that everything does NOT revolve around us. We revolved around the Sun. Those who became astronomers got it right off. Astrologers still have yet to get it as a group

I believe that the VALUE to astrologers of the heliocentric chart is the single cause of why astrology today tends to be a marginal or fringe livelihood in this modern time, at least in most countries

And so, of course, since I care for astrology and astrologers, I encourage each of you to get to know your helio chart, side by side, with your geo chart. After all, it is just another view of the exact moment of your birth, with the same planets, etc., but from another point of view. The two charts, geo and helio, offer you a stereo or 3D version of who you are. Take a look

Here are a couple of books that describe what I consider as the 60 major heliocentric chart types and what they mean:

“STARTYPES: LIFE PATH PARTNERS”

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/StarTypes.pdf>

“DHARMA CHART, KARMA CHART: ASTROLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE 21st CENTURY

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Dharma%20Karma-2003%20rev%20Nov2015.pdf>

Dec 26, 2020, 11:26 AM

MY ASTROLOGY FRIENDS

“Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em,

And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so ad infinitum.”

Of course, it is fine to just keep looking at this larger solar system that we are part of from our Earth's perspective. That's what we have always done. Yet, this oblique view of the solar system from Earth's perspective and view is limited. And yes, you keep telling me that the geocentric view is the only reality, this view from Earth of the solar system

It's not that I don't get that. Like you, that's the only view I ever had looked at from day one of my astrological interest. However, when in the early 1970s I found and tried an alternate view, a look at the solar system itself as the system actually is and functions, I had a second view offered to me and so I tried it out from curiosity. This was the heliocentric view, which is nothing more than a chart of the same moment, the same planets, only from an alternate view.

And just one real-time example may be useful. The recent Grand Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which was exact from Earth's view on December 21, 2020, while the actual physical conjunction heliocentrically, the one that physically related to the Sun from the view of the solar system, took place on November 3, 2020, Election Day. You tell me which was the most operative date? Yet, it is NOT a question of one or the other charts. We benefit from both views

What I found is that the two views, the geocentric and heliocentric, triangulate, and go together to give me what I call a stereo or 3D view of who and what I am, not to mention spiritually why I am on the planet. And I appreciated that more than I can find words here to express

I was stunned and thrilled to have a second opinion on who I was. And, as mentioned, it's not one or the other, but it is the two views used together, the geo and helio, that work properly. And there are other views as well, yet I don't want to frighten you, but just to complex it up a bit, to review the facts

There are other coordinate systems that we can use, like Azimuth and Altitude to plot out the local space surrounding us, and there are Right Ascension and Declination to position the Earth coordinates. And it does not stop there. Like those Russian Matryoshka dolls, nested one within the other, there is the Galaxy, in which our solar system is embedded, and even the Supergalaxy in which our Galaxy is embedded

And it can get even more complicated, if you dare to look further. More examples: each system, whether the local horizon, the Earth (or other planets), the Sun, Galaxy, Supergalaxy, etc. are not only nested, one

within the other, but these different systems each are also INCLINED or oriented differently one to the other

And so, it is not even as simple as one system is the mother or contains another (nested), but that each nested system is also inclined (or not inclined) one to the other. So, we may grasp the nesting, but fail to also understand or realize that one system is not well-inclined to the other, and so on

Of course, this is the secret of so much esoteric astrology, that not only is a lesser view embraced by a larger view, but a view may not be inclined to the next. And so, we may be disinclined to our former views and that may obscure clarity. It's like the old hermetic axiom:

Above, So Below,

But after Another Manner

It's the "... after another manner" that is the inclination. We are differently inclined, so the fact that we are no longer inclined to behave as we once did, can mask inner changes and a change in life

If any of you reading this find this interesting, here are the ideas laid out in a more gradual format

"Cycles or Circles, Centers, and Circulation"

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Circles%20or%20Cycles%20-%20Centers%20and%20Circulation%202020%20V2.pdf>

Dec 25, 2020, 11:49 PM

“FROM LITTLE ACORNS DO GROW GREAT OAKS”

[The quiet of Christmas Eve, now very early in the morning on Christmas day. I read a letter to Santa from my six-years old granddaughter, thanking Santa for his hard work. I could go on a ramble here, it being Christmas and all, but instead I will sit tight. Wish I was allowed a cup of hot chocolate. Some of you ask me about meditation, which I feel is do important,]

Yes, I meditate, but I also know that what that word represents to readers can mean a thousand things, and I sometimes forget to keep that in mind. I assume that you know what the age-old kinds of meditation as used by the Buddha actually are, but that does not seem to be true from reading many comments

Just as eskimos are said to have dozens of words for the kinds of snow, so do the Tibetans and Hindus have many words for the various kinds of meditation. In America, meditation is a blanketing word that mostly obscures the reality of what I as a dharma person actually do. Wish I could better convey what that is, so that folks would know that there are alternatives. What do you think meditation is?

What I do in terms of meditation practice is not the popular meaning of meditation as some kind of relaxation therapy. And the five minutes of downtime some folks do, sitting gently in a corner, which I'm sure is beneficial, does not comprise the thousands of years of traditional meditation practice and why it is so important for the lives of those of us living today

With the flood of all of what passes for meditation in today's world, how will the voice of just a few of us be heard and should I worry? It seems easier just to come up with another word or concept as to what the Buddha and others actually did. Perhaps "mind training," training the mind, is a more useful term. However, that may be too much like training dogs. Perhaps a better phrase might be that meditation reveals the mind to us

In either case, we are revealing or training the mind for what?

Well, we are revealing the mind's essential clarity, helping the mind to see clearly, and not to succumb so easily to the flood of obscurations that too often overwhelm us; as Shakespeare said, "... the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to." At what time and under what conditions do we rise above that flood of fog and do what we need to do in order to claim some clarity in our lives?

In my own case, it was in my late teens that it first occurred to me that the mind we all share is something we have any control over whatsoever. Perhaps it was in those night-to-dawn conversations in the late 1950s, sitting around, drinking lousy instant coffee, and smoking cigarettes, talking about philosophy and literature. For me, that was probably the beginning

Or perhaps, I first grasped that the dharma, is not just something to talk about, but something to do, from the great Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. In my life, Trungpa was a game changer. He personally sat me down and taught me to meditation in a little room

It took me years to fathom that mysterious word "dharma" and I was hesitant to even mouth the word, much less be able to define it meaningfully. And it took

still longer to identify dharma as pretty much what I understood natural “science” was, at least what I understood science back then to be, as in my love and reverence for the natural world. Nature and the dharma had much in common

As to all the many Sanskrit terms, how awful it is to mispronounce those foreign words that I had never heard spoken, only to, much later, have to force myself into the correct pronunciation, when I finally heard someone speak those words out loud. Painful

And how much longer yet to stop saying the word “Buddha” as ‘Boo-dah’, and rather pronounce it correctly, as it is spelled, “Buh-dah.” And the list goes on

As mentioned, this word “meditation,” for me, is an entire world, essentially another life within this life, a reality more real than I have otherwise known. And the dharma, especially Tibetan dharma, was so new back then to most of us. Authentic dharma practitioners were few and far between, and most of us ran around in circles trying to make it real for ourselves

I don’t even want to think about how misguided we were or how much time was wasted getting properly oriented. It was more like decades than years, and it still is going on. Certainly, no one I knew could meditate. We had our daily practice and we “practiced,” meditation, but we did not actually meditate. It’s not that easy, IMO, but worth any price to learn

Even something as simple as having a shrine in my home. The whole idea of a shrine or even the word “shrine,” was foreign to me. About the only use of the word shrine in my life was those “shriners,” that masonic fraternity, that rode around on three-wheeled

motorcycles wearing Fez hats in community parades.
And they were weird enough

In the beginning, I had to find a spot or place in my house that could be set aside for meditation. I can well remember when someone at our monastery in New York sent me a little postcard-sized picture with an image of the Buddha on it. I had nothing. I taped it to a little bookcase in my office and would sit in front of it. That was a shrine, my shrine. Today, I have a shrine in my office; it takes up the whole closet. I still sit in front of it each day

“And from little acorns, great oaks do grow;” so it does, from the inside out

[Photo by me of our center, with a little snow thrown in. This is the compound that contains our dharma center. On your left, is the actual dharma center (Heart Center KTC/KKSG). On the right, is our house, with windows facing due south. In the back are two things, our main shrine room on the left, and a stupa on the right. Front-left is part of our garden, busy wintering.]

Dec 25, 2020, 4:55 AM

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL

Here is a poster I designed, cut, and silkscreened back in the mid-1960s in Ann Arbor for a gig at the old Depot House train station on Ashley Street, where we used to play Saturday nights. The Prime Movers Blues Band was our band and, as the old song goes, “Those were the days, my friend.”

These are different days now, indeed, and hopefully all of my Facebook friends are still hanging in there as we weather one of the most bizarre times I have ever lived through. I keep thinking, now I have seen it all

It's very cold here this early morning, but it rained last night and I could hear the rain beating on the roof, while I watched the snow outside on the ground melt. And so, as they say, "Go figure."

I don't have a lot to say, and these days I do my best not to follow any of a number of wild thoughts that pop up in my mind. Instead, I try to keep putting one foot in front of the other. These hard times will pass and the Covid-19 will eventually give up, if we all work together

And my wife laughs at me every year at this time, because I always get happy that the Sun is now moving northward, the days will get longer, and spring will not be far behind. Well, here in the north, we do have to get through January, February, March, and most of April...Oh, well

I miss my kids and grandkids. Margaret and I are going to have a simple meal on Christmas, some pot pies we made and froze last summer. Margaret is also making a pumpkin pie and my job is to take the leftover dough and make little cinnamon crisps with maple syrup on them, which are my favorites. That will be just fine

I do send my sincere thanks to all my Facebook friends in this holiday season and hope you all are safe and sound. I appreciate all your "likes" and comments and always read each of your names each day in gratitude

Bless you

Dec 24, 2020, 6:44 AM

DHARMA POETRY AS NOTATION

I'm not a real poet. Wish I were. If anything, I am a didactic poet. I use words to hold my thoughts, to keep an idea or experience from vanishing away. As I wrote years ago"

"Prose is like carrying water in the hands,

Poetry is like drinking from the faucet."

You would think that if we really want to describe something, that we would use lots of words, the more words the better. However, I don't find that to be true

I write a lot. I know how to use words, but when something really important comes along, like an inner change or authentic breakthrough, I find that poetry can contain and capture, while prose stretches on and on, but never quite gets to the point. Well, maybe a year later I can find the words. Poetry is what I fall into when I'm inspired. Like a diamond is to a ring, it is a joy to be able to hold an image of a realization, even a little bit

I find this to be especially true when it comes to the dharma. The dharma lends itself to poetry, because it is so subtle that, sometimes, only a poem can capture it. And the Tibetans have a long and rich history of using poetry to express realizations that otherwise might be lost. They are called "Dohas," songs of spiritual realization, and the Tibetan saint Milarepa is particularly famous for them

When I first came across Dowas, these Tibetan realization songs, I thought, how original and so

concise, and then I realized from my own history of spiritual events that I too, would wax poetical from time to time. I knew that I was not, by nature, a poet, but I am very practical, so this gave me a new insight into the use of poetry for expressing spiritual experiences

Eventually, my takeaway, which I still maintain to this day, is that I'm not a poet, but just practical and need a way to keep insights or realizations from vanishing, vanishing away after they occur. And a poem or Doha does the job

My advice, as a non-poet, but documenter of my own internal mindstream is to be brave and write a poem, yet don't think of it as poetry. As mentioned, I use poetry to capture the subtle, a proper container for precious thoughts, experiences, and realizations, especially when it comes to dharma. Dharma are the most subtle and hard to capture experiences that I know of, and dharma realizations are impossible to capture, but we try. And here is my point again:

I don't use poetry for poetry. I use poetry as a system of notation to capture and hold precious experiences. And I find that once captured, even if it is bad poetry, it is a good way to sequence thoughts or concepts, so that they can be remembered and reanimated, if read aloud. If I read it carefully, slowly, and with clarity, this comes as close as I know to recreating or RE-minding me of the spiritual event itself. That's my view. Let's try it out

In my encouragement for you to try for yourself, let's go over a few dharma poems that I wrote to capture and hold my limited dharma insights. Still, they are all I have to go on, so why be shy? Check these out and see if you understand. First, some simple ones

THE REST OF THE MIND

You cannot rest the mind,
but you can let the mind rest
Just let go,

And don't mind the rest

TESTING THE REST

Learning to rest the mind,
Really puts my practice to the test,
So, sometimes I just need to take a break,
And simply get some rest

RESTING

Sitting quietly,
Properly,
With tongue to teeth,
My body invites,
The mind to be,
At ease

MIND PRACTICE

Not an option,
But a refuge,
Less painful than
Anywhere else

SAMSARA

The same world,
That early on,
Makes it difficult,
To meditate,
Later,
Makes it difficult,
Not to

[And now, some more complicated ones.]

NOTHING IS SOMETHING

Thank you, Rinpoche,
For pointing something out:
That there is nothing to be pointed out,

That nothing can be pointed out,

Including “Nothing.”

‘Nothing’ also cannot be pointed out

To me:
That is really something

SEEK AND NOT FIND

If you find yourself,
Then you are not looking
You will never not-find-yourself,
Unless you look

In other words:
If you don't look,
You will find yourself If you look,
You will not find yourself

That is the nature of having no nature

BEYOND MY EXPECTATIONS

Looking at the mind,
It's not what I'd expect
Expectations can't define,
And you can't expect to find

That's the nature of the mind

LOOK SEE

If you want to see,
You have to look

You can look,
And still not see

Once you see,
You will always see,

But only when you look

You have to look to see

THE NATURE OF THE MIND

Thoughts,
Fingerprints of the mind,
Are all different,
But identical,
In nature

PRACTICE A HABIT

Meditation,
While not practice,
Is a habit,
That can be practiced

Practice builds habits,
But should not itself,
Become a habit

In other words:
Practice,
To form a habit,

But don't make
A habit of it

[And some are just pretty.]

SOLITUDE

'Alone' is a simple mistake
Like the disappearance of a sound
Hearing cannot be heard,
And the finder never found

FINDERS KEEPERS

We are,
Both the finder,
And the found,
The silence,
And the sound

[And then some are just trouble.]

ASKED AND ANSWERED

If you ask a question,
I will try to answer,
But you will get no answer,
If you make a statement,

Yet, I'm tempted
Some of your statements,
Ask a lot

Dec 23, 2020, 6:33 AM

DHARMA NAMES? I'VE GOT EM'

[Moving off “The Blues” for the moment, it is still winter here and its cold outside, with snow. I am keeping up with my daily chores and dharma practice and studying dharma a bunch. Also waiting out the end of these endless politics and hoping that our country (and all of us) gets some needed rest from the politics. Thought I would say something about dharma names.]

Yes, there are dharma names in Tibetan Buddhist practice. It's hard to avoid them. The first dharma name we usually obtain is what is called our “refuge name.” When we officially decide to take refuge in the Buddha, his dharma teachings, and his authentic sangha (followers), this is done by a short ceremony in which a tiny lock of hair is cut and we are given what is called, as mentioned, our “Refuge Name” in Tibetan

For instance, my refuge name is Karma Dundop Dawa in Tibetan, and all refuge names in our lineage (Karma Kagyu) start off with the word “karma,” but the rest translates to something like “Moon of Accomplishment.”

There are other names that we can be given, but the main other name of importance is our Bodhisattva name, given when we take the Bodhisattva vow. In my case, I took the Bodhisattva vow with my teacher of 36 years, the Ven Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. And when I took the Bodhisattva vow, it was with a large group of people, so it was difficult to try and give that many people names, so I didn't get one

However, I always wanted a Bodhisattva name, so many years later I asked Khenpo Rinpoche could I have a Bodhisattva name. Rinpoche heard me, and a short time later he gave me the name, Sempa Chönyi Rangdrol. The word "Sempa" just means "Bodhisattva" or sometimes "Warrior," Everyone gets that part

And my particular Bodhisattva name is, "Chönyi Rangdrol," where "Chönyi" means "Dharmata, the true nature of the mind" and "Rangdrol" means "Self-liberating," so my Bodhisattva name means "Self-liberating Nature of the Mind."

As for other names I have been given: In 1990, I took the Kalachakra (Wheel of Time) empowerment, and in the process received a Kalachakra name from H.E. Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche, "Wang Gi Dorje," which means "Vajra of Power." This was a multi-day Kalachakra empowerment, which is considered the key empowerment for astrology, and I have been an astrologer for some 60 years.

And last, His Holiness, the 17th Karmapa, "Ogyen Trinley Dorje" gave me a name when I visited him in 1997 (along with my family) at his ancestral home (Tsurphu Monastery) in the mountains of Tibet at 15,000 feet. He said I was "Tenzin Nyima," which means "Keeper of the Sun."

So, as you can see, I'm all named out

Dec 22, 2020, 5:24 PM

HOW I FELL IN LOVE AND GOT MARRIED

[In working through the 176 TB of data (75 hard drives), I came across the story of when I met Margaret and fell in love. I have posted it before, but folks like love stories, so here it is again. Our 50th wedding anniversary is coming up this July.]

Ann Arbor has always, for me, been a romantic place. After all, it was the one place in all the world that I fell in love with a woman and married her. I guess I had been looking for her ever since I was in Tappan Junior High School, or before that when I was going to Catholic school at St. Francis of Assisi just across the street

Through all my early years, despite all the other interests and activities I had going on, deep within me, there was this search to find my life partner, the woman that I would love and who possibly could also love me. I am not always that easy to be around

And who could forget all those late-night walks around Ann Arbor when I was unable to sleep, just walking the streets, hoping against hope, to run into "Her." Well, as it turned out, it wasn't quite that easy. It took time for me to settle down and even be ready for marriage. Here is my story. I am sure there are those of you reading this that have your own story. This is mine

As a musician about town, there were always women who wanted to get to know me, but I grew tired of

dating, one-night stands, and short flings. I wanted someone that I really loved and to be with her for the rest of my life, you know, the traditional marriage -- a partner. And that is apparently a lot to ask from the universe. Not everyone can afford it, karma-wise. I hoped I had the karma to find a partner. Anyway, she sure took her sweet time in showing up, but she finally did, and I am thankful for that

Perhaps I had first to build a nest. For many years I had slept on a tiny mattress that I had specially made. It was so thin, little more than a pallet on the floor, and very, very narrow, not built for two. But then, for no reason I understood, in January of 1971 I found myself getting rid of my mat on the floor in favor of an actual mattress, in fact, a waterbed, something I didn't need, so who was it for? I'm sure I didn't know, but like a bird that just builds a nest, there I was putting together a bed, one built for two. it was some kind of ritual and also a sign all at the same time. Or, was it a case of coming events casting their shadow?

As mentioned, I had kind of reached the end of trying to get together with this woman or that -- flings. I was serious about getting together with a partner and had more or less given up short flings in favor of more permanent or serious relationships. My latest attempt was with very nice young and attractive lady and we both did our best to put something together. In the end, it did not work out and we both did our best to remain friendly, but I'm sure we both were disappointed. That great love I yearned for and wanted to feel was just not there. Anyway, that's just how it was at the time of this story. And I am getting to what happened next, the amazing part

I used to play music on Monday nights, just myself and my old Wurlitzer piano, at a place called the Odyssey Bar. It was at 208 W. Huron Street in Ann Arbor, just off Main Street. I went under the name of "Ann Arbor Heart Song," where the word heart was a red graphic heart (see the graphic). If I remember right, Wednesday was "Wine Night" at the Odyssey and they served this red Ripple wine, a super-cheap wine made as an off-brand by Gallo, but we drank it just the same. And so, once in a while I would wander down on wine night to hear a band I really liked called "Buddies in the Saddle." And way up at the front was a big long table, sort of reserved for the local regulars; at least all my friends would sit there. The table was at right-angles to the stage

And there I was, sitting on one side of that table from the stage, right in the middle of wine night, but I was drinking orange juice. My love of alcohol was an on and off thing. I never drank all that much and when I did, I was often sorry. Anyway, I knew most, but not all, of the people at our table that night, but certainly not the dark-haired woman sitting across from me to my right and perched on the bench of an old piano. But she had apparently noticed my orange juice and made a point of calling me out on it, and loudly, so everyone could hear. After all, this was wine night

"Drinking orange juice? What are you, some kind of pansy?" Well, that got my attention for sure, and she probably had no idea that as a performer I had no qualms about speaking up in a group or that I was not as shy as the orange-juice guy she thought she was teasing. I could be direct too, so I got right in her face, but in a friendly way. I probably made her squirm a bit and wish she had just left me alone. I can't remember exactly what she said in response to my challenge, but

the last part of it was something to the effect she wanted no more conversation with me and that "this is the end of it!" And then something really strange happened, something that has occurred only once or twice in my life

And that is, as I responded to her ending our conversation, I suddenly could hear my own voice speaking in the silence of my mind as if I were listening to myself talk, as I said out loud to the woman: "This is not the end; this is just the beginning!" As I spoke, I found my own words ringing in my head and took them in as almost some kind of cosmic message. "What was that all about?" I thought, and then dropped it. Nothing much else happened that night

Instead, it all happened about a week later at a favorite Ann Arbor bar called "Mr. Flood's Party," a place where I often performed. They had a high (but small) stage that looked out over the room and nestled right near and under that stage was a long booth, one that could seat a bunch of people, but you had trouble getting in and out of because of the length

So, I was sitting in Floods having a beer with a group of friends. I was kind of wedged in there at the back of that long table, but all was good until the woman I had been having the relationship with walked in. Now, as I mentioned earlier, I guess we were not getting along all that well and I wondered (from the look she gave me as she came through the door and spied me sitting there) if she was not happy with me. Worse, there I was, stuck at the far end of the booth and surrounded by friends. She had me in the perfect spot to give me some lip in public, which I assumed she might be about to do. Who can say? And she quickly sat down at the end of the

table near the door, totally blocking my exit. I felt trapped

Well, I just couldn't have that, so while everyone's attention was on this woman, and before she could settle in, I climbed over the back of the booth and was out of there, heading deeper into the bar looking for a seat and hopefully more friends, pleased that I had escaped what could have only been a difficult scene. However, as I looked around, I could see that all the tables were full and the only open seats were a few barstools

As I moved along the bar, in front of me I saw the dark-haired lady that had teased me at wine night about drinking orange juice. She was sitting on a barstool and there was an open seat right next to her. Any port in a storm, thought I, and quickly slipped onto the seat beside her, jokingly saying something like, "Hello you nasty old lady," to remind her who I was and what she had tried to do to me last week. She just smiled

Yet, it seemed that my sitting down with her was OK and we were soon trading small talk. It turned out that her name was Margaret. And then the most amazing thing happened. She told me that she already knew who I was and that we used to live just down the street from one another; we would at times pass each other walking from here to there

When she said that, I remembered seeing her one day while I was carrying some stuff from Circle Books (the metaphysical bookstore up on State Street where I worked) to my room on Division Street, and back, about two blocks away. To get there, I would cut through the corner of the First United Methodist Church lawn at Huron and State

And there, at this particular time, sitting on some low steps in a kind of alcove at a side entrance to the church was this same young lady. I remember that when our eyes met that day by the church that my heart went out to her and perhaps that feeling was returned. I don't know. It was just something a little magical that had happened in passing. As you know, I was always hoping to meet the "One."

Anyway, sitting on that bar stool in Mr. Flood's Party that night, it all came back to me with a rush. And when I realized who she was, I looked into her eyes more intensely to check her out and one of the most profound moments in my life just spontaneously arose. In a flash, I was somehow looking through and beyond her personality and deep within her mind or was it "The Mind." And I was struck to the heart by the purity and innocence I saw there, despite all the attempts on her part to appear tough and world-wise, which I knew was just an act

Instead, she seemed so completely vulnerable and open to me. In that instant, I fell down the rabbit hole. And to my total surprise, all I wanted to do was to protect her, to endlessly care for and love this woman, and shield her from the sorrows and sufferings of what I knew life could bring. I had never felt this way about anyone before, not even close. As they say, in that moment, "the dewdrop slipped into the shining sea." I was already gone, gone, gone

At the same time that I was overcome with feelings of wanting to care for this young woman I had just met, I also had a metaphysical revelation as I tend to do. I am always having these insights and visions. For all these years I had been looking for someone just like me, but of course a woman -- some other "One." There was me

over here (this one) and I was looking for my counterpart (another one) over there, who would love me like I loved her. And this next concept is a little hard to explain, so please bear with me

Then, in that moment at the bar, I realized for the very first time that in all the world, there was no "other One," but as the Greek philosopher Parmenides had pointed out so long ago: "Being Alone Is." There has never been two, but all along only the One. My idea of "alone" and being alone, which I had held close all those years morphed on the spot into a new concept, i.e., that instead of alone, the reality was "all one," almost the same word. In that instant, I got it, which was a major and profound realization for this guy

It became clear to me that all dualities, all the "twos" in the world, resolve into one, sooner or later. They have to. So suddenly, there was no independent being, "me," over here and then another independent being in "her" over there. Yes, there were two persons, but only one "Being." As Parmenides said, "Being alone is!" Well, being alone was all I had ever known, but this being all-one was new to me, and instantly I know this was the truth. And in that moment, for me, the two separate beings sitting together there became one, at least in my mind. It was all one

I can't expect to be understood here; I can only tell it like it was, as I remember it. Anyway, in that moment when I looked into her eyes, all of this just happened, and it happened without thinking, without a thought. I write it here in concepts and words, but in reality, back then it just happened. I finally realized that the idea of the "two" that I carried around all my life was already one and always had been so. And it was Margaret's person through whom (and with whom) I realized this

apparent eternal truth. That, my friends, was to me a sign indeed. LOL

And to take a note from the movie "Jerry McGuire," she had me from that first moment of insight into her purity. I was gone, no longer looking or able to honestly continue in good faith to look outside myself for some mysterious "other," for I had just realized that there was (and could be) no other "One." It was a logical impossibility. But here 'was' Margaret and it was she through whom I realized this eternal truth. As mentioned, I took this as a good sign and just naturally responded to her with my entire being

And I felt that unless someone like me, who could see how precious she was, cared for and shielded her from the harshness of life, she, like a rare flower, might be lost in the struggle life brings. For some reason, I could not bear the thought of this and, in that instant (and probably for the first time in my life) I put someone else's welfare above my own – Margaret's

I guess, at least for me, that's what love is, caring more for another than for yourself. There was no way I could just have walked on by her in my life (as I had with other relationships) and just leave her there. Not possible. And it was already too late for that. For the first time, I felt personally responsible for another human being and as mentioned, I was more concerned with caring for her than I was for my own comfort. And that was news! I had been the island and suddenly I was the sea

You might say that it was love at first sight from that very first moment when I looked deep within her mind (or my mind) -- whatever. And for me, that was it. I was hooked. I had already and without question just said "I do" or "I will" to her in my mind, but she didn't know it

yet. In truth, I was as married then, in that moment, as I have ever been, from that very night and not three months later when we actually got married. Marriage is when it spontaneously happens, not at some ceremony

Anyway, later that evening Margaret and I left the bar together and have never been really separated ever since. She told me later that she had always kind of had a crush on me. As mentioned, we got married a few months later and have remained so. We celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary this coming July. Lest you get the wrong idea that marriage for me is just a dream, it's not. Marriage is also hard work, but what they say about death and old age fits here: it beats the alternative. At least that is my view

I share this to point out what I have come to know love is and how it happened. So that's the story of how I fell in love and got married. I was thirty years old. She was twenty-three. I met Margaret March 26, 1971 and we were married about three months later on the 3rd of July. We had no money, only \$200 for a wedding and had it outside under a 200-year-old oak tree, with a couple of hundred friends. We made our own food, which was nothing more than French bread, potato salad, and beans. Our dear friend Tecla Loup made Margaret's wedding dress, the heart-shaped wedding cake, and she was the maid of honor. My English Bull Terrier Manley was the entertainment, swinging like a propeller on a rope from a limb of the oak tree. We didn't stand on ceremony, but we did have one. It was great!

Today we have four grown kids, three daughters, a son, and we have eight grandkids

Here is a short video of my dog Manley performing at our wedding in 1971. It's pretty funny

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0q4Tv-MnC8>

JUKE JOINTS AND SATURDAY NIGHTS

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

[This is my last article, for now, on "The Blues," and related topics. This is a related topic, a short article about juke joints and their part in African American music, in particular the blues. Yet, it also sheds some insight on the legendary innate purported musicality of Americans of African descent. What seems forgotten here (conveniently once again) is the whole specter of slavery and what that dictated. Some of you that are blues fans should find this interesting. I am not African American, so I hesitate to offer my thoughts on this very sensitive topic, but what insight I have came spontaneously, and I offer it that it might shed light on this part of American history. Let me know your thoughts, please, yet be kind.]

JUKE JOINTS

The term Juke (or Jook) Joints is probably derived from the Creole "juk" meaning to be disorderly and rowdy. Juke joints are said to have arisen after the emancipation, when Jim-Crow laws forbade blacks from entering white establishments. The facts show that they existed long before that, probably as early as there were plantations and slaves. In other words, even after the emancipation, when slaves were free to leave the plantation, they were not allowed in any establishment in town. Proscribed from white society and white establishments of any kind, juke joints arose wherever blacks could gather, socialize, eat, drink, and dance;

many also sold grocery items, moonshine, and some even had rooms to rent and other conveniences

Jook joints were shacks, originally built by the plantation owners themselves on their own property to give slaves a place to socialize and blow off steam. Most were open only on Saturday nights and were not much maintained. And juke joints always had music, which meant at least one musician and often two or three. Historically tagged as 'blues' joints, the music originally played in these places was not blues but dance music -- ragtime, slow-drag, etc. What we know as blues today did not actually appear until the early 1900s. In fact, musicians were not the focus early on but rather were there just to enable the dancing. It was all about dancing. It could be one happy drunk person dancing and clapping their hands with maybe someone keeping time on a table along with them or perhaps a harmonica – anything with a beat

And juke joints could be held anywhere, in someone's home, an abandoned sharecropper's house, any old shack of a building - wherever. In slavery days (and even after) blacks had no transportation, so juke joints had to be within walking distance or reachable by tractor, bicycle, or mule. And there was no law at juke joints

On plantations, the authorities never came unless the owner himself called them in to break something up. It was private land. Later, during prohibition and the sharecropping days, the sheriff was actually paid to stay away so that the illegal whisky would get sold and everyone in power got a piece of that. The law only came when they were called in on purpose. They never just "showed up."

Most early juke joints were one-room shacks, seemingly always too small for those who filled them. And they were not open the rest of the week, just Saturday nights, so they didn't get much upkeep and they weren't much at all, just some kind of roof, four walls, and a dirt floor

I did not grow up down south and I am not African American, but as a musician I have played in plenty of bars both black and white. In fact, I played more often in black bars than white ones

Older blacks liked the kind of blues our band played – Chicago-style blues. I never knew the Deep South juke joints, but I am sure that most any small bar on a hot summer night after a long week will hit the same pitch, if only for an hour or two. As for the rough quality of juke joints, I have seen knives, guns, clubs, whatever, and actually witnessed one fight (hiding behind our amplifiers) that it took nine police cars to break up

A juke joint was often an open shack in the back yard with a tin roof. It didn't take much of a place to draw a crowd. People were looking for somewhere to go and any excuse for a place would do. If you have ever found it hard to wait until Friday night when you got off work to visit 'the scene' at some local bar, imagine if that one Saturday night a week was your only chance to let it rip and socialize AND if there were no other opportunities for you than hard work the rest of your entire life aside from singing in church Sundays. That was the case for African Americans before emancipation. Consider that

I am reminded of the poem "Black on a Saturday Night" by Rita Dove of which this is an excerpt:

"... and an attitude will get you nowhere fast, so might as well keep dancing, dancing till tomorrow gives up

with a shout, 'cause there is only Saturday night, and we are in it - black as black can, black as black does, not a concept nor a percentage but a natural law.”

We all can identify with a wish to socialize, especially after a difficult work week. Just imagine if that Saturday night once a week was your only chance to do anything other than what you were told to do AND for your entire life this would be the case. That Saturday night and the following Sunday church service would take on a whole different meaning. And history records that blacks that could sing or play music were more valued as slaves than ones that could not

AFFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC

I find it interesting to read comments about the innate musicality of African Americans. I don't question that. What I question is the myopic view that manages to ignore two-hundred years of slavery, when blacks were basically restricted to one night of social gathering and what that restriction might actually mean in their history

What seems forgotten here (once again) is the whole spectre of slavery and what it infers, so I am asking readers to please think about this for a moment. And I am going to repeat some of what I presented earlier

You are twenty-five years old, young, bright, full of promise, and a slave to some owner of 'you'. While you have your whole life before you, in the slave's case that life is already mapped out in terms of the possible. You work at what you are told from morning until night and what is left? Perhaps you have Sundays off and maybe something like a Saturday night. That's it. You don't have college, schooling, or even trade school. You have no hope of seeing the world or even this country

because you are not free to travel anywhere. You are not free. You are somebody's slave. And depending on how far back we go, you can't even read or write and your owner likes it that way

I spent a good part of my young adult life studying black music, so I know full well blacks are great musicians. Wouldn't you be too if your forefathers, parents and their parents before them, had nothing to look forward to but Saturday night music and Sunday-morning services? Instead of a myriad of possibilities and choices you had no choice and two possibilities. The only social outlet you had each week was perhaps getting together with your own kind on Saturday nights and singing the Gospel in church Sunday mornings. Music and dance were one of the few outlets open to Black Americans and to their forbearers. Everything else was scripted. No wonder blacks know music and dance! It didn't all come from Africa my friends

SONG AND DANCE

My point is that aside from any traditional culture carried over from Africa centuries ago, of which there is a rich heritage, plantation life (slavery life) left only a few opportunities for free time; music and dance were often the only social outlets open to slaves and then only at certain times. Life as a slave in America gave African Americans generations of training in music and dance in addition to whatever culture they brought with them from Africa. Think about it and I will reiterate please

You are young, hopeful, energetic, and you have zero plans that involve freedom on your part. Your whole life is already entirely scripted leaving only Sunday church service and perhaps a Saturday night at a juke joint open to you. No wonder black Gospel music is so powerful. And no wonder blues music is so powerful.

These were the only outlets open to many black Americans for generations – Saturday nights and Sunday mornings. The rest of the time they were slaves! And the transition from slavery to tenant farming did not change things much for most blacks. In fact, as often as not, the black tenant farmer ended up owing the plantation owner money at the end of the year – another form of slavery

There was one break each week. Work stopped for most blacks in the slavery (and tenant) years sometime Saturday afternoon and that is when barbecues and social getting-together began. By Saturday night, workers were headed for the juke joints on foot, by tractor, and by mule. Early on the juke joints were right on the plantation itself and black workers would even drive the plantation tractor right to the juke joint with the understanding that as long it was on the plantation, they could use the tractor

I am not going to go into extreme detail on juke joints and what happened there. That has been covered elsewhere, but suffice it to say that these places were where the work-week steam was let off, and the later the night got, the more out of control these joints could become. It is said that after 11 PM anything could happen and usually did, everything from bar fights to shootings and knife fights

My main point is that these Saturday night juke joints were the focus of music, dancing, and celebrating. This is where the blues were born and grew up. This is where dancing was permitted, and drinking took place. This was your one night out. And (as mentioned), the law never went to juke joints unless it was called in. That was understood by all. So, there was the juke

joints music and dancing Saturday night and the gospel singing in church Sunday morning. That was it

I have pointed out that juke joints or Barrelhouses as they were also called originally were set up on plantations as a place for blacks to socialize on their one night off, which was Saturday. Later on, after the emancipation, when tenant farming had replaced slavery, blacks were not allowed at bars and saloons in town, so juke joints sprang up just outside of town at crossroads or wherever it was convenient. These joints were often hardly anything at all except a place to meet, drink, gamble, and dance. They were essentially shacks hastily thrown together and often with not enough room for but a few to dance - jammed

It is true that juke joints were later moved into town, urbanized by whites in the south, and called "Honky Tonks." But the original juke joints were hardly any kind of building at all, with no running water, and so on – just a roof and some side walls. That's it. But juke joints were where everything exciting happened socially for black Americans way back then

So, when we say that blues music and blues musicians were popular with blacks, understand that it means a lot more than just 'popular'. The juke joint scene was all the freedom there was to let off steam and have a good time. Period. That and Sunday morning church service and gospel singing

The main point here is not to just describe the juke joint scene, but to highlight that the skill of black Americans in blues and jazz, in dancing and having a good time, did not only come from Africa. It had generations of extreme focus right here in this country to hone those skills into a veritable lineage. And those who believe that the emancipation changed all that had better get

out their history books, because tenant farming changed things very little at first and often made things even worse. In slavery, African Americans had nothing to lose because they had nothing. As mentioned, with tenant farming, they most often went into debt to the plantation owners on top of struggling to make a living

If your whole life was work unending until you died and that one Saturday night a week of celebration followed by Sunday church were your only social outlets, what would that mean to you? How important would that music be and the musicians that played it? That is my question and also my point

If blacks are master singers, musicians, dancers, and entertainers, it is not just because they brought these skills from Africa. African Americans have had 200 years to refine these skills. It's no wonder that some say that white Americans can't dance and blacks can. And it is no wonder that popular music (especially jazz and rock 'n roll) in America finds its roots in the blues

And it is not only about dancing and playing music; it is about having a good time in the midst of whatever your situation is, about letting go and grabbing time to celebrate in the moment – being here now. There is wisdom here

And it's all right there embedded in the music. You can hear it. Growing up, I could hear the wisdom in the blues music and it pulled me to it. The music of Pat Boone didn't grab me that way, but Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf did. There was something in the music that spoke to me beyond the sounds. These blues musicians knew something that I knew little of and I hungered for it and it was not just the sound of poverty or deprivation

Later, when I had an opportunity to interview scores of the greatest blues musicians, I got to know these players often on an eyeball-to-eyeball basis. What I heard in the music was backed up by the persons they were. Blues greats like Big Momma Thornton, Arthur Big-Boy Crudup, Roosevelt Sykes, and Howlin' Wolf were incredible beings that made me feel accepted and welcome

They had wisdom and life experience I did not have and that my teachers in school did not have. They had what I wanted to learn and I yearned for it. I more or less studied rural folk music, blues, and jazz from the late 1950s until around 1971. And it was an inspiration

In the early 1970s, I found the Tibetan Buddhists, who had the same joy and insight that I found in the great blues artists. And they were also devoted to knowing the true nature of the mind and life. While I never abandoned my blues teachers, I did begin to study and practice with the Tibetans and am still doing that today

It was never the down-and-out nature of the blues that caught my attention. It was the wisdom of life and the ability to seize the day and find joy in any situation, the ability to master extreme circumstances and still have a life. We all owe a deep cultural debt to African Americans

Dec 21, 2020, 8:24 AM

THE GRAND CONJUNCTION,

WINTER SOLSTICE,

AND CHRISTMAS STAR

Yes, all this takes place tomorrow, December 21, 2020. Lot's of talk going around about this, so I'm putting on my astrology hat and laying it out for you as best I can

Point of fact is that I have more astrologers as Facebook Friends than any other type, thousands. If you ask why I don't post more about astrology, for me the answer is that my astrology friends don't ask me any questions, although I have been studying astrology for sixty years. Why that is, I don't know; perhaps they are shy or for some reason

It's not that they don't know of me. I have received most of the awards an astrologer can get over the years. A couple years ago they gave me a Life-Achievement award, which they don't hand out that often to my knowledge. And I have funny story about that, if that is OK

It was in 2018 and in Chicago. I was there for about a week, gave two talks, and spent the rest of time either doing short readings (free) for people or doing interviews. I posted some 24 interviews that I did of well-known astrologers that are posted on YouTube right now. Anyway, I was really busy there and worked from morning until they closed up the show each day, eating lunch right at the event. I was there with my good friends David and Fei Cochrane, astrologers in their own right, who took over my company Matrix Software some years ago

Anyway, at the end of the week or toward the end, they had one of those sit-down dinners and award ceremonies in a big Ballroom. I was tired from working all day, so I slipped out the back and went up and was soon sound asleep

Well, as luck would have it, they announced that I had won the Life Achievement Award and, I am told, some 1500 astrology applauded for a bunch minutes, but I was not there. I had no idea something like that could happen. And so, two well-known astrologers, Michael Lutin and Ray Merriman, marched up to my room, woke me up and gave me the award in my pajamas. It is somehow fitting. Anyway, I digress. About this Grand Conjunction et al

We all know what the Winter Solstice is; that's when it is the longest night (and shortest day) of the year, after which the Sun starts to move northward again toward Summer. I am not a holiday person, at least not so much, but I almost religiously observe the two solstices. So, that's one event tomorrow

Secondly, this "Grand Conjunction," at least one this close, has not happened in about 400 years, and many are observing it. What does it mean is anybody's guess or you can ask an astrologer

I'm an astrologer, so I will say a few things. First, and most important, whatever we decide this conjunction means, we have already worked through (or are still working through) it. The event already happened more than a month ago, so take note please

And this is because the actual event as far as the Jupiter/Saturn Conjunction in our solar system already took place, and that was around November 2, 2020, like Election Day. That is when, the true conjunction took

place, because the large planets, Jupiter and Saturn have a very definite effect on the Sun when they line up. In fact, the planets affect the barycenter, the center of mass of all the planets, etc. combined. In fact, the planets can effect the center of the mass so much that the barycenter is not even within the body of the Sun, but somewhat outside of it. Think about that

As far as Jupiter and Saturn are concerned, that would be on the heliocentric conjunction back on November 2, 2020 and NOT tomorrow. That was the one to watch, IMO

And we have had a month or more to ingest and work with whatever internal turmoil or effect took place back then. The conjunction tomorrow (geocentric conjunction) is just how Earth sees Jupiter and Saturn from its vantage point, and NOT when they actually affect the Sun. Just want to be clear, so it's too late to panic, if you want to do that.

So, tomorrow's conjunction is still meaningful, but I see it as more of an outer ceremony of that internal event that took place about a month ago

As to what Jupiter and Saturn mean when they conjunct together, Jupiter (Sanskrit word is Guru) represent our inner and outer guide, so it often represents our vocation or the path we are taking and about to take

Saturn (sometimes called Satan) is the great limiter or definer and should not be seen as "bad." Saturn is also the walls that make homes possible, but can be what limits us or obstructs us. Both are true. Here these two great planets meet one another in the sky for a time. A quick definition might be, "defining our path," but I am sure some fellow astrologers will chime in here and have their own interpretations

Anyway, while we observe this in the sky tomorrow, keep in mind that internally, we have already been wrestling with this full-tilt for a month. Here are dates and times, for your information

The “Grand Conjunction” of Jupiter and Saturn, the “Christmas Star” will take place on Monday December 21, 2020, tomorrow. Solstice too

Solstice on December 21, 2020 at 5:02 AM EST

Jupiter and Saturn make their closest approach in about 400 years (0.1°) at 1 PM EST

If any more questions, ask them here and I will try to answer them if I can

MAKING BLUES TIME

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

This article is about musical time, something we might agree to call “making time.” The classic blues players, like all great musicians, literally “make” time. They don’t just follow along in time like most of us do when listening. They set the time, inset the time with their music, but it goes deeper than that. They make the time for us to follow

Every once in a while, you and I might look at our watch and see what time the clock says, but the time in between those clock checks goes unchecked? It just passes, like the old song from Sandy Denny, “Who knows where the time goes?” I certainly don’t know where it goes. My point is that while clock time seems to be regular, what goes on when you and I are not watching the clock can be anything but regular. Try taking a hallucinogen sometime and then talk to me. In other words, time contracts and expands, especially when it comes to musical time, which is a safe way to play with time

The really great blues players, and we all have our favorites, actually can ‘make’ time. Time is also something we make. My favorite for “making” time would have to be Big Walter Horton, the Chicago blues harmonica player. In my opinion, he could make the best time. He could show me the best time I have ever had musically, the very best time I have ever experienced. And I have of course (like we all do) my own sense of time it is just that, you know, just going along each day, like each of us are doing now, reading this – taking our own sweet time

But with Walter Horton, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and other blues greats, somehow their music takes over time as I know it. They can overtake my personal sense of time and replace it with the kind of time that they make, which is for me a much more vast sense of time, more time, time enough to do other things in -- extraordinary time. In that extraordinary time, there can be room for us to think about life. That's my point. we can use their time to further out own thoughts

I can synch up or resonate to their time and it becomes (for the moment) my time too. Big Walter Horton (for me) is a great director or conductor of time, and I gladly groove along with him to his beat. Great blues players can expand time and, in that expanded time, these musicians give us more room to experience or listen, creating an envelope (almost like an aura) with their music, an envelope in which I have more room or space to know myself, to relax, to be myself, or to just think and be here now. Making time is what this article is about

MUSICAL TIME BEYOND TIME

Making time is one of the hallmarks of the great blues musicians. Most of them are gone and I have resigned myself to not hearing their kind of expanded musical time played live any longer, although I can still hear it on some recordings, sort of. It is gone. However, to my surprise, I actually experienced this form of blues-time live a few years ago after a very long hiatus. It was at a Michigan music festival called "Wheatland," held not far from where I live here in mid-Michigan. Perhaps 20,000 people attended it

They had a musician there named Aubrey Ghent, a lap-steel player from somewhere in the southeast; I believe it was Florida. Ghent plays gospel music and, sure

enough, that day he was making time like the old masters. I was spellbound. I had not heard profound “blues” time like that since back in the day around Chicago and places like that. And Aubrey Ghent was sitting up there on the stage playing blues time, just like they used to

Aubrey Ghent was ‘making’ the time. It immediately put me back in a musical space when I used to listen to players like Muddy Waters, a space where a blues player would take over time as I knew (and lived it) and would put me through something I could not put myself through, taking me on a trip and to a place where I sure liked to go

Aubrey Ghent had that kind of sense of time and one of the songs he displayed it on was, to everyone’s surprise, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy,” the Bobby McFerrin tune. The whole audience just stopped whatever time they were having and went on Ghent’s time for a while. And, of course, the rest of the night we were all telling each other about that incredible music. What I am after here is what makes that kind of music time incredible?

Maybe at the end, after you listened to Ghent, you would say to yourself, “Wow, that music was ‘really’ good,” but it is way more than just the music being ‘good’. Most of those present had just experienced something that they never had before and that some of us hadn’t heard for a very long time. And maybe they can’t quite remember it or maybe they remember it later, slowly, over a period of time, calling it back into memory with satisfaction, a little bit of that time, reading it back to themselves

Anyway, Howlin’ Wolf would put me through something like that when I was with him. And another blues player who did that to me was Chicago’s Magic Sam. Some of

you may not know of Magic Sam, but he was one of the most virile and seminal guitar players that have ever played the guitar. And he also was an incredible singer, and I 'mean' incredible! You can hear what I am pointing out here on the Delmark album "West-Side Soul" by Magic Sam here:

http://www.amazon.com/West-Side-Soul-Magic-Sam/dp/B000004BIF/ref=pd_sim_m_2

And in the re-release of his Cobra and Chief Recordings from 1957 here:

<http://www.amazon.com/Essential-Magic-Sam-Cobra-Recordings/dp/B000059RVO>

I first heard Magic Sam live in Chicago back in the mid-1960s in one of these large rooms like you find in some of the Chinese restaurants in the major cities, the ones that go on forever with really low ceilings. I am talking about big rooms, where they have all these little tables and chairs that kind of go way back in the distance. You can't even see the end of them and in this case everyone was already standing

I couldn't see Magic Sam. I had just squeezed in the door and was flat up against the back wall, and the place was packed. All I could make out were heads as far as I could see. Yet I could hear this incredible sound coming from somewhere way up front. It was Magic Sam's voice, which immediately made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. I had never heard anyone sing like that. It was literally a shimmering sheet of sound. It was Magic Sam making time. That kind of time was rare then and almost impossible to find now

In my opinion, what we are getting from blues players today, and I don't mean to offend anyone, so I will try to

say it gently, is that the blues music, “it sounds like this,” as in: “it sounds like Howlin’ Wolf.” To myself I just call it “reenactment” blues. Today we are now reenacting something that used to be there but no longer is, like: Howlin’ Wolf used to be there, but he is no longer with us, and so on. Or we could just say that no one sings like the Wolf, and those who try are just re-enacting Wolf, trying to sound like Wolf

The problem with younger players re-enacting Wolf’s songs is that they always make me think of Wolf, and whoever is singing does not really sound like Wolf. This spoils it for me because there is no comparison. I would rather these young players just sing Wolf’s songs in their own voice and with their own experience, so I could hear ‘them’, and not them through a Wolf filter, and often a lousy one at that. That’s just me. And I don’t like to hear ebonics that are natural

Consider this: most musicians listen to someone like Howlin’ Wolf or Big Walter Horton and they set about to learn Wolf’s style, to play Wolf’s licks, and so on, in hopes that they can make the kind of music Wolf makes. But this is just exactly backward to what would actually be needed to create the effect of a Wolf or a Muddy Waters, and this point may be a little subtle

Playing Wolf’s licks, and so on, will never get you there. Wolf himself was not doing that. Wolf is not trying to resemble anyone. He has managed to get his mind and consciousness (whatever we want to call it) into a certain state so that anything he plays, already has that sound and perfection. It is already perfect “Wolf.” You can’t imitate perfection and why would you want to?

Therefore, to play like Wolf plays, you would first have to perfect not your guitar licks, but your mind, your consciousness, pay your dues, and get yourself into a

state where anything you do, including playing music, will already be significant, and will exactly signify you and where 'your' head is at. Do you understand? Don't work on the licks only, but work on perfecting yourself, your life, your consciousness, and where your mind is at. Then whatever you do will sound right, at least right for you. Anyway, back to "making time."

The main blues players from back in the 1960s were all incredible, but the greatest time-maker of all time (for me personally), and I mentioned this before, was the harmonica player Big Walter Horton. He could set or make time better than anyone I have ever heard. I refer you to Volume Three of the "Chicago the Blues Today!" album on Vanguard, and the song "Black Spider Blues," as an example. Horton is playing there with Johnny Shines and the two of them are making time together. Here is a link:

http://www.amazon.com/Chicago-Blues-Today-Various-Artists/dp/B000000EJ0/ref=sr_1_4?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1291988413&sr=1-4

And it is perfect. If you were to add someone else, the time would probably immediately change for the worse and the expanded sense of time that I can clearly hear on the record would be lost, unless that player too was of the same caliber

And by "making time," I mean this: We all have a sense of time. Musicians who play regularly know that on the really good music nights they can make time slow down or somehow expand; time stretches. I may not have the best words here. The energy and effort put out by the musician to build the musical time actually creates not just a slowing down or expanding of time, but also produces some kind of mental or psychological space in which the audience can think or exist in. It's like clearing

out the usual cobwebs when I listen to one of these masters; they somehow give me time to perhaps know more about myself. I learned this years ago in a little bar in Ann Arbor called Mr. Flood's Party

Musicians, at least this one, constantly worry about how they sound. You know, is it good or good enough? Anyway, back then, playing harmonica and singing in that bar along with my brother Daniel (on guitar), I had a good night. I felt that finally I was playing what I intended to play and I looked at the audience, thinking, well somebody might be giving me the thumbs up, like "Michael, you're doin' good, man!"

Yet there wasn't any of that. As I looked out over the audience, everyone was in some sort of trance. They were all looking into their own mind as if in some kind of reverie. And I suddenly realized what was happening and said to myself: Oh, I get it now. It's not about me! I realized that, like everything else in life, even music has a "what's in it for me" quotient, and in this case it was about what was in it for them, the audience. My music only gave them the room to experience their own thoughts more fully. And I said to myself: "Oh, I get it."

Great musicians make space in time. They expand time into space and make more room. They make room for us. They make time and in that expanded time people can get some very personal and specialized jobs done, like thinking or feeling whatever they need to

We all do this, and music is not the only avenue. For example, I work a lot. And I get up like at two or three in the morning and I work until five at night. I might take a nap. And then somewhere around 6 PM I like to watch a movie. It doesn't have to be a whole movie or it might be two movies. It often is just a little bit of a movie. In that movie time, that down time, I am, of course,

watching the movie, but I am also mulling things over in my mind, about what happened that day

Movies may be the most common form of meditation for most people, because we really are just looking at a spot on the wall and holding very still. Isn't that what meditators do? Anyway, in that down time, I get things done in my mind (while I am watching the movie) that I need to do. I am processing the day's events. For me, it is very relaxing and some days actually quite necessary

When great blues players play, they create a similar kind of time in which we, the audience, can get into and experience. So, the great time setters, the great blues musicians (great musicians of any kind) take over our sense of time, take over what we call clock time, this time and that time. They take it over and supplant it or replace it with their sense of time, what they know how to do. They're setting the time. They are creating or making the time for us and suddenly our mind is caught by their sense of time. We are into it. This is why live performances can never be replaced by recordings

We might say afterward, "Oh, isn't that an incredible guitar player" or we could also say "Wow, he or she took me on a trip." Musicians make time and in that time, we have our own personal experience. It is not only about 'their' music, but also about our life. That is the point here. That is what great music is all about

I can remember one example and it's a good one. In Chicago, back in the mid-1960s I went into a club, a tiny little place (I forget the name of it; it might have been "Mother Blues") that Howlin' Wolf was playing in. It was way late, and there was nobody there, except me and my brother Dan. There was only Howlin' Wolf and next to him there was his wonderful guitar player Hubert Sumlin. That's it

And so, we came in and it was almost totally dark. There was just a little bit of light up near the stage. Wolf was sitting on a wooden chair way up front and singing like only Howlin' Wolf can sing. And for a while, time just stopped. It was not so much that, as it was that the walls, that whole place I was in, faded and gradually became transparent. I could see right through them

Not just the walls, but from the walls on out forever. What remained was this consciousness (I guess it was me) floating in an ocean of translucent space. And scout's honor, I was not on drugs! Everything just went void. For that time, I forgot where I was in my life. I had to reach inside to get a hold on myself, and there was nothing to get a hold of. Wolf's voice and the power of his musical time had taken over mine. I could have been anywhere in the universe – somewhere, and yet there was still no place. Place had nothing to do with it

I was transfixed by Wolf's time. And of course, I came out of it, but it was like: how could I forget this? That's what I mean by time. Wolf's time was better than mine. I wasn't even prepared for the experience; it just happened. He took me deeper than I could get by myself. It is like one of those times when somebody dies that is close to you. Those events kind of stop you in your tracks and make you, for a time, more open. You are popped out of your groove and open to alternatives. Life is new again

TOWARD AN EXPLANATION

What am I talking about here and how does it work?

This is where words can fail, but I will give it a try. You may have to meet me halfway. Have you ever been in one of those car accidents or near accidents when you see it coming, but maybe can't avoid it? It is easy to find

these events when driving on ice. Your mind concentrates and you are “right there.” Time slows down and everything seems to be taking place in slow motion. That is somewhat similar to what I am pointing at here when I use the term “making time.” In times of stress, intense awareness, or extreme concentration, time stretches and slows down. You can see it all happen. Time just somehow expands or makes room. “Making time” with the blues is like that

The standard blues progression is just twelve bars which keep repeating themselves over and over. In order to take control of that progression and go deeper with time, the blues musician has to concentrate (be aware) and articulate each bar of that blues progression, putting the brakes on here and rushing to catch up there. What matters is to emphasize and willfully stress, accentuate, or push the time leading up to this or that change here, and drag out the turn-around or what-have-you over there

If a musician is aware or present enough, and has enough experience, he or she can articulate the blues so that, although clock time just ticks on along, the end result of the effort is to expand time, slow it down, and we go between the clock-ticking seconds into what can only be described as expanded time, time in which we are beyond the distractions of the moment (our regular life) and able to taste or experience what is beyond, beneath, above (use your own words here) the normal. I don't want to call it eternity, because that term has been overused, but it is somehow outside, however marginally or temporarily, our normal sense of time. This then is what I mean by “making time.” Musicians do this all the time (pun intended)

And really great musicians give us such great time or can make time so well that we can hitch a ride with them, even if only for the length of a song. For those moments we are on their time, traveling with them, part of their mandala, and they are taking us deeper within conventional time to something greater than that. It is easier to experience this than to put it into words. Let me try another metaphor

The discipline and energy of making music can create more room in time than we normally have – expansion or extension. Think of it as an aura or envelope of normal time that somehow expands time as we know it (and the moment) into something deeper and wider – stretches time. It doesn't stretch time longer, as in making a song last longer; it stretches the time deeper as in going beyond normal time into somewhere else. I don't have a word for it. In other words, when time appears to slow down, the song in clock time does not slow down or get longer in duration. That stays the same. It is our consciousness and experience that stretches or reaches deeper inside ourselves. We expand

In other words, intense musical activity creates space, an envelope or aura, and the 'kind' of our musical activity (the kind of blues we play) creates the kind of space or room we can experience or rest in. Different musicians create different spaces for us. Think of it as a living room, room to live, room to move around in, something like a time out from whatever line of life we are usually travelling along

The more that the musician is able to work the time, the more of an aura or special space surrounds the moment, and in that space or in that extra room, there we are, experiencing it, living it. We are experiencing

not only the music, per se, but the music allows us to experience ourselves as well, to go where we can't usually get to on our own, except rarely

I don't want to digress too much, but this brings up the question: what is music? I won't go there just now, but when great musicians make time, and we experience that expanded time, we use it like money to think about or spend however we like. It is not only about their music; this experience is beyond the music, if you mean labels, lyrics, notes, song titles, and albums. Music is not only about what it means, as in the words of a song, but those words and notes are only references, means and ways to experience the heart of music, the purpose, which is to experience what I can only point to here

The words and sound of music depend on what they mean, the sense it makes. And 'sense' is always an experience, not an idea or thought. When great blues musicians make time, we sense it and have a deeper actual experience. We live it. Often that experience is 'special' because we can't get there from here, not from our day-to-day experience. That is why we listen to music. A great musician is capable of transforming our day, sending us back home (after the song is over) with a deep experience and sometimes with a new sense of direction

There you have the general idea of making time. Please don't read this article as a know-it-all statement from me, but more as a question, something I am thinking about and interested in, something to be discussed. Here is a PDF if needed

MAKING BLUES TIME

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/MAKING%20BLUES%20TIME%20EDITED.pdf>

Dec 20, 2020, 9:43 AM

ANN ARBOR: AN ORACLE

A WISHING STAR

[Sorry for so many posts, but I am divesting, getting things off my chest. The following is just my opinion, but this article offers a view of Ann Arbor as my home town from one who grew up there, not just as a city, but what is Ann Arbor really all about? Places have power and power takes many forms, including receptivity, the pure feminine.]

Most of us have a town where we came from. Ann Arbor Michigan is my home town; I grew up there

In the 1960s, Ann Arbor was very different from the overly-caffeinated and sophisticated city it is today. For one, it did not used to take me 20 minutes to drive across town, but that is beside the point. Back then, Ann Arbor appeared much less sure of herself (or was it just me growing up?). It seemed to be overly self-conscious and perhaps playing second fiddle (a weak sister) to other college towns like Cambridge, Madison, and Berkeley

Ann Arbor had not yet found its place in mainstream America and what it lacked in bravado, it made up for in introspection and a quiet humility. What I did not fully

grasp back then is that Ann Arbor is fecund, a fertile place, indeed a womb. It is pure feminine

In the 1960's, Ann Arbor's innate receptivity and 'femininity' might well have been mistaken for passivity and naiveté, not that there was not some of that also present. Ann Arbor in the Sixties was not fully aware of itself, a city yet to awaken to its full mission, but busy nonetheless taking a direction that time would reveal as significant. And it took a while

Most city names are feminine, but that is not what I mean by saying that Ann Arbor is "feminine." There are two kinds of sculpture, one made by adding clay until we have a form, and the other by cutting away stone until we have a form. Ann Arbor is definitely of the second variety. It reveals rather than posits; it is passive rather than active, passive enough to give and actually allow birth, that kind of creativity

At the time, growing up in Ann Arbor (and never really knowing any other city), I was only dimly aware that my home town was more 'passive', more giving (as in 'giving way'), and generally just more receptive and understanding than many others. I might better say that I felt that other college towns (like Berkeley or Cambridge) were in some way more aggressive or just 'on their game'. It was natural to assume that Ann Arbor was busy bringing up the rear. It is now obvious to me that it had not yet fully found itself

Exactly when Ann Arbor did find itself (in the contemporary sense), I cannot say. I was too busy finding my own self and that happened in 1967. In 1980 I moved about 180 miles northwest to Big Rapids Michigan where I live to this day. As near as I can tell, Ann Arbor became an "adult" somewhere after I left town, perhaps I did too. Certainly, Ann Arbor is

confident and sure of itself today, and I am not just talking about students walking right in front of your car either. They always did that

My best guess is that Ann Arbor became aware of its feminine qualities the same way I discovered my own gentler side, gradually, but certainly, by surrendering to surrender. In time, the passive qualities of the town have become a power, not a defect or liability. It is my opinion that this fertility, this receptivity that Ann Arbor has in such high degree is very rare among cities. At least in this regard, to me Ann Arbor is very special indeed

And I sometimes wonder just how many of us there are still out there, those who lived in Ann Arbor beyond our college years (not that I went to college), and were somehow unable to be all that we could be while living there, and yet blossomed almost as soon as we left the town. This is pure magic, IMO

This has always puzzled me and perhaps every town is like that. 'A prophet is never known in his own country' kind of thing, but is immediately recognized from the outside. I don't have enough data to even make a guess at this

Or, is the deep receptiveness and anti-macho quality of Ann Arbor Michigan something that makes traditional superficial success more difficult-to-impossible to achieve in this town, yet at the same time builds strong habits for responding and accommodating life. This I wonder

It is interesting that my first real business (incorporated) was formed in Ann Arbor, Matrix Software. I chose the word "Matrix," not for its mathematical meaning, but because it meant 'womb,' a place where something

could be born. In lieu of my remarks here, I find this fact fascinating. An article written about my company for "Red Herring Magazine" pointed out that Matrix Software was the second oldest software company still on the Internet, second only to a little company called Microsoft

Or, am I just a little crazy when it comes to the "meanings" in life. My point here is that Ann Arbor has always seemed for me to be a sacred womb from which good things come. Whether this just works for me I cannot say. I can only say it is true for me

After all, how do towns come to be located where they are? Is it only because this road is connected to that road, is connected to another road? Or does the natural world have springs of spirit just as it has natural springs of pure water flowing? I like to believe in the later take on this, that land has indwelling spirits that also speak to us or for us, an oracle

It is my belief that Ann Arbor is such an oracular place. At least in my life, it has functioned like an oracle, that rare vortex through which the universe has spoken directly to me, albeit not in words that I have always immediately understood. In essence, Ann Arbor has been a wishing well for all my hopes and dreams

In ancient Greece they had oracular places, why not here in America? What great female spirit indwells in a city christened after two women named Ann and a stand of bur oak? The Anns' arbor -- Ann Arbor. Tree Town

“When you wish upon a star,
Makes no difference who you are,
Anything your heart desires,
Will come to you”

All I can say is:
“Ann Arbor, wishing well to you.”

Dec 19, 2020, 8:45 PM

THE PAUL BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

[I am getting down to the seeds & stems of my blues sharing. I would be remiss without sharing something about the Butterfield band, and then I have a couple of articles, more like essays, that I will post and then probably get back into dharma-related posts, since that is my main interest these years.]

Here I will share with you something about the history of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, which very much influenced me and our band, the Prime Movers Blues Band. First, I will talk about my personal relationship with the Butterfield band, get in out of the way, and then go on with a general history of that band

As for me personally, our band, the Prime Mover's Blues Band, spent a lot of time hanging out with and around the Butterfield band. We went to hear them every chance we could, including driving all the way to Chicago just to hear them play. Butterfield was friendly enough, but always a little cool. I remember sitting outside in the van smoking some pot with Butterfield,

just the two of us, and he explained that he was so good just because he was left-handed. He said left-handed people were always better than right-handed people (like me). He was probably pulling my leg, but you couldn't always tell with Butterfield. He not only was left-handed, but played the harp upside-down and backward. That, indeed, would be very hard to imitate. LOL

I can remember one time in Chicago, my brother (our lead guitar player) and I were sitting behind a flimsy curtain in front of which the Butterfield Band was playing the landmark tune East-West. We had an old reel-to-reel tape recorder, and we were, as mentioned, recording an early version of the Butterfield band's tune East-West. This recording was later released on an album of East-West live recordings by Mark Naftalin

Our go-to guy in the band was Michael Bloomfield, sometimes Mark Naftalin, because they were very friendly. I am told that Butterfield said the "Prime Movers Blues Band" was the second best white blues band in the country, of course, emphasizing second-best. The Butterfield Band was by far the best. We loved those guys

In 1967, the Prime Movers drove out to San Francisco for the "Summer of Love," and were taken in by Michael Bloomfield. We had about zero money. Bloomfield found us a place where we could stay, the Sausalito Heliport, and even asked us to substitute for his band, "The Electric Flag," when they couldn't make the gig. We opened for Cream in one of their few concerts at the Fillmore Auditorium

Although the Butterfield band's albums, especially those first two, are incredible, nothing they recorded EVER

sounded as good as hearing them in person. They killed it

THE HISTORY

Butterfield grew up in Chicago's Hyde Park, and according to his brother Peter:

"There was a lot of music around. Hyde Park, a place unique in Chicago because it was an island in the Southside ghetto, and a bastion of liberal politics. When we grew up there was a crime problem -- mostly due to scattered groups of Puerto Ricans and poor white trash -- but no one made a connection to the black community as a source of crime. We grew up about half a block from something called the International Houses and you would see people from all over the world in the immediate area. "

Butterfield was culturally sophisticated. His father was a well-known attorney in the Hyde Park area, and his mother was an artist -- a painter. Butterfield took music lessons (flute) from an early age and by the time he reached high school, was studying with the first-chair flautist of the Chicago Symphony. He was exposed to both classical music and jazz from an early age. Butterfield ran track in high school and was offered a running scholarship to Brown University, which he had to refuse after a serious knee injury. From that point onward, he turned toward the music scene around him. He began learning the guitar and harmonica

He met the singer Nick Gravanites and started hanging around outside of the Chicago blues clubs, listening. He and Gravanites began to play together at various campuses -- Ann Arbor, University of Wisconsin, and the University of Chicago. His parents sent him off to the University of Illinois, but he would put in a short

academic week, return home early (but not check in) and instead play and hang out at the blues clubs. Soon, he was doing this six or seven days a week with no school at all. When this was discovered by his parents, he then dropped out of college and turned to music full-time

Butterfield practiced long hours by himself -- just playing all the time. His brother Peter writes "He listened to records, and he went places, but he also spent an awful lot of time, by himself, playing. He'd play outdoors. There's a place called "The Point" in Hyde Park, a promontory of land that sticks out into Lake Michigan, and I can remember him out there for hours playing. He was just playing all the time ... It was a very solitary effort. It was all internal, like he had a particular sound he wanted to get and he just worked to get it."

In the meantime, Elvin Bishop had come from Oklahoma to the University of Illinois on a scholarship and had discovered the various blues venues for himself. Elvin remembers "One day I was walking around the neighborhood and I saw a guy sitting on a porch drinking a quart of beer -- white people that were interested in blues were very few and far between at that time. But this guy was singing some blues and singing it good. It was Butterfield. We gravitated together real quick and started playing parties around the neighborhood, you know, just acoustic. He was playing more guitar than harp when I first met him. But in about six months, he became serious about the harp. And he seemed to get about as good as he ever got in that six months. He was just a natural genius. And this was in 1960 or 1961."

Butterfield and Bishop began going down to the clubs, sitting in, and playing with all the great black blues

players -- then in their prime. Players like Otis Rush, Magic Sam, Howlin' Wolf, Junior Wells, Little Walter, and especially, Muddy Waters. They often were the only whites there, but were soon accepted because of their sincerity, their sheer ability, and the protection of players like Muddy Waters, who befriended them

An important event in the history of introducing blues to white America came in 1963 when Big John's, a club located on Chicago's White North Side invited Butterfield to bring his band there and play on a regular basis. He said "sure," and Butterfield and Bishop set about putting such a band together. They pulled Jerome Arnold (bass) and Sam Lay (drums) from Howlin' Wolf's band (with whom they had worked for the past six years!), by offering them more money. Butterfield and Bishop (the core team), Arnold, and Lay were all about the same age, and these four became the Butterfield Blues Band. They had been around for a long time and knew the Chicago blues scene and its repertoire cold. This new racially-mixed band opened at Big John's, was very successful, and made a first great step to opening up the blues scene to white America

When the new group thought about making an album, they looked around for a lead guitarist. Michael Bloomfield, who was known to Butterfield from his appearances at Big Johns, joined the band early in 1965. Bloomfield, somewhat cool at first to Butterfield's commanding manner, warmed to the group as Butterfield warmed to his guitar playing. It took a while for Bloomfield to fit in, but by the Summer of that year, the band was cookin'. Mark Naftalin, another music student, joined the band as the first album was being recorded, in fact while they were actually in the studio creating that first album on Electra. He sat in (playing the Hammond Organ for the first time!) and noodled

around with one of his own tunes, "Thank You Mr. Poobah." Butterfield liked the sound. They recorded that tune with Naftalin that very day along with eight of the 11 other tracks on the first album. After the recording session, Paul invited Naftalin to join the band and go on the road with them. These six, then, became the Paul Butterfield Blues Band

The first two Butterfield Blues albums are essential from an historical perspective. While East-West, the second album, with its Eastern influence and extended solos set the tone for psychedelic rockers, it was that incredible first album that put the music scene on alert to what was coming

Although it has been perhaps over-emphasized in recent years, it is important to point out that the release of The Paul Butterfield Blues Band on Electra in 1965, had a huge effect on the white music culture of the time. Used to hearing blues covered by groups like the Rolling Stones, that first album had an enormous impact on young (and primarily white) rock players. Here is no deferential imitation of black music by whites, but a racially-mixed hard-driving blues album that, in a word, rocked. It was a signal to white players to stop making respectful tributes to black music, and just play it. In a flash the image of blues as old-time music was gone. Modern Chicago style urban blues was out of the closet and introduced to mainstream white audiences, who loved it

Perhaps the next major event in the Butterfield band came when drummer Sam Lay became ill, late in 1965. Jazz drummer Billy Davenport was called in and soon became a permanent member of the group. Davenport was to become a key element in the development of the

second Butterfield Blues Band album, East/West. In particular, the extended solo of the same name

Fueled by Bloomfield's infatuation with Eastern music and Indian ragas at the time and aided by Davenport's jazz-driven sophistication on drums, their arose in the group a new music form that was to greatly effect rock music -- the extended solo. There is little question that here is the root of psychedelic (acid) rock -- a genuine fusion between East and West

Those first two albums served as a wakeup call to an entire generation of white would-be blues musicians. Speaking as one who was on the scene, that first Butterfield album stopped us in our tracks and we were never the same afterward. It changed our lives

The third album (released in 1967), "The Butterfield Blues Band; The Resurrection of Pigboy Crabshaw" is the last album that preserves any of the pure blues direction of the original group. By this time, Bloomfield has left to create his own group, The Electric Flag and, with the addition of a horn section, the band is drifting more toward an R&B. sound. Mark Naftalin left the group soon after this album and the Butterfield band took on other forms

Aside from these first three albums, later Butterfield material somehow misses the mark from a blues perspective. He never lost his ferocity or integrity, but the synergy of that first group was special. There has been some discussion in the literature about the personal transformation of Butterfield as his various bands developed. It is said that he went from being a self-centered band leader (shouting orders to his crew a' la Howlin' Wolf) to a more democratic style of leadership, providing his group with musical freedom (like Muddy Waters). For what it's worth, it is clear that

the best music is in those first two (maybe three) albums. Subsequent albums, although also interesting, have not gotten as much attention then or now from reviewers

When I knew Butterfield (during the first three albums), he was always intense, somewhat remote, and even, on occasion, downright unfriendly. Although not much interested in other people, he was a compelling musician and a great harp player. Michael Bloomfield and Mark Naftalin, also great players, were just the opposite -- always interested in the other guy. They went out of their way to inquire about you, even if you were a nobody. Naftalin continues to this day to support blues projects and festivals in the San Francisco Bay area

After Bloomfield and Naftalin left the group, Butterfield more and more spun off on his own. The next two albums, *In My Own Dream* (1968) and *Keep on Moving* (1969) moved still farther away from the blues roots until in 1972, Butterfield dissolved the group, forming the group *Better Days*. This new group recorded two albums, *Paul Butterfield's Better Days* and *It All Comes Back*

After that, Butterfield faded into the general rock scene, with an occasional appearance here and there, as in the documentary "*The Last Waltz*" (1976) -- a farewell concert from *The Band*. The albums *Put It in Your Ear* (1976) and *North/South* (1981) were attempts to make a comeback, but both failed. Paul Butterfield died of a drug-related heart failure in 1987

Even to this day, Butterfield remains one of the only white harmonica players to develop his own style (another is William Clarke) -- one respected by black players. Butterfield has no real imitators. Like most

Chicago-style amplified harmonica players, Butterfield played the instrument like a horn -- a trumpet. He tended to play single notes rather than bursts of chords. His harp playing is always intense, understated, concise, and serious -- only Big Walter Horton has a better sense of note selection

The effect of the Butterfield Blues Band on aspiring White blues musicians was enormous and the impact of the band on live audiences was stunning. Butterfield the performer was always intense, serious, and definitive -- no doubt about this guy. Blues purists sometimes like to quibble about Butterfield's voice and singing style, but the moment he picked up a harmonica, that was it. He is one of the finest harp players (period)

Butterfield and the six members of the original Paul Butterfield Blues Band made a huge contribution to modern music, turning a whole generation of white music lovers onto the blues as something other than a quaint piece of music history. The musical repercussions of the second Butterfield album, *East/West* continue to echo through the music scene even today!

I would like to thank Blues Access magazine for permission to use the quotes by Peter Butterfield and Elvin Bishop from the excellent article by Tom Ellis

Here is this article as a PDF

The Paul Butterfield Blues Band

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/The%20Paul%20Butterfield%20Blues%20Band.pdf>

Dec 19, 2020, 1:42 PM

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OK, winding up this flurry of blues-related posts and to make it easier for you to access and remember any of this that interests you, here are most of the material and in easy-to-access free e-Books. There is a lot of information here for those that are learning or remembering the blues

FOLK REVIVAL TO ELECTRIC BLUES

A HISTORY

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THE ANN ARBOR BLUES FESTIVALS: WHAT IT WAS

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BRIEF BIOS AND ALBUM PICKS

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BLUES PLAYERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

ANN ARBOR BLUES FESTIVAL

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THE INTERVIEWER

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BLUES PERFORMER

Albert King

Born: 1923-04-25

Indianola, MS

Died: 1992-12-21

Memphis, TN

Guitar, Vocals

Albert King is a take-no-prisoners king of player and one of the three great bluesman named King, the others being B.B. and Freddie. Standing well over six feet tall, king was indeed an imposing figure that, coupled with his serious demeanor, made any performance something you would remember. Although well acquainted with Chicago and the style of blues played there, King's music was more shaped by his contract with Stax records which often used Booker T and The MG's as his backup band for recordings. King's song "Born Under a Bad Sign" is perhaps his signature tune and his blistering guitar playing the envy of all guitar players. My brother Dan, a world-famous guitar repairman, made a custom-made guitar for Albert King, with his name inlaid on the fingerboard

Born Under a Bad Sign / Stax / 1967

Live wire / Blues Power / Stax / 1968

Laundromat Blues / Edsel / 1984

BLUES PERFORMER

Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup

Born: 1905-08-24

Forest, MS

Died: 1974-03-28

Nassawadox, VA

Guitar, Vocals

Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup was one of those artists who really seemed bigger than life in person. Meeting him was an awesome experience. A powerful singer and songwriter, Elvis Presley covered no less than three of Crudup's songs, the most famous being "That's Alright Mama," the tune that really launched Presley's career. Crudup was one of those artists who was kind to everyone he met and meeting that kind of wisdom and kindness is never forgotten. I remember my brother Dan and I drinking Jack Daniels with Arthur Crudup one fine night when Crudup was housed at the Michigan League

Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup / Fire / 1962

Give Me a 32-20 / Crown Prince / 1988

Mean Ol' Frisco / Charly / 1999

BLUES PERFORMER

B.B. King

Born: 1925-09-16

Indianola, MS

Died:2015-05-14

Las Vegas, NV

Guitar, Vocals

B.B. King really deserves his title "King of the Blues," both as singer, guitar player, and person. King's always gracious, gentlemanly style, carefully phrased lyrics, and superb guitar solos coupled with the fact that he always put on a great show, worked with a fantastic band, complete with horns, Hammond B-3 organ - the

works. If it was B.B. King, then it was a real experience you would have. I can well remember nights in Detroit, in a school gymnasium, perhaps the only white kids there with B.B. King, Bobby Forte on tenor sax, Duke Jethro on the organ and plenty of beer and fried chicken for sale. That was something

Live at the Regal / ABC / MCA / 1965

The Blues / Crown / 1960

Live in Cook County Jail / MCA / 1971

BLUES PERFORMER

Big Joe Turner

Born: 1911-05-18

Kansas City, MO

Died: 1985-11-24

Inglewood, CA

Vocals

The "Boss of the Blues," Big Joe Turner hails from Kansas City, which has its own take on the blues. Turner is a blues 'shouter' and has played everything from jazz and big band to rock n' roll. His 1954 hit "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" made him a national celebrity. Turner, like B.B. King and Bobby 'Blue' Bland, is more uptown, used to a large audience, and puts on a real show

Joe Turner Sings Kansas City Jazz / Decca / 1953

Boss of the Blues / Atlantic / 1956

Things I Used to Do / Pablo / 1977

BLUES PERFORMER

Bobby Blue Bland

Born: 1930-01-27

Rosemark, TN

Died: 2013-06-23

Germantown, TN

Vocals

Bobby "Blue" Bland was one of the few blues singers who worked with a big-band sound to also make it with the gut-bucket blues crowd. He has a world of heartache in that voice and there are no credible imitators of his sound. Like B.B. King, Bland toured with a larger band and his performances were carefully put together shows. His apologetic style of singing, which features heartbreak and love lost, endears him to almost all listeners. He is indeed one of the greats

Blues Consolidate / Duke / 1958

Two Steps from the Blues / Duke / MCA / 1961

Touch of the Blues / Duke / 1967

BLUES PERFORMER

Buddy Guy

Born: 1936-07-36

Lettsworth, LA

Guitar, Vocals

Chicago singer and blues guitarist Buddy Guy is world famous today, but in the late 1960s, his incredible guitar style was already the envy of all the younger players. His work on the Junior Wells album "Hoodoo Man Blues" sets the mark for a certain style of Chicago guitar and is a must-listen for lovers of city blues. Junior Wells and Buddy Guy are an unbeatable combination for pure inner-city blues and you can see it from the photos of the blues festival. I had the good fortune to have dinner with Buddy Guy some years ago

I Left My Blues in San Francisco / Chess / 1967

Pleading the Blues / Evidence / 1979

Chess Masters / Chess / 1987

BLUES PERFORMER

Charlie Musselwhite

Born: 1944-01-31

Kosciusko, MS

Harmonica, Vocals

Charlie Musselwhite, along with Paul Butterfield, is one of the few whites to have paid his blues dues early on and to appear on stage with the great performers at those early Ann Arbor blues festivals. "Memphis Charlie" as he was called, came more out of the country side of blues, but soon learned all the nuances of big-city Chicago blues. He was a student of the great harp master Big Walter Horton. Musselwhite started out in Chicago, but has since toured all over the country, in

particular on the West Coast. He is still cookin'. I have seen and talked with Musselwhite a number of times over the years

Stand Back / Vanguard / 1967

Tennessee Woman / Vanguard / 1969

In My Time / Alligator / 1991

BLUES PERFORMER

Clifton Chenier

Born: 1925-06-25

Opelousas, LA

Died: 1987-12-12

Lafayette, LA

Accordion, Vocals

Creole-born accordion player Clifton Chenier is called the "King of Zydeco," and for good reason. He pretty much single-handedly showed the world what Cajun and Zydeco tunes should look and sound like. His flamboyant style of presenting himself (he wore a large crown and flashed his gold tooth) and that irresistible music had everyone out of their seats and dancing in the aisles for every performance. Chenier is the king!

Bayou Blues / Specialty / 1970

King of the Bayous / Arhoolie / 1970

Out West / Arhoolie / 1974

BLUES PERFORMER

Dave Alexander

Born: 1938-03-10

Shreveport, LA

Died: 2012-01-08

Marshall, TX

Piano, Vocals, Bass, Trumpet

Dave Alexander, a very talented singer and pianist, was a very familiar figure in the Ann Arbor scene in the early 1970s, playing both solo and as a sideman. He was very approachable

Boogie Woogie Riot! / Ace / Arhoolie / 1994

The Rattler / Arhoolie / 1972

The Dirt on the Ground / Arhoolie / 1973

BLUES PERFORMER

Doctor Ross

Born: 1925-01-21

Tunica, MS

Died: 1993-0528

Flint, MI

Guitar, Harmonica, Vocals

In the tradition of the one-man band players like the West Coast's 'Lone-Cat' Jessie Fuller, Doctor Isaiah Ross plays guitar, harmonica, and sings in various combinations. Ross came out of Mississippi, where he appeared on radio and onto the Memphis scene, eventually working for Sun Records and playing a boogie style of guitar, voice, and harmonica. His sound is instantly recognizable, perhaps because he played the guitar left-handed and upside down and the harmonica backward, with the low notes to the right

Call the Doctor / Testament / 1965

I'd Rather Be an Old woman's Baby / Fortune / 1971

Doctor Ross / the Harmonica Boss / Fortune / 1972

BLUES PERFORMER

Eddie Vinson

Born: 1917-12-18

Houston, TX

Died: 1988-07-02

Los Angeles, CA

Sax, Vocals

Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson is a jazz saxophonist who wandered, to everyone's delight, into the blues and R&B format from time to time. Vinson can play the most down-and-out bar-walking sax you have ever heard, when he has a mind to. He also wrote a number of tunes for Miles Davis. 'Cleanhead' is a terror on the sax

Clean Head's Back in Town / Charly / 1957

Cherry Red / One Way / 1967

Old Kidney Stew Is Fine / Delmark / 1969

BLUES PERFORMER

Fred Below

Born: 1926-09-16

Chicago, IL

Died: 1988-08-14

Chicago, IL

Drums

Fred Below, one of the best-known of the Chicago blues drummers, is instantly recognizable by his signature black beret. Below, at first a jazz drummer, crossed over into blues and stayed there. He played with the "Three Aces," Junior Wells key band, and eventually after Wells left, with Little Walter as the "Four Aces" and then "Little Walter and the Jukes." Below played on almost all of Little Walter's greatest hits and also worked with just about every blues player on the scene. He was 'the Man' when it came to choosing a drummer for a sideman

No solo albums, but Below played on many tunes by Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson, Muddy Waters, Jimmy Rogers, and Howlin' Wolf, Junior Wells, and others

BLUES PERFORMER

Freddie King

Born: 1934-09-03

Gilmer, TX

Died: 1976-12-28

Dallas, TX

Guitar, Vocals

The great guitar instrumentalist and singer Freddie King, the "Texas Cannonball," is perhaps most famous for the instrumental "Hideaway" and the song "You've Got to Love Her with a Feeling." Every aspiring guitar player studies King and covers his material, people like Stevie Ray Vaughn, Peter Green, and even Magic Sam. Not the Chicago sound, but the Texas sound. That is Freddie King

Let's Hide Away and Dance Away with Freddie King / King / 1961

Gives You a Bonanza of Instrumentals / Crosscut / 1965

Hide Away / Starday / 1969

BLUES PERFORMER

Fred McDowell

Born: 1904-01-12

Roseville, TN

Died: 1972-07-03

Memphis, TN

Guitar, Vocals

I first met Delta-style bluesman Mississippi Fred McDowell in a small room in the Michigan League at the University of Michigan, where he had arrived some days too early for the Ann Arbor Blues Festival. There he was alone in his room, soft spoken and gentle mannered. We hung out. McDowell was the real deal, a great slide player, with a wide repertoire that made that original Delta sound live again in the now

My Home Is in the Delta / Testament / 1964

Amazing Grace / Testament / 1966

Mississippi Delta Blues / Vol. 2 / Arhoolie / 1966

BLUES PERFORMER

Hound Dog Taylor

Born: 1915-04-12

Natchez, MS

Died: 1975-12-17

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Slide guitarist and singer Hound Dog Taylor was always a force in the local Chicago blues scene. His band, the legendary House Rockers, contained only two players, himself and guitarist Brewer Phillips, but the two of them really did rock the house, sending folks to the dance floor and they sounded louder than a full band. Here is wild, up-tempo slide music

Hound Dog Taylor and the Houserockers / Alligator / 1971

Natural Boogie / Alligator / 1973

Beware of the Dog / Alligator / 1975

BLUES PERFORMER

Howlin' Wolf

Born: 1910-06-10

West Point, MS

Died: 1976-01-10

Hines, IL

Vocals, Harmonica, Guitar

Singer and harp player Howlin' Wolf was indeed an imposing figure. Physically he was huge, but when he started to sing his voice seemed to come from such a deep or faraway place in the mind that he actually would intimidate people. That voice could scare the dickens out of you, so serious could his music sound, and yet the next minute he would be crawling on his hands and knees across the stage clowning - a total ham. Almost every blues fan loves "The Wolf." I did an interview with Wolf that is like and acid trip

Howlin' wolf / Chess / 1962

The Rockin' Chair Album / Vogue / 1962

Evil / Chess / 1969

BLUES PERFORMER

J.B. Hutto

Born: 1926-04-26

Blackville, SC

Died: 1983-06-12

Harvey, IL

Guitar, Vocals

The great slide player J.B. Hutto, in the tradition of Elmore James, is known for his powerful voice, sometimes almost incomprehensible singing, and searing guitar work. Hutto and his band called "The Hawks" were among the first to go electric and push the amplified sound to the limit

Hawk Squat / Delmark / 1968

Sidewinder / Delmark / 1973

Masters of Modern Blues / Testament / 1995

BLUES PERFORMER

John Lee Hooker

Born: 1920-08-17

Clarksdale, MS

Died: 2001-06-21

Los Altos, CA

Guitar, Vocals

John Lee Hooker is the unrivalled groove master in the blues idiom and deserves his title as the "King of the Boogie." His recordings have an amazing uniformity of quality and his serious and soulful demeanor is matched only by that of the great Muddy Waters himself. Hooker grabs the audience from the first note and holds them transfixed until he stops. He was that good. I remember sitting with him in a tiny Green Room at the Chessmate in Detroit, which Jimmy Cotton was putting on a show out front. I think Cotton and his band lived with us for a week... something like that

I'm John Lee Hooker / Shout Factory / 1960

Burnin' / Vee-Jay / 1962

The Great John Lee Hooker / Crown / 1964

BLUES PERFORMER

Johnny Shines

Born: 1915-04-26

Frayser, TN

Died: 1992-04-20

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Shines who traveled and studied with the legendary Robert Johnson played in the Delta style, using a lot of slide guitar. Settling in the Chicago area, his powerful voice and understated manner of singing always stayed a little on the country side of city, but that being said, Shines was a real force in modern Chicago-style blues.

His performances on the album "Chicago, The Blues Today! Vol. 3" with his friend Big Walter Horton are masterpieces. Hanging out with Johnny Shines, who was very approachable, was a treat that I can never forget. That Chicago the Blues Today" album, below, with Big Walter Horton is one of the finest blues albums I have EV ER heard

Johnny Shines with Big Walter Horton / Testament / 1969

Dust My Broom / Flyright / 1980

Chicago the Blues Today: Vol. 3 / Vanguard / 1967

BLUES PERFORMER

Johnny Winter

Born: 1944-02-23

Beaumont, TX

Died: 2014-07-16

France

Guitar

Johnny Winter, blues guitarist and singer, was not on the festival schedule, but like many your white performers, he knew enough to want to be at that historic gathering. He sat in with a number of artists (like Luther Allison) and generally hung out and soaked in the sound

Second Winter / Columbia / 1969

Johnny Winter And / DCC / 1970

White Hot & Blue / Blue Sky / 1978

BLUES PERFORMER

Johnny Woods

Born: 1917-01-01

Looxahoma, MS

Died: 1990

Guitar, Vocals

Singer and harmonica player Johnny Woods played mostly post-war country-style music. He often travelled with Mississippi Fred McDowell, with whom he also recorded

Mississippi Fred McDowell and Johnny Woods /
Rounder / 1977

BLUES PERFORMER

Johnny Young

Born: 1918-01-01

Mississippi

Died: 1974-04-18

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Mandolin, Vocals

Singer, guitar, and mandolin player, Johnny Young hailed from Mississippi and ended up a fixture of modern Chicago blues. Often busking on Maxwell

Street with fellow player Johnny Williams, Young went on to record with Big Walter Horton, Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, and others. He was one of the few players who used the mandolin and has not received all the attention he deserves

Johnny Young and His Chicago Blues Band / Arhoolie / 1966

Chicago The Blues Today: Vol. 3 / Vanguard / 1967

Fat Mandolin / Blue Horizon / 1970

BLUES PERFORMER

Junior Wells

Born: 934-12-09

Memphis, TN

Died: 1998-01-15

Chicago, IL

Harmonica, Vocals

Junior Wells is perhaps the paradigm of the inner-city Chicago bluesman. Just pick up a copy of his Delmark recording "Hoodoo Man Blues," which tells all. The singing and harmonica playing on that album is literally incredible and takes you to a place I will bet you have never been to and will never forget. Wells is the essence of what Chicago-style blues is all about

Hoodoo Man Blues / Delmark / 1965

Blues Hits Big Town / Delmark / 1977

Come On in This House / Telarc / 1997

BLUES PERFORMER

Juke Boy Bonner

Born: 1932-03-22

Bellville, TX

Died: 1978-06-29

Houston, TX

Guitar, Harmonica, Vocals

Juke Boy Bonner was perhaps best known as a singer and harmonica player, but he also played a lot of guitar. Bonner, who was mostly a solo act, often appeared as a one-man band, and sung of the harshness of urban existence for a black man, with songs like "Going Back to the Country," "Life is a Nightmare," and "Struggle Here in Houston."

One Man Trio / Flyright / 1967

Going Back to the Country / Arhoolie / 1967

The Struggle / Arhoolie / 1968

BLUES PERFORMER

Koko Taylor

Born: 1935-09-28

Memphis, TN

Died: 2009-06-04

Chicago

Vocals

Sometimes referred to as the "Queen of the Chicago Blues," singer Koko Taylor, like Big Mama Thornton and Bessie Smith before her, is a take-no-prisoners vocalist. When she sings her signature (Willie Dixon) tune, "Wang Dang Doodle," she brings down the house and sends dancers flooding onto the dance floor. All modern female blues singers have learned from Koko Taylor

Koko Taylor / MCA / Chess / 1969

I Got what It Takes / Alligator / 1975

The Earthshaker / Alligator / 1978

BLUES PERFORMER

Little Brother Montgomery

Born: 1906-04-18

Kentwood, LA

Died: 1985-09-06

Champaign, IL

Piano, Vocals

Chicago blues pianist Little Brother Montgomery was around when blues turned electric and was an integral part of the small club scene in the Windy City. With some roots in traditional jazz, Montgomery's piano blues are more refined than many, as his work with the great guitarist Otis Rush makes clear. He appeared at many folk and blues festivals over the years

Tasty Blues / Prestige / 1960

Chicago: The Living Legends / Reverside / 1961

Goodbye Mister Blues / Delmark / 1973

BLUES PERFORMER

Lucille Spann

Born: 1938-06-23

Bolton, MS

Died: 1994-08-02

Vicksburg, MO

Vocals

Lucille Spann, the wife of legendary blues pianist Otis Spann, sang both blues and gospel. She recorded with the likes of Muddy Waters and often toured with her husband Otis

Bottom of the Blues / Bluesway / 1968

Cryin' Time / Vanguard / 1970

Last Call: Live at Boston Tea Party / Mr Cat / 2000

BLUES PERFORMER

Luther Allison

Born: 1939-08-17

Widener, AR

Died: 1997-08-13

Madison, WI

Guitar, Vocals

Guitarist, singer Luther Allison was a mighty force at those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals. He was on fire. About thirty years of age at the time and at the top of his game, Allison (who was known by the older blues musicians) was himself a fan of these great blues masters and acted as an ambassador for the blues to the emerging white audience. Well-known in Ann Arbor, Allison performed frequently in the city and more or less hung out with the music crowd there. Everyone in Ann Arbor knew and loved Luther Allison

Love Me Mama / Delmark / 1969

Luther's Blues / Mowtown / 1974

Serious / Blind Pig / 1987

BLUES PERFORMER

Magic Sam

Born: 1937-02-14

Grenada, MS

Died: 1969-12-01

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Magic Sam, who died within months of the 1969 festival was a phenomenon, certainly one of the bit hits of the

festival. Magic Sam was for me the very essence of the electric Chicago sound, both as a guitarist and a singer. His album "West Side Soul" is one of the finest I have ever heard, with his swinging syncopated guitar and a voice like none other anywhere. Magic Sam was also kind and welcoming to all who came to know him. I first heard Magic Sam on Chicago's West Side, playing in a huge Chines-restaurant-style low ceiling room. It was packed, so that is was all I could do to slip in a press up with my back to the wall. And then I heard this incredible voice, like shimmering water, and the hair just stood up on the back of my neck. Sam was playing that night with "Shakey Jake" Harris, a harmonica player. If you want a blues player who can sing like no one else, and who is also an incredible guitar player, get the album "West Side Soul."

West Side Soul / Delmark / 1967

Magic Touch / Black Top / 1966

Black Magic / Delmark / 1968

BLUES PERFORMER

Mance Lipscolm

Born: 1895-09-09

Navosta, TX

Died: 1976-01-30

Navosta, TX

Guitar, Vocals, Violin

Mance Lipscomb, the oldest artist at the festival (born in 1895), was in his mid seventies when he appeared at the Ann Arbor Blues festival. Gentle mannered and soft-spoken, Lipscomb harkened back to an earlier time and was more in the tradition of folk blues, although he could play a wide variety of styles. Seeing him perform was a treasure

Texas Songster / Vol. 3: Texas Songster in a Live Performance / Arhoolie / 1965

Texas Songster / Vol. 2: You Got to Reap What You Sow / Arhoolie / 1964

You'll Never Find Another Man Like Mance / Arhoolie / 1964

BLUES PERFORMER

Mighty Joe Young

Born: 1927-09-23

Shreveport, LA

Died: 1999-03-27

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Singer, guitarist Mighty Joe Young came from Milwaukee and settled in on Chicago's West side, eventually recording on the Delmark label in 1971. Young did not tour as much as some of the other Chicago blues player, but was well-known and respected around town. He was a permanent fixture on

the Chicago scene, holding down steady gigs at various Chicago clubs over the years

Chicken Heads / Ovation / 1974

Mighty Joe Young / Ovation / 1976

Mighty Man / Blind Pig / 1997

BLUES PERFORMER

Muddy Waters

Born: 1915-04-04

Rolling Fort, MS

Died: 1983-04-30

Westmount, IL

Vocals, Guitar

If there is one "King" of the Chicago blues, it has to be Muddy Waters. First of all, he acts like a king, always dignified, almost reserved, actually "regal" is the word I am looking for, like a king. I always felt I had to be on my best behavior when I interviewed him or even was at a club where he was playing and I could see that the blues players felt the same way. The Muddy Waters band, like Miles Davis, was the birthing place for all kinds of great blues players, like Junior Wells, Big Walter Horton, Little Walter, Jimmy Rogers, Otis Span, Willie Dixon, James Cotton, Mojo Buford, George Smith, Francis Clay, and many others. The Muddy Waters band always set the bar for comparison and there really was no comparison. Muddy Waters was the living spirit of the Delta sound

At Newport / MCA / Chess / 1960

Folk Festival of the Blues / MCA / Chess / 1963

Muddy Waters / Chess / 1964

BLUES PERFORMER

Papa Lightfoot

Born: 1924-03-02

Natchez, MS

Died: 1971-11-28

Natchez, MS

Harmpnica, Vocals

Lost to the music world for years, harmonica player Papa Lightfoot was found again in the late 1960s and made an album for Vault Records in 1969. A born showman, Lightfoot loved to perform and is reminiscent of the style of Big Joe Turner

Natchez Trace / Vault / 1969

Rural Blues / Vol. 2 / 1969

Goin' Back to the Nachez Trace / Ace / 1995

BLUES PERFORMER

Pee Wee Crayton

Born: 1914-12-18

Rockdale, TX

Died: 1985-06-25

Los Angeles, CA

Guitar, Vocals

Texan Singer and blues guitarist Pee-Wee Crayton is in the tradition of blues-great T-Bone Walker in that his vocals are refined and sophisticated, but his aggressive guitar playing is distinct and instantly recognizable

Pee Wee Crayton / Crown / 1959

Blue Guitar Genius / Vol. 1 / Ace / 1982

Blues After Dark / Charly / 1988

BLUES PERFORMER

Robert Jr.Lockwood

Born: 1915-03-27

Marvell, AR

Died: 2006-11-21

Cleveland

Guitar, Vocals

Robert Lockwood, Jr. had the distinction of studying and traveling with two of the greatest bluesman, Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller) and the legendary Robert Johnson (who lived with Lockwood's mother for some ten years). Lockwood was in demand in the Chicago area as a sideman, working with Little Walter, Sunnyland Slim, Eddie Boyd, and many others. For those of us learning blues back in the later 1960s,

Lockwood obviously carried the tradition. You could see it in how he carried himself and hear it in his playing. And he was kind and approachable. We all loved to hang around Robert Jr. Lockwood

Steady Rollin' Man / Delmark / 1970

Plays Robert and robert / Evidence / 1982

I Got to Find Me a Woman / Verve / 1998

BLUES PERFORMER

Robert Pete Williams

Born: 1914-03-14

Zachary, LA

Died: 1980-12-31

Rosedale, LA

Guitar, Vocals

Robert Pete Williams was actually discovered at Angola Prison in Louisiana, where he was serving time for murder. Williams is not a Chicago-style player, but is more country style, with intense songs of his life experience in and out of prison. He was featured at many festivals during the later sixties, often traveling with Mississippi Fred McDowell

Angola Prisoner's Blues / Arhoolie / 1961

Louisiana Blues / Takoma / 1967

Rural Blues / Storyville / 1972

BLUES PERFORMER

Roosevelt Sykes

Born: 1906-01-31

Elmar, AR

Died: 1983-07-17

New Orleans, LA

Piano, Vocals

Blues pianist Roosevelt Sykes was born in Louisiana, raised in Arkansaw, and relocated to Chicago in 1943, where he charted a number of songs, with his band "The Honeydrippers." He returned to New Orleans in the 1960s, where he remained. I cannot really find words for Roosevelt Sykes, who was of course an awesome pianist and singer, always upbeat and with a friendly word for all who came to know him. His incredible kindness and welcoming nature made him a true ambassador for not only the blues, but for humanity. Roosevelt and my father spent a couple days hanging out and drinking beer. That was a sight to see

Honeydrinker / Bluesville / 1961

Feel Like Blowin My Horn / Delmark / 1973

Hard Drivin' Blues / Delmark / 1975

BLUES PERFORMER

Sam Lay

Born: 1935-03-20

Birmingham, AL

Drums, Vocals

Chicago-style drummer Sam Lay came up through the Howlin' Wolf band, playing with the Wolf for six years until he switched to the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and immediately found prominence. He also backed up Bob Dylan at the historic 1965 Newport Folk Festival set when Dylan went electric. Lay taught the drummer of our blues band, a young Iggy Pop, how to do the double-shuffle. Iggy practiced for weeks to get it right, which he did

Shuffle Master / Appaloosa / 1992

Stone Blues / Evidence / 1996

Live on Beale Street / Blue Moon / 2000

BLUES PERFORMER

Son House

Born: 1902-03-21

Riverton, MS

Died: 1988-10-19

Detroit, MI

Guitar, Vocals

Hearing Son House live at the Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, one of the greatest of the Delta-style slide players, was like being back there and then where all that music came from. Here was a man who influenced and was revered by players like Muddy Waters, Robert

Johnson, and everyone (and all they represent) playing music that would sear your soul and start you to thinking: what is this life all about. This is where the music came from

Blues from the Mississippi Delta / Folkways / 1964

The Legendary Son House / Columbia / 1965

Son House / Folk Lyric / 1995

BLUES PERFORMER

Sunnyland Slim

Born: 1907-09-05

Vance, MS

Died: 1995-03-17

Chicago, IL

Piano, Vocals

Blues pianist Sunnyland Slim was born in the Mississippi Delta and moved first to Memphis and finally to Chicago in 1928 where he became one of the most sought-after and beloved blues players in that city. He has recorded dozens of albums and has appeared on hundreds of albums

Midnight Jump / BGO / 1969

Slim's Shout / Prestige / 1969

She Got That Jive / Airway / 1977

BLUES PERFORMER

Willie Dixon

Born: 1915-07-10

Vicksburg, MS

Died: 1992-01-29

Burbank, CA

Bass, Guitar, Vocals

Willie Dixon is central to the history of Chicago blues as a singer, a bassist, arranger, record producer, and above all as a songwriter. Dixon songs include Little Walter's "My Babe," "Evil" and "Spoonful" by Howlin' Wolf, and a host of other hits like: "Back Door Man," "I Just want to Make Love to You," "Wang Dang Doodle," and "Little Red Rooster."

I Am the Blues / Columbia / 1970

Catalyst / Ovation / 1973

Hidden Charms / Bug / 1988

BLUES PERFORMER

Lightnin' Hopkins

Born: 1912-03-15

Centerville, TX

Died: 1982-01-30

Houston, TX

Guitar, Vocals

Texas guitarist and singer Lightnin' Sam Hopkins is without a doubt one of the most awesome performers I have ever experienced. It was more than just music we heard. Like the really great blues players, such as Muddy Waters, Lightnin' Hopkins literally created time as he went along and if you dared listen, you were caught up in it and his music could rearrange your mind for you. Hopkins was riveting

Lightnin' Hopkins / Folkways / 1959

Sings the Blues / Crown / 1961

Mojo Hand / Collectables / 1962

BLUES PERFORMER

Lazy Bill Lucas

Born: 1918-05-29

Wynee, AK

Died: 1982-12-11

Minneapolis, MN

Piano, Vocals

Chicago pianist Lazy Bill Lucas moved to Chicago in the early 1940s, hanging out and working with John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson and Big Joe Williams. Lester also played with Little Walter, Snooky Prior, and in the Howlin' Wolf Band. He was well known in Minneapolis for the "Lazy Bill Lester Show."

Lazy Bill Lucas / Philo

BLUES PERFORMER

John Jackson

Born: 1924-02-25

Woodville, VA

Died: 2002-01-20

Fairfax Station, VA

Guitar, Vocals

Blues singer and guitarist John Jackson represents the East Coast Piedmont blues, in the songster tradition - a more country side of blues with an easy-going style

John Jackson / Rounder / 1966

John Jackson Vol. 2 / Arhoolie / 1968

Don't Let Your Deal Go Down / Arhoolie / 1970

BLUES PERFORMER

Lowell Fulson

Born: 1921-03-31

Tulsa, OK

Died: 1999-03-07

Inglewood, CA

Guitar, Vocals

West Coast blues singer, guitarist, and songwriter Lowell Fulson wrote such blues standards as "Everyday I Have the Blues" and "Reconsider Baby," a big hit that

was later covered by no less than Elvis Presley. Fulson played a wide range of blues, with sideman such as Stanley Turrentine, David "Fathead" Newman, and other jazz greats

Hung Down Head / MCA / Chess / 1954

Soul / United / 1966

Tramp / United / 1967

BLUES PERFORMER

Carey Bell

Born: 1936-11-04

Macon, Mississippi

Died: 2007-05-06

Chicago

Harmonica, Vocals

Carey Bell was one of the top harp players in what we might call the second generation of Chicago amplified harmonica players. A student of both Little Walter and particularly Big Walter Horton, Bell cut his teeth working in the bands of Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon, and served as a sideman with many artists on harmonica and bass guitar

Carey Bell's Blues Harp / Delmark / 1969

Deep Down / Alligator / 1995

Gettin' Up: Live at Boddy Guy's Legends Rosa's / Delmark / 2007

BLUES PERFORMER

Jimmy Dawkins

Born: 1936-10-24

Tchula, MiS

Died:2013-04-10

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Blues singer and guitarist Jimmy "Fast Fingers" Dawkins has been a blues fixture on the Chicago's West Side for many years, eventually recording on the Delmark label with his first solo album "Fast Fingers."

Fast Fingers / Delmark / 1969

All for Business / Delmark / 1971

Kan't Shake Dees Blues / Earwig / 1991

THE BLUES ARTISTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I though you might like to hear about the Ann Arbor Blues Festival and "The Blues" in general, right from the performers themselves. I did scores of personal interviews both with audio and later with video, as well. Here, in their own words, are the voices of some of the performers at these festivals. Let's start with some comments about the festival itself

Magic Sam (August 3, 1969)

This festival is like an all-star game

Louis Myers

This blues festival is a big family reunion

James Cotton (August 3, 1969)

I've never seen nothin' like this in my life. This is the beatifulest thing I ever seen in my life. This is so beautiful

Luther Tucker (August 3, 1969)

As for the blues festival, I can dig it. I enjoyin' it

Lightnin' Hopkins (August 3, 1969)

Well, I been looking forward for this for a long time. And I thought this would happen in the future and it did, so now I hope it lasts long. Fact of business is, I believe it will

Sleepy John Estes (August 2, 1969)

When all the children get together, Oh that will be a day

And I also asked many of these performers to tell me how they view the blues and what it means to them. Here are some responses:

Jim Connely (horn player for Otis Rush) -- (August 2, 1969)

Blues and jazz, they are one, yet still they are different, because to be able to play jazz, a musician has to be able to play the blues first. He's got to know the blues, because blues is soul. It's what you feel, and jazz is just a step farther than the blues. I mean it's musically a step up

You see, blues is just the common ground that you meet on, but jazz you get sophisticated and you move out a little more. But if you can't play the blues, then to me you can't play jazz

You play the blues and then you go a little farther and you go into jazz. Blues is a simple thing that anybody can understand. Jazz, you have to keep hearin' it, over and over again to really adjust to it, where anybody can understand the blues

Whereas blues is a story, a story usually of one's life or somebody's life. And jazz is what a man...it's his life, but it's also what he lives in a dream world. And it's also what he would like to do outside of his life. And he goes into this world of his own, but they are (blues and jazz) are still close together that it's hard to separate the two, like love and hate. You can't have one without the other

You don't learn how to play the blues. Blues is something that comes natural. You don't go around studying the blues. It's something that comes as natural as a baby sucks his mam'a breast

Blues is something that's gonna' come natural, anyhow, and the next step you go, you learn to play with rock and roll, and the next thing you know, you are trying to modernize it a little bit. You're tired of that old down feelin' of the blues, and the next thing you know, your gonna' be tryin' to play some jazz

Blues is me. Blues is the black man. Blues is what we had. Then you move up a step farther, not what we have, but what we want that that's jazz -- this other world we would like to have, when we can set here and imagine what we want. Blues is the

most common thing that you have. It's a thing which will bring all people together, the common ground

Roosevelt Sykes: (August 1, 1969)

Blues is a part of a man. It's the way he feels. Lot's of people have the wrong understandin'. They think a blues player have to be worried. Thinks the blues player have to been whipped or something, or worried, or troubled or something to sing the blues

That's wrong. There's doctors. He has medicine. He ain't sick, but he makes stuff for the sick people. So blues players. He ain't worried and bothered, but he's got something for the worried people. With a doctor, your can see his medicine. He can see his patient. Blues, you can't see the music; he can't see the patient, because it's the soul. So I work on the soul and the doctor works on the body. So something for your soul. Do something for your body. All is mixed in one. Two makes one

I been goin' to Europe since 1960-1961. People all appreciated the blues everynight I played... eight, ten thousand people a night, in Europe, even in the small towns

There, nobody could ever become graduated on it, that they can't learn no more music. You just get to think you're finished up and there is something brand new started that you didn't get. So, on and on. It's gonna' be that way

The blues is a talent. You can't learn that. there's nobody teaches that. No schools for it. Nobody can teach it to you. God gives every man a talent. It don't come in schools. It's something you born with. It's a feelin'. Can't nobody give you that feelin'. You have to

have it. You can't buy it and you can't give it away if you got it

Blues is a part of a man. It's the way he feels. Lots of people have the wrong understandin'. They think that a blues player have to be worried

Freddy King (August 3, 1969)

Jazz gets a little too way out. I can't understand it if it gets too way out. You understand what I mean by too way out? Away from the beaten track, the common ground or bond of all men. Away from the heart. Blues is the heart

Fred Below (August 3, 1969)

Altogether different beat, difference in chord structure. Modern Jazz is a measured thing. Blues is not measured. There's as much different between blues and jazz as between night and day

Louis Myers (August 3, 1969)

Blues is a whole lot different than jazz. I think blues is more so the soul bag than jazz. Jazz is modified from the blues. This [the blues festival] is a big family reunion

James Madison (August 3, 1969)

Blues is like something that's happened to you. You feel it. You have the blues each and every day. jazz is more or less something you learn. You wake up and are worried about something, try to put it in music, it's blues

Jack Myers (August 1, 1969)

Improvisation: I think jazz is limited, man. You got certain changes you gotta' make, while if you play the 12-bar blues, a cat can just express his self. Blues is something that is happening every day, that you can understand

James Cotton (August 3, 1969)

(Blues festival) I've never seen nothin' like this in my life. This is the beatifulest thing I ever seen in my life. This is so beautiful

Luther Tucker (August 3, 1969)

Everyday brings a little change. As for the blues festival, I can dig it. I enjoyin' it

Charlie Musslewhite (August 3, 1969)

Blues is a thing by itself. You can express it through music. You can express it by talkin' or paintin' or just walking' down the street, you know. Blues is a thing, separate. Music is a medium for it. Music just happens to be a very comfortable way to express the blues. Jazz is just like takin' a tune, it's just messin with it. You take music and mess with it. takin' a chord and instead of playin' it real conventional, playin' it real crazy. Blues is a thing

Jimmy Dawkins (August 1, 1969)

I feel like the blues is the truth, because when a guy sings the blues, he sings what happened. Jazz, you can adlib. You can do the little things you wanta' do to please the public. When you're doin' blues, that's the truth, that's the whole story of blues, tellin' the truth. If something happened to you that sets you back, that's the blues

Blues is standard. Maybe the jazzman makes a little money, so he don't want to be in the bag anymore. So he try to move away from it, but he never leaves blues. He just try to play something else

When a musician has not paid his dues, he sounds like somebody else. He does not sound like himself

The blues festival gives breathing space for smaller bands to expand and achieve self-confidence and standing

When you got the blues, you're always searchin' for happiness, and when I'm up there on the stage, I'm always searchin for something deeper and deeper all the time

Fred McDowell (August 1, 1969)

You play with understanding. That's the way I play

Lightnin' Hopkins (August 3, 1969)

Now I just have to tell ya'. I never knowed anything about no jazz, because jazz never affected my life. In my life, the blues always dwell with me. Now, here's what the blues is: that is a good man feelin' bad. You ever heard of that? Now, I'm gonna' show you and it is true. Now you can walk right here and have one dollar in your pocket. You going to the store. You loose that dollar, before you get there. then you walk on by and you turn around. Lord, what happened to me? And now what you got? You got nothin' but the blues

[festival] Well, I been looking forward for this for a long time. And I thought this would happen in the future and it did, so now I hope it lasts long. Fact of business is, I believe it will

Bob Koester (August 2, 1969) [Delmark Records]

What is Jazz? The element of improvisation has to be present, blues chord structure has to be present

Blues is a vocal music and jazz is an instrumental music, and if you have an artist who is a great guitar player, and he does not sing well, he's eventually gonna' wind up in the jazz field, or somewhere else

Jazz is the ability to get away from that chord structure and the 12-bar language. It's a matter of material. But also, I think it is the emphasis on the instrumental aspects of the music, rather than the vocal. Blues is not only vocal, it's verbal, where words mean a great deal

Big Mama Thornton (August 3, 1969) [Hound Dog]

Jazz? I don't understand it in the first place. It don't have no endin. Here he is up there blowin' and maybe he blow till he get tired, then he just stop. What about rock and roll? Some folks say: It's nothin' but a hopped-up, fast-up blues. That's all it is

I like to let my audience be close to me, you know what I man? And I want them to feel that they are close to me, anyway, because I wants to be close to them, because I want to express myself to let them know what I do and how I do it. And if they can do it, good luck to 'em, is all I can say

Muddy Waters (August 2, 1969)

Blues. I lived them. I lived them musically and I lived them lifewise. Blues is the mother of jazz and all those things. A blues performer stays in blues, when he loves them like I do. To me, I'd rather remain with the blues

and not try to move into the jazz field. I didn't even have it on my mind to try a change, to do something else

Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup (August 3, 1969) {Wrote Elvis's first song]

I'm this a way. If I go to work for you, and just whatever I promise you, that's what I will do. If I promise you that tomorrow afternoon, me and you gonna' fight, we gonna' fight. The reason we don't fight is that I don't meet you, and that's the way I am. I only have nothin' but my word. And through not nothin' being but my word, I have to do as I say. A man's word is his bond. And if a man's word ain't no good, he ain't no good. And I've learned that

You know the life of a musician is only thirty-three years, if he live it. Somebody will either poison you; some woman will kill him, or some man will kill him. And if you go beyond that, you got to treat everybody nice

Magic Sam (August 3, 1969)

This festival is like an all-star game

The blues has been handed down from generation to generation. Blues came from spirituals. It developed and developed. Jazz is taken from the blues

T-Bone Walker (August 3, 1969)

Without Blues, there wouldn't be no jazz. Blues is the basis of all jazz

Clifton Chenier (August 2, 1969)

Blues gonna' forever be here. Jazz goes on and off.
See? The blues always standard. Jazz is Ok for those
who like it, you know

Otis Rush (August 2, 1969)

Blues is the foundation of all music. They keep buildin'
and buildin' on it, just like these cars. They didn't use to
look like this, jazz is a thing like I'm saying. They just
pep blues up. They speed it up. they cut it up, all kinds
of ways and pieces. They got time to go by, nothin' but
time, and they can cut it up all kinds of ways. This is
what I mean by cutting it up

Son House (August 3, 1969)

Yeah, Yeah. It's all right I think. Mostly all the old guys,
they mostly all are gone. I think Willie Brown was about
the last one

Dec 18, 2020, 11:18 AM

INTERVIEWING THE BLUES

That first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969 changed my
life. I was 29 at the time and that event became one of
the most important in my life, a pivot point where I
turned from whatever I was doing at the time, and more
toward what I became and still am today, an archivist of
popular culture. As they say, "Who Woulda' Thunk It?"

If there is one of those times where we feel like we are
living in our own dream, that first Ann Arbor Blues
Festival was for mr that. Imagine

Suddenly, in one place, were almost all of the heroes in
my recent life, the great blues players, assembled in
one place, with their all their sidemen. Not only was the

general public (read White people) introduced all at once to most of the great living black blues players, but equally (and more important), those scores of blues players, their sidemen, and families were assembled together in what turned out to be a kind of celebration

So, as the public was overcome by this profound blues music for the first time (with that many blues players present), there's was somewhat of a celebration and reunion going on with the blues players themselves

It was epic and cosmic, IMO. And there I was, not one of the university-folks who planned the festival, but the on-the-ground guy who knew some of the great blues players and ended up in charge of "hospitality," which means providing all these players and their families with food and drink, and "drink" was all about alcohol in those days. My family and I were very popular serving these folks

I was there with my brother Dan, who was equally interested in all this, and also our other three brothers, Stephen, Phillip, and Tom, plus our dad. We served the booze out of my dad's station wagon and my dad spent most of the time hanging out and drinking with folks like Roosevelt Sykes, Big Mama Thornton, and some of the other blues greats

Speaking of my dad, I seldom had connected all that much with him about whatever I loved, but we connected that weekend through introducing him to many of these players. It was, so to speak, a bit of the divine, a taste of heaven on Earth as far as I was concerned

There is so much I could tell you and probably should, those few of you who are transported by the music and life wisdom of these great black blues players. What I

can do here is show you some of the photos that came out of that event, many by the great photographer Stanley Livingston

And hidden in that event, like a seed, was my future as an archivist of popular culture. I never saw it coming, but I was always into organizing and documenting what I most loved, and I loved the blues and those players!

After that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969, came the second blues festival in 1970, which was more of the wonderful same. And then, after the University stopped sponsoring the festival, there was a year of no festival, (1971) and then the festival was reinstated by music promotor Peter Andrews (who brough a lot music to Ann Arbor) and poe/blues-expert John Sinclair, with the “Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals,” which were held in 1972, 1973, and an unsuccessful festival held in Canada in 1974

Andrews and Sinclair expanded the venue to not only include blues, but also jazz and R&B, with performers like Ray Charles and Miles Davis

I was also on-site for most of those, handling hospitality and doing even more interviews, this time with audio and video

Well, the long and the short of it is that from those seminal blues festivals, both the Ann Arbor Blues Festivals and the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals that followed, I became aware of how precious and fragile those times were. And I came out of those festivals with an intense desire to protect and preserve our country’s musical heritage

This manifested some years later with my founding the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com), which today is the

largest collection of music data on the planet, millions of pieces of information all organized. Of course, I did this assisted by an incredible team, that eventually numbered (before I sold it) of 150 full-time (review and computer) staff, and over 500 freelance writers, all working together

And later, my company, AMG, founded the All-Movie Guide (allmovie.com), which is one of the two largest film databases present today, and the All-Game Guide, which was eventually abandoned after I sold the company. I also founded the first major Concert Music Poster site called, "Classic Posters" (ClassicPosters.com), which is still going today, and other collections, etc

I went on to interview scores of rock poster artists, some rock players, and so forth. I have been busy these last years divesting all of these archives so they are not swept into memory anytime soon. These include:

My Rock Concert Poster data has been donated to:

University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library

The Haight Street Art Center (non-profit) in San Francisco

My collection of music CDs is now at the Michigan State University, some 700,000+ CDs

My collection of astrological books, magazines, and so forth are now part of the permanent collection of the University of Illinois. Fill a full-sized moving van and a UPS-sized truck

A large collection of Tibetan Buddhist teachings, thousands of tapes, are now at the KTD Monastery in upstate New York

And I am busy distributing many databases on music, astrology and other disciplines as we speak. With said, here are some photos of me interviewing

Dec 17, 2020, 9:14 PM

INTERVIEW WITH HOWLIN' WOLF

[I still have the concluding part of the article on the Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970 to post, but thought first I would add this interview I did with Howlin' Wolf that I did at that first festival. I am told that it is probably the best interview ever done with Wolf. What do you think?]

August 2, 1969

Howlin' Wolf

Interviewed by Michael Erlewine

It was the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival and there I was backstage talking with Wolf. It was just the two of us standing in the open sun and it was not your normal interview

As I stood there listening to this huge man, I flashed back to some years before when I had seen the Wolf performing live in a small bar at the north end of Chicago late one night. There was no one in the place, just Howlin' Wolf and his guitarist Hubert Sumlin. My brother Dan and I stood somewhere at the back of the place and it was very dark. Wolf was way up to the front, with one small light playing on him. He was sitting

on an old wooden straight-backed chair. It was all light and shadows

And Wolf was singing as only he can sing, and his music not only filled the room, it actually took over all sense of time as his laser-like voice penetrated deep into my brain. For a while, I lost all idea of who or where I was. The walls of the room just went transparent, as did my body, and I found myself suddenly thrust outside of time, beyond any sense of myself that I knew, somewhere out there on my own in this vast universe, just a mind floating there. This was more than just music. This was a life initiation, as I believe you will get a sense of from reading my interview with this great bluesman

HOWLIN' WOLF

“Some of them said years ago. ‘We will never make it to the moon.’ I said: ‘You never know.’ Today, we settin’ on the moon and got a flag up there. You understand? But they told me that we couldn’t do that. Don’t never say what we can’t do.”

“Next thing, I’m looking for a man walkin’ down the street with no head on his body. And if they say they can’t do it, I’m gonna’ tell ‘em, ‘You’re wrong.’ He gonna’ come down sooner or later. That’s right. This is of the day. He will have no head and be all heart, just one big heart.”

“Because these performers probably have the biggest hearts in the entertainment business, and there were thirty or forty thousand kids here trying to learn about heart, about understanding, about developing their hearts. Thousands of hippies, hipped up children, with great big heads and tiny hearts, trying to lose that big head and get that big heart. The big head and the hard

heart of modern rock and roll and psychedelic music has gone as far as it will go. The heart just has to be developed and this, the first of all the blues festivals, promises much to cross the generation gap and bring the old and younger Americans closer than they have been for the last decade. Because blues performers have big hearts.”

“I'm not a smart man. You see, I got a little head and a big heart. Because blues is based on the common ground shared by all people, black and white, young and old. Blues is the story of the human life, of its loves and struggles. All rock and roll, all jazz, all American music finds its roots in gospel music and in blues. Blues is not unhappy music.”

“A lotta' people sing, but they don't sing with no understandin'. When you repeats your words, make sure to make some understanding of what you're sayin'. Those men played a clear guitar. They made clear notes.”

“I've been pushed way back. I don't know why the people wouldn't let me up to the front like they did. I was just dirt. I felt like I was just dirt, so I stayed back, because I was able to back up my own self. I didn't think I had no right to be out there trying to push and scrap. I didn't think I had no right to be out there tryin' to push and scrap up no few nickels, you know, which I needed... never get too many of them.”

“But, I'm a funny kind of person. I don't never want to take advantage of nobody, and think I'm takin' advantage of... you know what I mean. Let the peoples have it. Then if anything for me, it will come by, and I'll get that.”

“Well, now anytime anything is pushed back, sooner or later, they gonna' bring it to the front. They can't keep it hid always.”

“I'll tell you. when people can't make or use you, they don't need you.”

“There ain't gonna be no trouble. Somebody gonna' come on up to the front and say "I am the man. I'm sorry," That's right. There ain't gonna' be no hard feelings. He didn't come for no trouble, but he gonna' sure let you know that he are 'the man.' Supposed to be.”

“Just like a flower. You see, we're trampin' on this grass. We stay here a couple months and tramp right around here, we gonna' kill it. Just as soon as we stop trampin', the first warm sunshine, and then the grass gonna' start a growin' again.”

“You don't never learn it all. You just learn some portion of it, and be able to, you know, entertain. And I play a certain portion of harp and a certain portion of guitar. I'm not a smart man. You see, I got a little head and a big heart. That's all I need. You take people. When they got a big head, they don't make it far”

“You're supposed to make it pleasin' to the peoples ears, then they don't mind listening to the tune.”

“I heard a negro, howlin' and moanin'. I said: I take it from you. He was an old man. I said: I'm gonna' take that someday and make something out of it. I took that howlin' and that yodelin' and put it together and made me a thing of my own.”

“You got to get in the right position to where you can control your voice. I'm not a smart man. You see I got a

little head and a big heart. You got to know your keynote. You got to know your notes from staff to staff. If you don't know your notes from staff to staff, I can tell when you pick up your guitar, you really don't know what you're doin'."

"I don't mean to be funny, but if you let me, I'll show you, and tell you, if you will accept it. But if you think because I'm a Negro, and you're not supposed to be told nothin', you understand, you're wrong. You're supposed to be told somethin' by anybody, when you're doin' wrong."

"Take a learnin' from anybody. Somebody can always tell you something that fit you."

"I hope I don't talk too much. No, I don't know. I'm just tryin'. So, now that's a lotta' ground your covering, when you say you know better than me. I just know some of the things that are supposed to be done. When you say you know it, that covers the whole world."

"Some people don't want to tell you how it is, but I'll tell ya."

"If we were playin' in a key, tell me your tonic and I'll tell you what else you're supposed to do. All I want to know is your tonic. I'll build the rest of it. See, but you got to have your tonic. That's your startin' off. Without that tonic, when you get ready to stop, you stop somewhere else. Anytime you start on your tonic, when you end your song, you got to be right back on your tonic."

"I don't have no education, see. Now you can take my sense and put it in a paper bag and it'll rattle like two nickels. But you see, understandin', that's all I need. Common sense, that's all a man needs now, common

sense. Just get you some common sense and pass on by.”

“Some of the music is too loud today, because it knock the eardrums to your ear. Them high speakers, tall as that fence there, is blastin' your ear down, all the time. Boom Bam. Bing. You know what I mean?”

“That's uncalled for. You hear that? I played on a show one night, and I went home and cut myself all up and down the back, because I heard that thing in my sleep. It's too loud. I'm sorry. Ain't no need in me tellin' you no lie. It's too loud. That go for the white boy, and the Negro boy, and any old Mexican, anybody! When it's too loud, it's nothin' but 'knockness.’”

“Knockness, just some stuff comin' together, and you don't understand what it mean That's what you call real garbage. That's the worst garbage in town. That's right, but the peoples eats it up. Just like the rabbit eatin' the carrot. What's up Doc?”

“I don't dominize no musician. I hate to hear a man dominize a musician, but I will say: music is too loud. Whether you playin' good or whether you playin' bad, you know it's too loud.”

“Dominize, knockness. Some knockness. Something knockin' together. You know.”

Dec 17, 2020, 4:11 AM

FOLK REVIVAL TO ELECTRIC BLUES: A HISTORY

[I would like to take some time here on my Facebook blog to share some music history. I know, it may not be as exciting as some might like, but it is time I make sure some of you out there get to read this because, it is our history. And so, for the next few (or however many I need) blogs, I will share in quite some detail, information from my own experience about the transition from the folk revival of the 1950s to the emergence of city electric blues. My hope is that some few of you will appreciate hearing how this went down.]

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival

On a warm summer night in August of 1969 a music legacy was born. Several thousand blues lovers gathered in a small athletic field called Fuller Flats near the North Campus of the University of Michigan (a spot along the Huron River in Ann Arbor, Michigan) to witness the first “Ann Arbor Blues Festival.” By the time blues icon Sun House took the stage to close the show it was clear that something magical was happening in this southeast Michigan college town. Few present also knew that music history was being made, for the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival was the first electric blues festival of its kind in North America

When we look back at the roster of performers at those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, it is hard to imagine that all of this great talent managed to converge at one place and time, blues greats like Bobby ‘Blue’ Bland, Big Joe Turner, Buddy Guy, John Lee Hooker, B.B. King, Albert King, Freddy King, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Howlin’ Wolf, Magic Sam, Muddy Waters, Son House, T-Bone Walker, and Junior Wells, to name a few. And that is just the short list

How I Happened to Be There

Before I begin, let me tell you something about why I happen to be writing this and how I got involved with these landmark festivals in the first place. It is simple: those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals changed the course of my life forever

Sometimes I think of myself as similar to the lead character in the movie "Forest Gump," always on the edge of history, witnessing, but never quite front and center, never in exactly the right place at the right time. However, when it comes to those first two blues festivals in Ann Arbor, I was there AND then, one-hundred percent. Those festivals were life-altering events for me, a pivotal point in deciding who I was going to be and what I would do in my life. Let me give you a quick idea what I was about back then

In 1968, when that first blues festival was being organized, I was part of the only blues band in the area. The "Prime Movers Blues Band" first came together in the summer of 1965, the same summer that the Grateful Dead formed in San Francisco. This was a time of real cultural change across the country. I was studying and learning to play Chicago-style blues 24x7. It was my passion

We hooked up with the blues festival organizers pretty much by default: we were the only band in the area that knew anything about modern city blues. We had been to Chicago years before and seen all the blues greats live, not to mention: you couldn't keep us out of that festival for the world. This festival was like a dream come true for me, a chance to see my idols, these great blues players up close and right here in my own home town. Who could ask for more?

My brother Dan and I volunteered (we probably forced ourselves on the organizers) and ended up being put in charge of feeding all the performers and making sure they had drinks. Trust me, providing drinks proved to be 'key' in gaining access to these players. The opportunity to meet our heroes was way beyond anything we could have imagined on our own

And to put the icing on the cake, I ended up officially interviewing (on reel-to-reel tape) almost every blues artist and sideman at the festival - scores of them. Later in my life, the experience of putting all that interview information together led to my becoming something of an archivist of music data in general and I eventually founded and built the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com), which today is the largest database of music reviews, bios, tracks, and information on the planet. So, you can see what I mean when I say that these festivals were life-changing for me. They gave me direction. Now you know how I fit into all of this, so let's move on

In this writing, I have two stories to tell. One of course is the importance of those first two Ann Arbor blues festivals, how they came about, who was involved, and the artists that played there – the music itself. The second story I want to share with you has more to do with my experience of how white America first became aware of electric-city blues music and, as you will see, the two are to some degree interdependent

A Short History of Blues Festivals

To appreciate the uniqueness of those first Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, some historical context may be helpful. Blues as a genre did not always have festivals. Although some blues was included in many of the early folk festivals, it was almost exclusively of the acoustic 'folk-blues' variety, more of an add-on than a featured

style at folk festivals like those held in Newport Rhode Island. It was the 'folk' in folk-blues that was what most people came to hear, not the blues. The "blues" was just a feeling that the folk-blues held for many of us and was not recognized as the genre it is today, at least not by folkies like me. Until the late '60s, modern, electric, citified blues was almost exclusively the province of black Americans, made available on black record labels or served up in hundreds of small clubs and bars across the land. White Americans didn't go there. All that began to change with that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969, but let's back up just a bit

The Chitlin' Circuit

Chitterlings or 'Chitlins' as they are called are the large intestines of pigs that have been specially cleaned, stewed, and then fried. The Chitlin' Circuit as it was called consisted of hundreds of small venues (mostly in the South) where chitlins were served along with plenty of beer and music. These were the places where black musicians travelled to play the blues and where black audiences could congregate in a racially divided country and time. The chitlin' circuit also included (on the high-end) some major black theaters like the Apollo Theater in Harlem, the Howard Theater in D.C., the Cotton Club in NYC, the Royal Theater in Baltimore, the Fox Theater in Detroit, the Uptown Theater in Philadelphia, and so on

But for the most part, this kind of blues was played in the hundreds of small bars, clubs, and way-stops along the circuit. Many of the great blues musicians featured at those first Ann Arbor blues festivals knew the chitlin' circuit only too well. For years, these performers had traveled the circuit playing the blues - one-night stands at roadside bars and clubs. To white America, the

chitlin' circuit was practically invisible. City blues at that time was black music played in black venues - music for blacks

The Folk Festivals

By the 1950s, more and more young Americans became interested in their own indigenous music – American folk music. In the later '50s and early '60s, festivals and folklore societies became increasingly popular, in particular on college campuses and among more affluent white Americans. Along with the interest in folk music came the folklore societies. My first experience with these groups was the University of Michigan Folklore Society in Ann Arbor in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1957, freshman student Al Young (today a poet laureate of California) and Bill McAdoo founded the University of Michigan Folklore Society. Great players like Marc Silber, Perry Lederman, and others were part of that

And of course there were the folk festivals, of which the one in Newport, Rhode Island is perhaps the most famous, if not the first. The Newport Folk Festival was established in 1959 by George Wein, the same man who in 1954 established the Newport Jazz Festival. The first Newport Folk Festival was held on July 11-12, 1959 and featured, among other acts, the Kingston Trio, a group that had exploded to national prominence only the year before. Flanking the Kingston Trio were classic folk singers like Odetta, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and of course, the ubiquitous Pete Seeger. During a set by the singer/songwriter Bob Gibson at that first 1959 festival, a young Joan Baez made her national debut to a wildly enthusiastic audience of over 13,000 people. The Newport festival is still considered

to be the granddaddy of all folk festivals, even though it has been reduced in size in recent years

The folk scene in the early '60s was very active and organized enough to have a well-established set of venues (coffee houses, church sponsorships, etc.) and routes that stretched across the country and over which performing folk artists traveled, mostly by hitchhiking. By the early 1960s, folk enthusiasts everywhere were learning the rudiments of music research, at least to the point of tracing particular songs back through time to their roots or at least trying to. It was axiomatic at that time that the original version of a song was preferable to later versions, almost always enriching the listener's experience and enjoyment of the tune. "Sing Out! Magazine" was one of the main repositories of this research, our musical collective heritage

It should be remembered that the folk-music revival emerged toward the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, a time when more and more young people were rejecting the culture of the 1950s (the flattop haircuts and what they felt was a cookie-cutter mentality) and thirsting for something a little more authentic. It is a simple fact that most of us looked to the folk music tradition as a way of grounding ourselves, a way to somehow get underneath or break through the social veneer in which we were raised. Future events cast their shadows and the counterculture revolution that was to come later in the mid-1960s was already nascent and emerging

The Folk Scene

Unlike folk music, whose roots were often in England or Ireland, with blues, to the surprise of most white folk-blues lovers, a trip into the history book was often as easy as venturing into a different part of town, only we

didn't know it then. The folk music scene was flourishing on college campuses and what started at Newport in 1959 was echoed in the next few years by startup folk festivals all across America, including the Berkeley and Chicago Folk festivals, both of which debuted in 1961. And, although these folk festivals also featured some blues (country blues), the blues at those festivals was mostly treated as part of the folk genre, and as a sidelight at that

For example, one could hear Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller at Hertz Hall (Berkeley, CA) in 1959 and at Newport in 1960. In 1960 Robert Pete Williams performed at Newport. Other festivals in the early 1960s had Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, and Mississippi John Hurt, Rev. Gary Davis, Sleepy John Estes, Jesse Fuller, and occasionally John Lee Hooker. It is hard for me to imagine John Lee Hooker or Lightnin' Hopkins not getting mainstream attention wherever they played. In 1965, an electrified Bob Dylan, backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, shocked the Newport folk crowd and helped to bring awareness of modern city blues to a mostly white folk crowd. Dylan was booed

The Folk Revival – Looking for Roots

This folk music revival in the later 1950s and early 1960s was just that, a revival, an attempt to revive a music that most felt was already deeply embedded in the past. The revival started out looking back and, for the most part, stayed that way for many years. We sought to revive and find our future in past songs rather than writing our own songs for the future

Initially, younger folk artists were just too shy. Emerging players like Bob Dylan, Ramblin' Jack Elliot (and scores of now-unknown players schooled in traditional folk music) were (at first) not focused on writing songs

themselves. Their favorite contemporary songwriter was probably Woody Guthrie, but most of the songs they played came from even earlier times, sometimes all the way back to England and Europe. The great majority of folk artists did covers of earlier songs, Dylan included. The goal then was to do them well, to revive and make them live again

Pivotal artists of the time like Joan Baez and the New Lost City Ramblers were not writing their own songs, but instead re-enacting and re-presenting the finest in traditional folk music. Their technique was flawless, but it was not their own songwriting creativity that was being featured. Groups like the Kingston Trio and the Weavers are perfect examples. The folk music magazine "Sing Out!" is a written testimony to this approach. White America was exploring its roots, but we were looking backward to find what we felt was missing in the present – our living roots. Folk artists as a group had not yet empowered themselves to write for the present, much less for the future. They were too busy trying to make the past live again, reviving their heritage. That's why it is called a revival

I was fortunate enough to be part of the early folk scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There was a route we all traveled that went from Cambridge, Massachusetts to New York City, to Ann Arbor, to the University of Chicago, to Madison, Wisconsin, to Berkeley, California, and then round back again. For the most part we all hitchhiked or piled into cars that could barely run all the way across this wide country. If I remember right, I believe I hitchhiked the distance from Ann Arbor to New York City some ten times and hitchhiked to and lived in Venice Beach and North Beach, San Francisco as early as 1960. I even travelled with Bob Dylan for a while, hitchhiking together with my

friend Perry Lederman, who back then was a legendary guitar instrumentalist

The folk route also included side trips to places like Oberlin and Antioch colleges in Ohio, and so on, wherever colleges and universities were. In Ann Arbor, folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were frequent visitors, while groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were pretty much regulars and Ramblin' Jack Elliot spent a lot of time there. We met mostly in houses or apartments and it seems we spent an inordinate amount of time drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes in the cafeteria of the University of Michigan Student Union. I can recall sitting around the Union with a nervous Bob Dylan who was awaiting the Michigan Daily review of one of his earliest performances in Ann Arbor. He couldn't bear to leave town until the review came out. When he saw that the review was good, Dylan was on his way to the edge of Ann Arbor, hitchhiking out of town

Singers, Not Songwriters

For the most part, the folk movement at this time was oriented around covering traditional folk tunes. The folk artists originality was in how well they sang the song and not yet in the writing of contemporary songs. This is not to say that no songs were written; some were. My point is that back then it was all about the 'singer' in 'singer/songwriter' and not yet so much about the 'songwriter'. For most of us, that came a bit later

I can remember well traveling in 1961 with Bob Dylan and stopping at Gerde's Folk City on West 4th Street in New York City. Gerde's was 'the' happening place back then and the folk star of the moment in that club was a guitar virtuoso named Danny Kalb, who later became part of the group known as the "Blues Project." Dylan

was obviously aware of and perhaps a little jealous of the attention Kalb was getting (you could hear it in his voice), but it was not just petty jealousy. He honestly could not understand what Kalb had going for him that he didn't. It boggled his mind. I didn't know then that my traveling companion was "The" Bob Dylan, but I am certain he must have. After all, he had something to say

Remember, all of this was in the early 1960s, well before Haight Ashbury and the hippie scene. Most folkies (like myself) were wanna-be Beatniks, but that train had already left the station. We stood outside conventional society, but we were not so much politically alienated from that society as we were repulsed by it, and fascinated by the world of music, literature, art, and our own little social scene. Things were happening man! I was 19 years old

The Folk Blues

Real folk-blues artists like Elizabeth Cotton and Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller began to be featured at festivals like the Berkeley Folk Festivals in the late 1950s. Many of them came to Ann Arbor where I lived and we heard them live, songs like "Freight Train" (Cotton) and "San Francisco Bay Blues" (Fuller). To folk enthusiasts like myself, this was still just folk music, but you did get a different feeling when you heard the blues. To me at the time, this just sounded like really good folk music – 'really' good. Back then we didn't know much about the blues, but we sure could feel that music

While folk enthusiasts heard some blues early on (as mentioned), it was at first mostly only the folk blues, and folk blues were seen as just another form (albeit, with a lot of feeling) of folk music. Later, and only very gradually, more and more country blues began to appear, but usually only southern acoustic blues, not

music from the North and nothing at all from the inner cities. There was no awareness of inner-city blues or electrified blues and no interest either. At that time electric-folk music was an oxymoron

Being Part of the Scene

As a folkie myself, I can remember listening to acoustic folk-blues and really loving it, but I treated it the same way I treated traditional folk music, as something that also needed to be preserved and revived: learned, played, shared - kept alive. It was a natural assumption on our part that we were listening to the vestiges of what had once been a living tradition and we wanted to connect to that past, to revive and relive it. We had no idea that modern electric blues music was not only 'not-dead', but was playing 'live' most nights of the week probably only blocks away, separated from us by a racial curtain. We just had no idea. The folk music scene had few blacks in it (other than a handful of performers) and those that were present were usually the older folk-blues artists like Sonny Terry, Odetta, and so on. Their music was perceived by folkies as coming out of the past, not part of the present. Their singing was seen as some kind of recreation

Please don't get the idea that our exposure to folk music was only at concerts or folk societies. Like most musicians, we played or practiced music all the time, if only to learn the songs and how to play our instruments. We were also exposed to a lot of jazz. In Ann Arbor in the early 1960s, before bars could serve liquor by the glass, everyone met in apartments and houses around town to drink, smoke pot, and play music. This was primarily a jazz scene and young folkies (underage high-school kids like me) were tolerated as long as we

kept to the shadows and sat along the far edges of the rooms. We took this all in

And quite a scene it was. I remember one house on E. Williams Street in Ann Arbor. Protruding horizontally from its second story hung a huge flag with a picture of Thelonious Monk. At nights, especially on weekends, there was impromptu jazz in that house that went on most of the night, with players like Bob James, Bob Detwiler, Ron Brooks, and many others. It was music, music, music plus wine and pot. High school kids like me sat on the floor, squeezed in along the back wall. We didn't rate any pot, but we used to snort the ashes from joints that others had smoked. That should tell you how desperate we were to be part of the scene!

Searchin' for Roots

We experienced jazz along with our folk music, but still not much blues. And the jazz was anything but bluesy jazz; it was more frenetic, like bop. And if it wasn't jazz we heard, then it was classical music played in the background on the stereo. Again: not much blues. This is an important point, because when the mostly-white folk musicians like myself were suddenly exposed to modern (and virile) inner-city blues players like Junior Wells, Magic Sam, and Howlin' Wolf, we were astonished

As folkies made the gradual transition from studying and researching traditional folk music to also searching out historic country folk blues and then on to discovering modern city blues, all of a sudden things lit up. We got it. Blues was not simply R&B or pop music like you heard on the radio, but music by plain folks – folk music! We could see that blues was the same as folk music, only modern, fresh – alive and well, plus incredibly potent

What we had assumed must always be lost in the past, like folk music that depended on our efforts to restore and revive it was, when it came to blues, very much alive and in the present – staring us in the face and more-or-less happy to see us at that. This blues music we were hearing lived in the present and not just in the past. It did not need us to revive it. Our idea of folk music as something to restore and treasure suddenly moved from the past into the present in our minds. We made the connection. Blues didn't need restoration. It was still with us and it was powerful. It was like the movie Jurassic Park; we had found a living dinosaur, folk music that lived in the present! And this music revived us and not vice-versa!

The blues scene in the early 1960s as played out in the small clubs and bars of Chicago, Detroit, and other major industrial cities, while very much still alive, was by then itself on the wane, only we newcomers didn't know that yet. To us, it was way more alive than the standard folk music we knew. Intercity electric blues music was still authentic and strong, but (for the most part) the next generation of younger blacks was already not picking up on it; they were just not interested. Chicago-style city blues was, to younger blacks at that time, old-peoples music, something from the South, a past and history they wanted to get away from rather than embrace. Younger blacks had already skipped ahead to R&B, Motown, and funk. Forget about those old blues

My band played in a black bar for something like a year or a year and a half, a bar filled with mostly older black folks and a sprinkling of hippie whites who had come to see us. This was in 1967. Right next door was another black bar, where all the younger blacks hung out and where they played only the latest R&B hits. The younger blacks seldom came into our bar and, in

general, were embarrassed that their parents and elders were listening to blues played by a racially-mixed band – listening to white boys play the blues. How embarrassing! Interest in the classic Chicago blues was just not there for the younger generation of blacks. They felt that blues was music from an older generation, music for old people

While within the black community the door was slowly closing on the Chicago blues artists (even the artists knew this), another and much wider door for this music was opening onto white America, an open door that would extend the careers for many of these artists and secure their music well into the future

B.B. King said in Time Magazine in 1971:

“The blacks are more interested in the ‘jumpy’ stuff. The whites want to hear me for what I am.”

1965: A Sea Change

As pointed out, in the early 1960s the folk music revival was one of the main things happening on all the major campuses across America: Cambridge, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Madison, Berkeley, etc. What happened to it?

For one, in the mid-1960s, pop music groups like the Rolling Stones were busy recording covers of blues classics and pointing out the source – the artists who originally wrote and recorded them. White players like me, eager for guidance, hunted down the original blues 45s, which were a revelation to us. I can remember rummaging through bins of old 45s in downtown Chicago and finding just incredible music

That first “Rolling Stones” album, of the same name, was released in April of 1964. It contained tunes like

Jimmy Reed's "Honest I Do," "Willie Dixon's "I Just Want to Make Love to You," "I'm a King Bee," plus songs by Chuck Berry and Rufus Thomas

The Stones second album, also released in 1964, veered away from the blues and contained tunes recorded by Chuck Berry, Wilson Pickett, Dale Hawkins, songs like "Under the Boardwalk." It also included the blues-R&B tune made famous by Irma Thomas, "Time Is on My Side." In 1965, the album "Rolling stones, Now!" had the Dixon-Wolf classic "Little Red Rooster."

From that point onward, the blues content of Rolling Stones albums decreased. In 1965, the album "Out of Our Heads" had no real blues tunes, and neither did their other 1965 album, "December's Children." It was those first two albums in 1964, and in particular the first album, that pointed the blues out to many in the white audience. The U.K. was all about authentic blues well before white America ever heard of them

In the wake of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, late summer and early fall of 1965 saw the emerging dancehall scene in San Francisco and the arrival of bands like the Grateful Dead. This was the beginning of the hippie era, and it's when my own band, the Prime Movers, formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We knew nothing of the Grateful Dead, yet we too arose at the same time and represented a new era in music and lifestyle

In fact, the summer of 1965 was the trigger point for so very much. It marked a change in the folk scene with the advent of groups like the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. If there was a single band that opened up blues to white players, it was the Butterfield Band. That first Butterfield album appeared late in 1965, and it totally

kicked ass. The Butterfield band in person was way more powerful than anything they managed to record

This racially mixed band playing authentic Chicago blues sent a lightning bolt-like signal to all of us who were just waking up to the blues anyway. Their message was that white players could overcome their fear to play black music, including the blues. The Paul Butterfield Blues Band set the standard and set white musicians on notice that anybody was free to try to play the blues. We were emboldened to try

Unlike many areas of folk music, modern city blues at that time was anything but a dead art. While the lineage of most folk music required revival, like trying to trace out the history and line of the music, this was not true of blues. The blues lineage was not only unbroken, but indeed very much alive, both on black record labels and in thousands of bars and clubs across the nation. Perhaps some forms of country blues were endangered, but inner-city blues (at least for the older generation of Blacks) was in full swing. White Americans just knew little or nothing about it. During the later 1960s, all that changed. And last, but not least, many of the modern city blues players were still reasonably young and more than willing to be discovered. They needed the money and appreciated the recognition

Historians would agree that from the middle to the late '60s, music in general was, to a real extent, fusing. The whole psychedelic era blurred the boundaries of different music genres and emboldened white players to play music of all kinds – black, Indian, Asian, etc. The first extended psychedelic-like guitar solo/jam was Michael Bloomfield and the tune “East-West ” on the Butterfield album of the same name in 1966. It was over

13 minutes in length and inspired legions of heavy metal players that followed. My brother Dan and I recorded an early version of “East-West” sitting behind a curtain in a Chicago bar with a reel-to-reel” tape recorder. Our recording was release some years ago

The American Folk Blues Festival in Europe

The first large-scale blues festivals, “The American Folk Blues Festivals” were not really festivals and were never held in America. Established in 1962 and lasting through 1972, these so-called festivals were in fact tours of Europe by groups of black blues artists thankful to get the work. This is what informed the British blues-oriented groups like the Rolling Stones in the first place. Starting in 1962, at a tour run of three weeks, the American Folk Blues Festival excursions eventually would run up to six weeks. Individual concerts often lasted three to four hours. The tours started up again in 1980 and lasted until 1985

Europe has always been in love with American black music, especially blues and jazz. Whereas in this country players like Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf found it hard to get a job outside of their home-town bars and the Chitlin’ Circuit, in Europe these players were treated like VIPs and played to rapt audiences. Race was never a real issue on the continent. This is why so many black blues and jazz artists have relocated to Europe. They found jobs that paid well and they were not considered second-class citizens

Thanks to these touring festivals, Europe heard such blues greats as T-Bone Walker, Memphis Slim, Willie Dixon, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and John Lee Hooker. In 1963, the list was joined by Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Victoria Spivey, Big Joe Williams, Lonnie Johnson, and Sonny Boy (II) Williamson. 1964 brought

Hubert Sumlin, Lightnin' Hopkins, Sunnyland Slim, sleepy John Estes, and Howlin' Wolf. And in 1965, there was Mississippi Fred McDowell, J.B. Lenoir, Big Walter Horton, Roosevelt Sykes, Buddy Guy, Big Mama Thornton, Doctor Ross, and others

In a very real sense, Europe was privileged to hear the more modern, electric, city blues well before the general (white) public in America knew anything about it. White America for the most part did not even know this music existed until the later Sixties

Memphis Country Blues Festival 1967

Perhaps the earliest festival in this country dedicated exclusively to blues, albeit the more acoustic folk or country blues, was the "Memphis Country Blues Festival." Although it was organized in 1966 with the help of the great blues journalist Robert Palmer, the first festival was actually held in 1967. For example, the 1968 festival featured artists like Bukka White, Nathan Beauregard, Joe Callicott, Furry Lewis, and Rev. Robert Wilkins. Again, as the festival title suggests, this was country blues and acoustic artists, not the inner-city electric blues that had not yet been celebrated. That was to happen in Ann Arbor, Michigan

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival: The First of Its Kind

There is no doubt that the first North American all-out blues festival for modern, electric city blues (in fact all types of blues) was the Ann Arbor Blues Festival held in the fall of 1969. It featured artists like Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, B.B. King, Otis Rush, J.B. Hutto and the Hawks, Howlin' Wolf, T-Bone Walker, Magic Sam, Freddy King, and dozens of modern-electric blues players as well as traditional blues artists like Son

House, Lightnin' Hopkins, and those in between like Clifton Chenier, Roosevelt Sykes, and many others

In the Ann Arbor festivals, the accent was off the folk and country blues and right on modern, big-city, electric blues artists. After all, Ann Arbor is only about a three-hour drive from Chicago. While the Newport Folk Festival sometimes featured more than folk music, and to a small degree helped blues to segue from folk and country blues to a more modern blues, this was not something they actively featured. For many years, electric anything was frowned upon at the Newport festival. It was in Ann Arbor that we find the first all-out presentation of modern electric city blues

It has been said that those first Ann Arbor blues festivals mark the end of the city-blues era and the beginning of its exploitation. Of course, there is some truth to that if we mean that by reaching a wider audience, the music will be more easily embraced and imitated. But in fact, the electric city blues by that time was already dying out of its own accord. The younger blacks had turned away. Reaching the larger White audience actually prolonged the music's decline and extended its life. Today (2020), with most of the original blues giants gone, we may be facing what amounts to reenactment and revival once again – blues as folklore

There is no record of a blues festival of any similar scope and extent that predates that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival, which was organized in 1968 and held in 1969, much less one that endures to the present day. Actually, the popular Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival, which saw its roots in those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, was suspended in 2007 due to lack of funds. The last festival was in 2006

Dec 16, 2020, 5:25 PM

BLAST FROM THE PAST: PRIME MOVERS BLUES BAND

[Here is definitely an all-you-can-eat smorgasbord of material on both Robert Sheff and the rest of us in the Prime Movers Blues Band. Enjoy or ignore at your own risk.]

With the passing of my friend and bandmate Robert Sheff (aka “Blue” Gene Tyranny), I have gotten various requests to hear some of Robert Sheff’s music, both how he sounded in our band and also what his film scores and other pieces were like. While, I am at it, I might as well offer you a variety of music, photos, and history and let you choose what you have time to view or listen. Take your pick from the following

For example, here is a short piece Robert Sheff recorded for a film score called “Crack of Dawn” that I particularly love. Robert gave me permission to use this years ago and it was the intro for a great number of my various 200 or so videos on YouTube. To me it is wonderful

Robert Sheff (aka “Blue” Gene Tyranny)

https://traffic.libsyn.com/secure/spiritgrooves/Sheff_Instr.mp3

Now, as for how Robert sounded in our band, the Prime Movers Blues Band, here is a sample solo by Robert from a longer piece, too long for here. Robert is on keyboards and I’m in the background on harmonica weaving in out a bit

https://traffic.libsyn.com/secure/spiritgrooves/Yonders_Wall_Robert.mp3

As for how the Prime Movers Blues Band sounded? As it turns out, there are only a two extant recordings of our band and they surfaced out of my brother Stephen Erlewine's basement some years ago. So, instead of dozens of recordings, all we have is really one and a little bit from another one. Nevertheless, here are some samples. They make me wince a little bit, especially as for my own playing, but here you are

MICHAEL, DANIEL, AND ROBERT SOLOS

As for what my brother Dan and I sounded, here is a longish one, with three soloists. It's called "Endless Blues," something we often did to while away the time while playing for long hours in a bar. Here you have with a solo (and intro) by me, followed by lead guitar by my brother Dan Erlewine, then a solo on keyboards with Robert Sheff

https://traffic.libsyn.com/secure/spiritgrooves/CD_Track_1_Endless_Blues.mp3

As for me and what I sounded like, here is my singing and playing amplified harmonica on an old Eddie Burn's song called "Orange Driver," the name referring to a vodka "Screwdriver."

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And finally, here I am with an intro, harmonica and vocals starting off a long tune, a version of Elmore Jame's "Look Over Yonder's Wall," a version of that by Junior Well's, and our version of Well's tune

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And now, if there is anyone left standing here, a little history of the Prime Movers Blues Band. And that's about it

PRIME MOVERS BLUE BAND

A Brief History

It's hard to say exactly where the idea for the Prime Movers Blues Band came from. I was into the folk-music scene of the later 1950s and early 1960s, almost always as a sidekick, a kind of a Forest Gump sort of bystander. I played a little

I travelled with a young Bob Dylan; we hitchhiked together in the spring of 1961 and I helped to put on a concert in Ann Arbor for Dylan around that time and so on. I can remember sitting around the cafe at the Michigan Union with Dylan, waiting for the review of the concert he did the night before. We were smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. Around 10:30 AM, the review of the concert in the Michigan Daily newspaper came out. The reviews was good, Dylan was happy; he grabbed his guitar and backpack and was soon hitchhiking out of town heading somewhere, perhaps Chicago

Everyone hitchhiked back then. If I remember right, I probably hitchhiked from Ann Arbor to NYC something like ten times, not to mention all the way to the west coast and back as well. We were all part of what back then was called the folk-circuit, a route from Cambridge to NYC to Ann Arbor to Chicago to Madison to Berkeley and back around. We either hitchhiked it or got an old jalopy and drove. This was all part of what was called the folk-revival of that time. So, there was all that

However, probably what influenced me most was the year I spent in Berkeley, California in 1964; it really imprinted me and left its mark. There was so much going on there, not to mention that it was in Berkeley that I dropped acid for the first time and that altered my

mind forever, not in the way we all feared (like it could wreck our brain), but LSD altered how I saw the world and that was a realization

We can't walk a realization back any more than we can put the toothpaste tooth paste back in the tube. I came back from that year in Berkeley changed forever as to how I saw life. The effects of LSD were happening all over the country

It was in the late summer of 1965 that my brother Daniel and I formed the Prime Movers band, a name I came up with. Little did we know that same year (and summer) out in San Francisco the Grateful Dead were forming. It seems to me that change was in the air everywhere in the country. In my own heart of hearts, I credit the generation change called "The Sixties" to LSD and how it changed how young folks my age saw things. And beyond that, I credit that the largest peak of intense solar influx in all of the known history of the world came in the late 1950s. That huge solar influx (IMO) is so important that it makes LSD a symptom and not the main cause

At first, the band was just an idea my brother Dan and I had. Daniel was a guitar player, who later became a guitar maker and today is probably the best-known guitar repairman on the planet. He also made guitars for players like Jerry Garcia and bluesman Albert King

And then there was my good friend Robert Sheff, who was an accomplished musician on keyboards. He joined us too and Robert could read an orchestral score on sight with something like 15 or more staves to it. Robert was latter to be known (as he is today) as an avant-garde classical musician: "Blue" Gene Tyranny. He has a box set of his works coming out soon and a

feature-length documentary on his importance as an avant-garde musician out now

As for a rhythm section (bass and drums), in the beginning we had a friend of my brother Dan's, "Michael Wynn," on drums (known to us as "Spider") and our cousin Robert Vinopal (R.T.) on bass

Looking back, over the years I believe we had something like 37 major players pass through the band, not to mention a bunch of short timers. And so, it was not long before the band shuffled off Spider and R.T., replacing them with Jack Dawson (a music-school student at the University of Michigan) on bass (later Jack played bass for the Siegle-Schwall Blues Band) and a young James Osterberg (today known as Iggy Pop) on drums

Now, there have been various stories about where the name "Iggy" came from, so let's get that straight. And the truth is very simple. James Osterberg came to the Prime Movers Blues Band from a local frat-band around town called "The Iguanas." We had no interest (and perhaps not enough respect) for frat bands, so when Jim Osterberg joined the Prime Movers, we wanted to remind him where he came from, so we called him "Iguana" for a while, until (to our satisfaction) he had paid his dues. That was soon shortened to "Iggy" and it just stuck. Jim obviously liked the name too

I know that Iggy Pop is famous today and he deserves all the credit he gets and especially because he walked a fine line between stardom and being a regular guy. I admire Iggy for doing just that, not selling out, but working his music out as he has done. Now, another question I get about Iggy is could he play drums?

The short answer is “Yes.” Iggy worked real hard to learn blues drumming. Early on, we heard the first drummer for the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Sam Lay, do something called the “double shuffle.” It was some really down drumming and very hard to do. Not every drummer could. Well, Iggy worked day and night for weeks to master the double-shuffle and he did. So, Iggy became a very good blues drummer, IMO

One last question I get about Iggy a lot is how was he with the ladies. All I can say, with his long eyelashes and muscular build, they loved him. Iggy never had to lift a finger. He was not macho or alpha; he was just Iggy and women followed him everywhere

Early on, as we made the Ann Arbor music scene, we got connected with a local promoter and band manager name Hugh “Jeep” Holland. Jeep handled a number bands, one of which was “The Rationals,” a great local band and good friends with our band. Holland was a great music collector (mostly albums and old 45s), but he was not much fun to hang out with, and none of our band liked him a lot

One reason is that Jeep Holland wanted to make a rock n’ roll band out of us and put us on the teen circuit. We tried that and did our best to fit in. We never did care for that scene and, as we came to like Jeep less, we fit in less. We had no interest in wearing any kind of matching outfits or doing anything other than playing the kind of music we liked to play. We did get regular men’s suits and even wore ties for a while, but that too got old fast. So, our time with Jeep Holland was more brief than anything else and we were soon just out on our own. This was fine with us

We did have one near-fame experience with a subsidiary of Motown records who heard us play and

liked it. Before we knew it, they came up from Detroit and drove us around in their big limousines, talking us up and doing nice things for us. An example of a nice thing, was arranging for my brother Dan and I to have lunch with the Everly Brothers. There we were having lunch with Don and Phil Everly. WOW! Who does not like the Everly Brothers!

However, beyond the talk and the hype of the Motown folks was something a little more sinister. When it came down to where the rubber meets the road, it turned out that they wanted a White band to play Black music. Fine by us, because all we did play was black music, mostly the blues. Yet, like so many things in life, there was a caveat or “twist” to their offer. They wanted us to play black music that they would feed to us. We would have nothing to say about what we played. All we could say to that was: “What?”

Well, that was just a no-go for us, at least for me. I did not want to be told what to play and we refused and that was the end of the limousines. That was probably our one chance at fame, but I’ve never regretted it. We liked to play what we liked to play and that’s all there was too it. We had no interest in being their shill for music we could care less about. And I should make something clear

Personally, I never wanted to be famous and on tour. What I wanted most was to play blues and study black music. We were always in homage to the great blues players. That’s where I was the happiest. What wonderful musicians (and people) the great blues players were back then

And so, we played around Ann Arbor, Michigan and the surrounding Midwest area, with occasional trips to Chicago and elsewhere. We played bars, frats, and any

kind of gig we could get. We even were hired (someone's mistake) one time to play at a polka place and were paid to leave. LOL

We did end up with a fairly regular gig at a black bar called "Clint's Club" down on Ann Arbor's one-block of black businesses. We typically played at Clint's Club from Thursday through Sunday each week. I think we made \$35 a night for the entire band. LOL. We were doing Chicago-style electric blues for the older blacks, while right next door was another bar for younger blacks. They were all into soul music (rhythm & blues) and were embarrassed that a mostly white band was playing for their moms and pops just right next door. It was like that

Sometimes, we would play at Clint's Club from 9:30 PM until 2:00 AM and then break down the equipment and go across town to a teen nightclub called the Fifth Dimension and set up and play there until dawn. Acts like Jimi Hendrix and The Who played there. By dawn, all we could do was go out to a restaurant and pig out. We were beat

Or, another story: we got a week-long gig in Grand Rapids, Michigan at a place that I think was called the "Blue Note" or something like that. We were to stay (for free) in a bare-bones upstairs apartment over the club. However, when we pulled into the parking lot, there was a huge banner hanging above that place that said "The Prime Movers: The Junior Walker Music." This was a shock because of course we knew of Junior Walker and the All-Stars, but had never played any of their tunes. LOL

We had to run out, buy an album and learn some tunes before that night. Luckily, we had two horns in the band at that point and by show-time we were playing tunes

like “Shotgun,” “Road Runner, and “Shake and Fingerpop.” That’s the kind of crazy stuff that happened back then

Mostly we studied and played the blues, a least I did. Ann Arbor is only about four hours from Chicago, the city with the most electric blues, so various band members (sometimes the whole band) would go to Chicago to hang out and look through the local record bins for old blues 45s. Our main contact there was Bob Koester, who owned the Jazz Records Mart and founded Delmark Records, where he produced some of the greatest blues recordings ever, albums like Junior well’s “Hoodoo Man Blues” and Magic Sam’s “West Side Soul.”

Koester not only put us up, but took us down to the south and west side of Chicago where we saw the great blues artists play live in the clubs, players like Little Walter, Junior Wells, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Magic Sam, and many others. For us, this was like going to heaven

Our familiarity with the Chicago blues and its artists served us well a few years later when the first Ann Arbor Blues Festival was announced for August of 1969. We didn’t help form the festival but we couldn’t help but be involved. After all, we were the local blues band and we ended up providing food and liquor to all the performers, and there were scores of them between the headliners and their bands

We served all our blues heroes food and especially drinks, which made us very popular. We set up a bar, working out of my dad’s station wagon. We were blown away to be talking with and serving all these blues heroes – scores of them. And it was more than that

The performers for that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival starting pouring into town as soon as a week early. I have no idea why, perhaps they had no other place to go. The University put them up in various dorms and at the Michigan League. Here were these incredible beings like Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup, Big Mama Thornton, and many others staying in these little rooms with nothing else to do

We could go and just hang out with them, in these tiny dorm rooms, sitting at the foot of their beds. I remember my brother Dan and I going up to Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup’s room with a bottle of Jack Daniels one night. Crudup came to the door, a giant of a man. Dan just opened his coat to reveal the bottle of Jack Daniels and Crudup just said “Come on in boys!” We stayed up late drinking. Crudup wrote Elvis Presley’s first song “That’s All Right, Mama.” And we did this another night with Big Mama Thornton (where Presley got “Hound Dog” from) and others. Now, that was a time. I ended up interviewing scores of the great blues players, first with audio tape and in later years with video. This helped me into my career of documenting all music, the All-Music Guide (AllMusic.com.)

As for drugs and stuff, we never got lost in the hard drugs. Mostly it was alcohol and pot. I remember that we had a pound of lousy marijuana under the floorboards in our attic, a big house where most of the band lived. It was known as the Prime Mover house. We smoked every last fiber of that pot

I can remember one night when we had some good pot. We were playing on the teen circuit north of Ann Arbor, up on a stage and we were high. I looked across at my brother Dan who was just as high. Our eyes met in the middle of the tune and I swear that neither of us had the

slightest idea as to what the next chord we were supposed to play was. Not a clue. But, sure enough, in the slowness of that expanded time, we always managed to find it. LOL

And so it went. In the summer of 1967, the “Summer of Love,” our five piece band (and a friend) jumped into our van and drove all the way to San Francisco. I can remember waking up as we crossed the Continental Divide and found that we were surrounded by a flock of sheep

In San Francisco, we knew practically no one and had no place to stay. Our friend Michael Bloomfield, lead guitar for the Butterfield Blues band, took care of us. He found us a place to practice and sleep in the Sausalito heliport. To eat, we played for meals at a little Black rib-joint in Sausalito

And we played or auditioned at many of the San Francisco clubs, the Avalon Ballroom, The Matrix, The Straight Theater, The Height A, as well as across the bay in Berkley. As it turned out, Michael Bloomfield asked us to fill in at the Fillmore Auditorium for their band “The Electric Flag,” which we did. We opening for “Cream” (Eric Clapton, Ginger Baker, and Jack Bruce) at one of the first times they played the Fillmore. We watched them shoot up speed in the green room. I had a shouting match with Bill Graham as to how our amps were to be set up. Now, that too was a time

We also sat in and jammed with Jerry Garcia and opened for groups like The Contours, the Shangri-Las, and others. I remember one night sitting around, just Janis Joplin and myself, drinking whiskey at the Grande Ballroom in Detroit. She drank most of the whiskey

By the early 1970s, our band had shrunk down to just odd gigs with my brother Dan and myself, billed as “The Erlewine Brothers.” And finally, it was just me playing my little Wurlitzer piano and singing in bars. About that time, I got married to Margaret. I used to wear a big pin on my shirt saying “Beautiful Margaret,” and she was. Still is. We have been married 50 years this coming summers. I’ve got four kids and eight grandkids. A number of my kids are musicians

And that’s a brief history. My brother Dan, as mentioned earlier, who made guitars for folks like Jerry Garcia and Albert King, became the best known guitar repairman out there, Robert Sheff, now known as “Blue Gene Tyranny is a famous avant-garde classical composer, Jack Dawson is playing music somewhere on the west coast, and Jim Osterberg, as you all know, became Iggy Pop and is alive and well today

And Iggy was not our only drummer. When Iggy became Iggy Pop, we hooked up with J.C. Crawford, “Jessie” to us, and he was a fine drummer. Later J.C. became the M.C. for the MC-5 and it was J.C. who made the “Kick out the jams, motherfuckers” famous. In later years, our bass player became Ilene Silverman, a lady who could really play the blues

As for me, I founded and created the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com), the largest collection of albums, sidemen, discographies, biographies and other data on the planet. I also did the same with movies, documenting all movies from the beginning up to now (All-Movie Guide)

For those who would like to read more about the Prime Movers Blues Band (and see lots of photos), please see the excellent web site by Bruno Ceriotti, who is the official historian of the group at this link:

<http://brunoceriotti.weebly.com/the-prime-movers.html>

Dec 16, 2020, 3:56 AMPOLITICS:

BEING ALONE TOGETHER

This idea of being “alone together” is a fact, the aloneness. No one can enlighten us but ourselves. It is the “togetherness” that that I want to focus on here. I could use more togetherness since the aloneness either goes without saying OR we can say it again. I am more in the latter group; I’m looking for more togetherness in our aloneness. I too am OK with things as they are (because they ARE), but, nevertheless, I complain about it. I would expect advanced practitioners like lamas to be friendlier. My Rinpoche certainly was

I’m sure that I probably drank the Cool-Aid of believing that dharma practitioners, especially advanced practitioners, would naturally be kinder, gentler, and more interested in others than themselves, and so on. This is what the teaching day will happen

That last phrase, “... more interested in others than themselves” deserves some explanation and perhaps even some discussion. There comes a time when we have worked through and thinned down our “Me, Myself, and I” quotient until it is pretty transparent; we can see through ourselves enough to notice others who are more needy than we are

In fact, my understanding is that this is pretty much the natural order of dharma realization, to exhaust our fascination with ourselves and discover beyond that an inexhaustible thirst on our part to share our realization of the value of dharma with others

In my understanding, this is called “Bodhicitta,” and when it comes via the Insight Meditation that is integral with Recognition as to the true nature of the mind, it is called “Absolute Bodhicitta.” There is a difference

And by “absolute,” it is meant that absolutely one is unable NOT to want to share dharma with others because of the compassion that comes with Recognition, which means having been introduced to the nature of one’s mind by an authentic guru. For goodness sake, it’s in all the pith teachings

So, when we are casting about to find someone who has taken the dharma to heart, it’s not rocket science to look for someone who is looking for you or open to you. And they exist. If you reach out and ask a possible dharma teacher if they could work with you, and there is nothing coming back, no interest or they don’t have time, then that is not a dharma teacher, at least not for you

That person may just not be yet ripe, although they may have what is called “fabricated” Bodhicitta (we all have that), meaning they are practicing it, but have not yet recognized the mind’s nature and have not achieved Absolute Bodhicitta, and because of that they are best left on the vine, so to speak, to further ripen

I know, criticism is seldom welcomed, but I am a critic by nature, and was a music critic by profession, so criticism is in my blood. When I look out at the sea of possible dharma teachers, I am looking for someone who can see me enough to welcome me and answer (if they can) whatever questions are worrying me about dharma practice. And I always have some

If they are too busy for that, then understand that they cannot yet afford to benefit others, at least you. And as

to their ignorance of you and your needs, it's probably the best that you look elsewhere because they cannot yet see beyond themselves (and their own obscurations), thereby they are unable to benefit others. They lack what I mentioned earlier, Absolute Bodhicitta. So, that's something about what THEY lack. Let's talk about what we may lack

If we want answers and attention to our own problems with the dharma, we have to ask. Yes, we have to actually reach out and present our questions as sincerely as we can. That is our responsibility, not the teachers. We might think that these possible teachers would just naturally see our predicament, take compassion on us, and offer to help, without our having to ask, but I don't find this (very often) to be true. It does happen!

It has taken me years to accept that monks, lamas, and supposedly advanced practitioners may not have enough realization themselves to naturally be other-oriented and are enough finished with their won obscurations to be open to others. I always assume everyone else knows and that I am just bringing up the rear with my questions, but that does not seem to automatically be true

Knock on every door, is my motto. Ask and you shall receive or at least know not to knock on that door again. I found that it is a mistake to assume, just because we are talking "dharma" here, that dharma people will be any different than any other people. Sure, fellow dharma practitioners can be a bit like a club and that's comforting for a while. Yet, I find that after that, when we get down to the real nitty-gritty, where the rubber meets the road, so to speak, dharma people are still just people

We are each on our own, which brings me full circle here. What I have learned (or am still learning) is not to be disappointed that dharma people are human, but instead to keep looking and keep asking your questions of those who appear to us that they might know. If I keep in my mind Rinpoche, my dharma teacher, he always took time to be interested in whatever questions or dharma problems I had. That the sign of someone who is realized to some degree (in his case, totally) more than we are

And so, it is quite simple. The ones you are looking for are also looking for you, yet I find that I have to ask, and I do ask. I always think of the Shakespeare quote: "Ripeness is all." The dharma is still new to this country. In order for someone to make room for us, they first have to have room themselves and thinned out their own obscurations

[Sketch from a photo of me "the photographer," out walking in the snow with tripod and camera.]

Dec 14, 2020, 8:38 PM

"OH LORD, STUCK IN LODI AGAIN"

[The Creedence Clearwater song reminds me of where I am and what I am going through just now.]

Along with the death of my friend, I find what often happens when such untoward events occur, that I am kind of thrown outside my normal self-preoccupation into something like the old Chuck Berry song, "No Particular Place to Go" and no particular anything I want to do. I am there once again now, and in my own way, feeling a bit like a sore thumb sticking out

There is nothing like a little impermanence to wake us up. What I always joke is that a whiff of impermanence is the smelling salts of the dharma. And here it is again, trivializing everything I am otherwise doing and placing me smack dab in the center of my own emptiness. LOL

These kind of events used to terrorize me, to suddenly find myself high and dry, somehow exposed to the brilliant emptiness all around me, but over time I have learned to accept these respites as a welcome relief from my more linear self and where it thinks it is going, like nowhere important

In these comments, I don't want to dive full tilt into my rap on the emptiness of Samsara, so here I will just skirt the edges and remind myself that this exists. It is amazing to me that the Self can deconstruct almost instantaneously, leaving me standing here naked and vulnerable, so to speak, in the middle of nowhere and with nothing on my mind

I know that this perceived gap or "vacating" will not be long in finding closure and things will rumble on again in some linear-like direction, so I should appreciate and learn from my vacation while I can before the tunnel vision closes in around me and I am once again hurtling down the luge run of my life

Such an event as my friend's passing is enough to kind of wipe the slate clean of any agenda I had going for these days before this event, leaving me stranded in some kind of empty Limbo until my Self has time to collect and reanimate

In other words, I should enjoy this while I can, but it makes me nervous to have lost the protection of losing myself and hiding in the business that I normally enjoy,

like one of those hermit crabs that is looking around for the seashell that it lost to hide in

Time suddenly slows or extends out, seeming taking longer toward forever. Another way to say this is that nothing seems attractive right now and the specter of boredom rears its head, of there being nothing I feel like doing except nothing. And yet, I am not entirely comfortable with that either. Any realization that I have is not that great

Time will heal and close this gap and I will soon forget myself in the throes of busyness once again and be lost to this sense of emptiness I am describing

Dec 14, 2020, 4:54 AM

A BEAUTIFUL MESS

With the passing of my friend Robert Sheff (aka “Blue” Gene Tyranny) of 58 years friendship, I had difficulty sleeping last night as I kept tripping over the fact that I could not pick up the phone and just call him, not that I did all that often, but he was always there. Now he’s gone

I posted a blog yesterday of some of the things Robert and I shared in all these years, and I wanted to write more personally, but could not find the words. I am still trying to find those

But a song my daughter May Erlewine (a wonderful songwriter, and Robert taught her some piano) kept coming to mind, so I thought to post that instead of words. Don’t be put off by the title. It does not relate to

Robert, but is descriptive of the kind of world we live it. The feeling does express how complicated any relationship is. I hope that some of you can enjoy it

“A Beautiful Mess” by May Erlewine

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAq_6ehZp2o

Dec 13, 2020, 11:23 AM

MY LONGTIME FRIEND ROBERT SHEFF (AKA “BLUE” GENE TYRANNY) PASSED

Sad news. My longtime friend, bandmate, and one-time house companion Robert Sheff (aka “Blue” Gene Tyranny) has passed on. I want to tell my friends something about him

For one, we shared the same house for some seven years in the early 1960s and beyond, his room door was directly across the hall from my own. We were friends, shared similar philosophical interests, and played together in the same band, “The Prime Movers Blues Band” for years. Iggy Pop was our drummer, etc

And Robert and I have stayed in touch over the years. As founder of the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com). I once invited him to our center for quite a length of time some years ago now, where he recorded the theme-lines from thousands of classical compositions. He could just sightread and knew all of the music

Robert stayed with us and would, sometimes after dinner, play for us on the piano the most lovely music. As mentioned, I also knew Robert up to the present time and his impending blindness. We would talk on the phone from time to time. I am sure I knew him in many ways that others have not, as we lived together in Ann

Arbor during a very special time in history, the Once Festival years, etc., which I will get to in a moment

I can't remember where and exactly when I met Robert Sheff. It must have been in the early 1960s, perhaps somewhere in 1962. It was later (1965) that we started a band together, so what first drew us together I am not sure, probably just similar philosophical interests. Ann Arbor, Michigan was a hotbed of activity in those years, although we all thought of Ann Arbor as a bit backward, a weak sister to college communities like Cambridge and Berkeley. In fact, it was just a very spiritual town that took its time to grow up. It's grown up now!

It may be that Robert invited me to live at 114 North Division, a large house near the corner of Huron and Division streets. However, live there I did and for many years. As mentioned, Robert and my rooms were right across the hall from one another. And we all shared a common kitchen and bathroom

There were four bedrooms on the second floor, and a third floor that was not really rented to people but used for various projects. This included a huge vaulted and unfinished room that I once painted a magic circle on the floor and we kept 1 lb. of bad pot under the floorboards, until we had smoked every last fiber of it. There was also a room that I turned into a silkscreen shop, where I cut the Rubylith film, built the screens, and printed all of our band's posters, but that was not until later in 1965. And last, there was a fairly large room that the band practiced in

Over the years many of our band's members lived in this house, but first of all it was just Robert and me. This became known as the "Prime Mover House" and our 1966 Dodge Van was always parked right around back. People thought we were a moving company at times

Robert was a phenomenal musician. He could sight-read an entire orchestra score. He was the music teacher of the band. And in tight places, like when we opened for famous groups like the “Shangri-Las” or “The Contours,” Robert would carry the load while some of us, like me, did the best we could. Robert could play the whole thing right off and did

Robert played in a number of bands around Ann Arbor after our band broke up and travelled on the road with jazz musician Carla Bley. For the last decades Robert Sheff has played all kinds of gigs in the New York area and released many avant-garde albums

Aside from being part of our band, Robert was totally interested in what we could call Avant-Garde music; that was his love. He was all about what is called Once Music and the famous musicians of this modern music that made up the Once Group. Robert would get me to come and hear the Once music happenings, something I had never heard before. I also went with Robert to many of these Once-musicians studios and just hung out

He introduced me to all those musicians and their music, folks like George Cacioppo, Robert Ashley, Gordon Mumma, Philip Krum, and Donald Scavarda. Later, when Robert moved to New York City, he became known as “Blue” Gene Tyranny. A new full-length documentary has just been released on him and his influence on modern music. It is very well done. It is called “Just for the Record: Conversations with and about “Blue Gene Tyranny.” I just watched it. Here is the link

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/bgt>

Ann Arbor has been the birthplace for more than one new type of music and here I am talking about the now legendary Once Festivals. Originally held on February 24-25 and March 3-4, 1961 in the old Unitarian Church at 1917 Washtenaw Avenue and then continued annually until 1966, the Once Festivals changed the face of modern classical or avant-garde music forever. I can remember walking way out Washtenaw Ave. to those concerts

It turns out that I met and probably partied with most of these now famous avant-garde composers, but I am sorry to say I was a Luddite at the time as relates to this kind of music

Since Robert and I lived in the same house, I was constantly exposed not only to Robert's own compositions, but by association most of the other Once composers who are now famous. To the Once musicians, anything and everything was music. I can remember one concert where I believe they played the same note on the piano... was it for hours or was it all night? I got the idea after only a minute or two and the rest was wasted on me. I didn't stick around for all of it

There were six Once Concerts over five years (1961-1965) The last was held on the roof of Ann Arbor's Thompson Street carport. Artists for that event included John Cage, Eric Dolphy, Morton Feldman, Lukas Foss, David Tutor, and others. I was there for that event

Whatever the Once Group did made a splash. They stirred things up. In fact, the faculty at the U-M School of Music boycotted the festivals. Of course, they did. That only made the group more special. In 1964 the Once Group issued a publicity poster with political activist Martina Algire posing nude on the counter of Red's Rite Spot, everyone's favorite go-to diner for

coffee and a grilled pecan roll. If you can remember the original Red's Rite Spot on E. Williams, you really are an Ann Arborite

I will miss Robert. He was like part of my family and we shared a bond that went back to when he first came to Ann Arbor. For years, I used a theme from the film by Philip Makanna "The Crack of Dawn," with music by Robert., It was my splash-screen intro. It sill may be my favorite music from my friend "Blue" Gene Tyranny."

I will indeed miss him

Dec 12, 2020, 6:40 PM

Bhadrapur and Bharitpur

Though we had arrived at the international airport in Kathmandu, we knew little about the adjacent domestic airport from which we were about to fly out of to Bhadrapur, a tiny town in southeastern Nepal and very close to the Indian border. From there, we planned to cross over into India, first to the Indian border town of Karkavitta (a dangerous place, where you had to drive fast and not allow your car to slow down because of bandits), and then on to Sikkim, where we were to visit more Karma Kagyu centers like Rumtek and Ralang. All five of our family members had elected to go

We arrived at the much smaller domestic airport and managed to wrestle our own luggage away from the army of touts who rushed us and pile it near the small office of the Royal Nepal Airlines, with whom we had tickets

For the umpteenth time, I confirmed our tickets and managed to weigh our luggage and present it for

inspection. As usual, the guards demanded we open this or that bag to be searched, only to tell us to forget it the moment we began to comply. I had no idea what kind of plane we would be on, only I suspected (from the size of this airport) that it might not be a DC-10. We waited for our flight to be called, with me checking every time any plane was being boarded just to make sure it was not our flight and we were not somehow missing it. Finally, it was time for us to board, and we climbed into the small bus that would drive us out to where the plane was waiting

Well, we kept going farther and farther out on the tarmac until we were at the very edge of the airport, passing jets and larger transports and then pulling up in front of a tiny propeller plane that seated maybe 16 people. Gulp

The small hatchway of the plane had a three to four rung ladder hanging down, touching the runway. Climbing on board, we wedged ourselves into the tiny tubular wire-frame seats. The single flight attendant offered us a tray with cotton for our ears and a piece of candy to help us swallow. With the few people from the bus on board, the pilot climbed in, and we took off at once

I could not see much from the tiny porthole windows, but I could see the beautiful green Kathmandu valley unfolding beneath us. In about an hour we prepared to land. I looked hard to see the airport, but could see very little. We dropped lower and lower. I still couldn't see a runway, only a grassy field, which, of course, turned out to be the runway. Bumpity bump, we finally came to a halt, swinging around in front of a small ochre-colored building with a bunch of people in front. Out we climbed

It was very hot; as my family watched the growing pile of our baggage being tossed from the back of the plane, I went to try and find a taxi to drive us the short distance from the airport to the Indian border-town of Karkavitta, about a half hour's drive away. I was hoping to find a driver who might also take us across the border and all the way to Mirik, in West Bengal. "How far to the border?" I asked one driver, just to confirm. "Which border?" he said. "Why the Indian border, of course." "It's a ten hour drive," he responded. Here was one confused taxi driver, I thought. "The border is no more than a half-hour from here..." "No," he said, "The Indian border and Karkavitta are at least 10 hours from here."

I didn't get it. "This is Bhadrapur, isn't it?" I ask. "No, this is Bharitpur."

It turns out Bharitpur is in Western Nepal, some ten hours from the border and in the opposite direction of where we had thought we were going. I began to get excited, and the airport attendant said, in his best Hindu-English accent, "Sir, there is no problem. I can stop the plane"—which had begun to taxi away—"I have the authority to stop the plane."

"Do stop it," I stammered. "We have to go back to Kathmandu, right now!" So much for that idea though, for the plane just took off and vanished into the shimmering heat, leaving us (along with our baggage) standing in a field in one of the hottest parts of Nepal, near the edge of a tropical jungle. What a deserted feeling that was! The Royal Nepal Airlines ticket agent had misunderstood our destination and interpreted 'Bhadrapur' as 'Bharitpur'

After milling around with any number of Nepalese, all of whom were trying to speak English—which they could not—we were finally helped by a Brahmin—often the

only ones of the Nepalese who could truly speak English. There was very little we could do, he explained. We would have to wait at least one day for another plane. That was that. I looked around at the sad state of the town we were in. Twenty-four hours here?

Well, I refused to accept that fate...spending a night in this little sweatbox of a town, completely screwing up our trip, and with people waiting for us to arrive later that day at the other end, eventually worrying about us...by God, I would rather spend the next ten hours driving to the Indian border, arriving late at night, but getting on with our journey. I set about hiring two cars (since my family, plus baggage, were too much for any one taxi) to drive us that great distance. We were driven to the local Royal Nepal Airlines office, a single room that was soon filled with onlookers ogling us

We managed to find one middle-aged man (who had somewhat of a wreck of a taxi) willing to take us, and, after a while, a young Nepalese driver popped up with a very tiny, but newer vehicle. He was the only one of the two who claimed to know English, which, it turned out, he also did not

We were determined to go, if only to get out of where we were. I explained to both drivers what we were doing, and that, at all times, we must keep each car in view of the other. We must always stay together. Yes, yes, they agreed. As we started out, the older driver had to stop at his house to get his license and a few other things. We waited out front. My wife, my young son, and I had gotten into the larger, older car, while my two daughters, May and Anne, had gone in the smaller car with the young driver. Both cars were jammed with our luggage

As we waited for the older driver, the younger of the drivers kept motioning to me from his car to take the wheel of the car I was in, and just take off, leaving the older man behind. Funny guy, I thought

Then, as the older driver came out with his license, the younger driver started right off, moving toward the nearest main drag. We followed as soon as we could close the doors and get moving; and yet, when we reached the main road, there was no sign of the car with the girls. Looking to the right and to the left, we saw nothing. He had vanished, and, with him, my two daughters, aged 15 and 21—just gone

Well, we would have to catch up. Our driver took off in the correct direction, but we did not manage to catch sight of the other car, even after several miles. “But I told him to stay in lock-step with us,” I stammered to the older driver, who understood not one word. All he did was throw his hands up in a gesture of futility and say “young driver.” After one or two miles, I was still hopeful, but after ten and fifteen miles, at quite a fast pace, I began to lose hope. Around this time, our driver began to swing into various filling stations and stores, asking if they had seen the other car. Nothing was forthcoming. I was getting quite upset at this point and began to be more vocal

At some point, our driver just turned around and we began heading back to the town of Bharitpur and to the Royal Airline Office. After what seemed an eternity, we arrived at the office and I rushed in and began to explain to the agent there what had happened. My wife wanted to contact the police at once, but the agent didn’t really want to do that. He kept saying we should get back on the road and keep driving, and, if after one hour of driving, we did not find the girls, then we should

drive back to his office here (another hour) and THEN he would go with us to the police. My wife was having none of this, she insisted we go to the police NOW!— which we did. Time kept slipping by, with well over an hour and a quarter having passed since we last saw the girls

The police just went round and round, up and down the line of authority, to no real effect. We probably wasted a good 45 minutes in that office before they once again insisted we drive that one hour west along the road to the next town and, if we did not find them, then we were to call them from that town and they would institute a major search

In the meantime, they would call on ahead to the next town with the word. This was not really what we wanted, but we had little choice. We headed back over the same road we had just traveled, covering the same ground for the third time, in what seemed like a futile gesture

On and on the road went, through incredible scenery— tall grasses along a large river, etc. Still, we did not come to the town. And after more than an hour, we were still driving, looking in every filling station, every store—and there was nothing but stores along these Nepalese roads. I was sick with worry at this point, running any number of horrible scenarios through my head. Then, some 54 miles down the road—there, by the side of the road, was the car, and the young driver—and our girls!— all alive and well

We were so relieved, but I was really pissed at the kid driver. The girls were worried too, and did not want to ride with the young man any farther. Nothing much had happened. He had made eyes at them and otherwise tried to impress them. Of course, there was also the fact

that he had paid no attention to our instructions. I spoke strongly to him. We decided that the possibility of getting this combination of cars, people, and drivers all of the way across Nepal was unconceivable—we would not try to. We gave up and drove back down that same damn road for the fourth time, this time all the way back to Bharitpur, where we would just have to hole up for the night. Our trip had ground to a halt. Seldom in my life has something stopped me so cold—I really understood, in this case, the word ‘frustrated’, of was it “terrified.”

Back at the Royal Nepal Airline office, I fumed and spouted, refusing to pay the young driver much of anything. Then I arranged to find the most expensive hotel in town—which everyone warned was way too expensive. It was called the Safari Hotel, and rooms there were up to \$65 a night. It sounded like a deal to me. We packed up all our gear, and, along with our girls, headed for the Safari

Well, the Safari turned out to be a huge resort, with a pool, a vast dining room—the works. After weeks of marginal hotels, we all hopped into the pool and cooled off. And cool was needed, for this was a tropical climate—just plain hot. The entranceways, and even some of the rooms, had geckos (lizards with suction-cup toes) all over the walls, which were great fun to watch catching insects

As we (half starved) waited for dinner to be served—at what seemed to be a very late time, 7:30 PM—we discovered that what the Safari was really all about was the taking safaris into the nearby jungle while straddled atop elephants. Since we had nothing better to do but wait for the next day’s plane, we resolved to set off into the jungle the following morning—on elephants! We

would start for the jungle at 5:30 AM. It was our first non-pilgrimage act, but it seemed like the right thing to do

And sure enough, at the crack of dawn, there we were, hurtling down the back roads in an open jeep, heading toward the jungle. We passed seeming endless grass houses and shacks, with the people and animals all around them starting their day; and everywhere along the road were flowers and plants, the dawn light illuminating their blossoms

We arrived at some kind of a hotel camp overlooking a large river, on the other side of which was the jungle. We could see herds of deer or antelope moving along the jungle's edge. After being offered tea, we were guided down a path to a high landing where, one by one, several elephants moved in, one by one, and allowed us to climb into the wood-frame baskets securely mounted to their backs. It was four people to an elephant, plus the elephant driver way up front

And then, the elephants walked right down to the river, drank their fill, and began to move out into the mainstream. The river was maybe a quarter of a mile wide. As the current got stronger, the elephants turned sidewise (facing the current) and began to sidestep toward the distant shore—this was a little scary! Gradually, however, we crossed the expanse of the river and climbed up the far shore, moving into the jungle proper

It was good to be high up on the elephant, because the grass we walked through (called, appropriately enough, 'elephant grass') was at least a good 5-6 feet high—and there were tigers in this jungle and crocodiles in the river. The short of it was that we saw all kinds of deer, wild boar, and most important, a family of wild

rhinoceros. What an experience! Riding high up on the elephants, we walked right into a group of three rhinos—a mom, a pop, and a 3-year old baby (not so much a baby anymore)

There they were, just that close. And, as it was, the elephants would leave the narrow trails and just crash on through the jungle itself, blazing new trails by tearing off limbs with their trunks and smashing foliage down with their feet

As they made their own trails, insects and leaves rained down on us from the forest canopy above. And the elephants would make this deep shuddering sound whenever they smelled something ahead of them in the jungle they were not sure of

The steep-banked muddy narrow streams were forded and, after crossing a stream, the elephants often had to get down on their knees to climb up the other side. I must say, this was an experience I would not soon forget. I sure got close enough to a real jungle; on the way back, I saw a large crocodile eyeballing us as we crossed the river again—not a good place for swimming!

After eating breakfast at a camp near the jungle's edge, and playing with giant six-inch millipedes that crawled all over our hands and arms, we were back at the hotel by 10:00 AM. We grabbed our bags and made for airport, there to stand in the heat. The sun was fierce, and I was quickly soaked with sweat, which, as it dried later, actually left a salt residue

At last an air-raid siren sounded to get the cattle off the runway so that the plane could land. As the siren went off, boys with sticks swarmed onto the runway and drove the cattle and water buffalo back from the landing

strip. The plane was able to land, and we climbed aboard, stuffing cotton in our ears. We were on our way, back to Kathmandu to catch the correct plane—the one to Bhadrapur not to Bharitpur!

After this experience, though, our two girls elected not to go to India; they wanted to spend the coming week in Kathmandu instead, just doing whatever they felt like. We really couldn't blame them, and although we hated to be separated, we said goodbye to them at the airport

Dec 12, 2020, 7:22 AM

TAKING THE PLUNGE

We can (and do) plunge into the present moment, but the moment we think about it, we are looking at the past. That's just the way it works

We can “be” in the present and that means fully immersed, like a rollercoaster ride -- all in. However, if we stop to think about it, we are already looking at snapshots of the past that we've recorded and are already memories

That's why I sometimes say that we are backing into (or toward) the future by looking at the past in our rear-view mirror, while we try to steer into the future. It's not the easiest way to drive

Aside from my Root Lama, the Mahasiddha Tilopa has always been my special hero because many of his teachings have impacted me so directly. In particular, among the pith teachings revered by dharma students, are what is called Tilopa's “Six Words of Advice,” of which four of them are what are usually quoted. And

this, because two of them are actually subsidiary. Those four main ones are:

(1) Don't Prolong the Past

(2) Don't Invite the Future

(3) Don't Alter the Present

(4) Relax, As It Is

These are all imperatives because in my experience these pith teachings are for those dharma practitioners who want direct advice, without all the polite qualifications. At this point, we trust the source, the guru, and just want direction and straight talk

So, the advice is to not look back and also to not peer into the future, and then don't monkey with the present, and finally to just relax in the present moment. It's best not to read "Relax As It Is" to mean take the day off, but rather, it is very difficult, and a practice all by itself, to just allow the mind to be as it is and to rest in our natural awareness. Just try it!

I was amazed to see how much time I spend in the kaleidoscope of the past, which only gets foggier as time passes. And the same goes for my anticipations and expectations of the future. As the philosophers argue, the present moment is infinitesimally brief and at the same time as long as time itself when you are in it. We take the plunge and only talk about it later

As for not monkeying with the present, they mean those first two words of advice, to not spend our time recollecting what is inherently unclear (and growing ever dimmer) or spend it worrying and trying to anticipate and plan out the future. Instead, spend more

time in the present actually living it, but don't mess with it or alter it in any way. And this means don't gild the lily or reify whatever is already real (this present moment) and at the same time don't be ashamed or apologize for what this present moment is not. Instead, just be aware of whatever this present moment is and take note. "Taking note" is big in the dharma. Sometimes, that is all we have to do. Being aware does the rest

This present moment is the "wish-fulfilling gem" or cornucopia from which everything comes. Every last thing that has ever been thought, spoken, or done was done in this ultra-thin slice of the present moment, every last bit. Nothing was ever done in the past of the future

I'm not saying to throw caution to the wind; however, I am saying that we should take the plunge and jump right into this present moment, so that we have something to talk about, some experience from which know what we are talking about. Otherwise, it is all conceptual hot air

Dec 11, 2020, 7:05 PM

PHASES OF CYCLES

It's time for a basic introduction to cycles. Astrology, not to mention life itself, is not only filled with cycles, but is completely cyclic. Everything cycles or circles, if only to persist and endure. Anything that does not posit itself repeatedly does not endure. It is gone and passed into history and eventually out of mind. We exist only by persisting

Cycles can be almost as long as time itself, eons and eons. A line I coined years ago “The straighter the line, the finer the curve.” Or cycles can be as short as a breath, a beating heart, or a tiny nuclei, cycling and repeating. It seems that everything pulses in order to exist

And then there are cycles that, like the three bears, are either too long or too short, but some are just right-sized enough for us to be aware of them and perhaps keep track of them. The breath, the rotating Earth, the monthly lunar cycle, and on and on – anything that repeats

And so, one of the most useful examinations that we as human beings can undertake, at least in my opinion, is the study of cycles. We know that they come and go, but just how? And how are cycles they similar to one another?

And, surprise, surprise, all cycles share a common nature. They have ups and downs and they come around again and repeat. Not only that, but once you understand the form of cycles, you can take any number of them and line them up next to one another, arranging them so their greatest points of expansion and contraction match. A lot can be learned from doing this

The expanded part of the cycle of our breath and the expanded part of our heartbeat have actual similarities. And if you can learn something about the form on one kind of cycle, you will find that this can tell you about that same phase attribute in another cycle, and that can be invaluable

And the same is true of the cycle of the zodiac signs, the Chinese animal signs, the wheel of astrological

houses, and the synodic return of any two heavenly bodies, such as the solunar monthly cycle of the Earth, Sun, and Moon

How do all these different circles and cycles fit together? Is the moment when we breathe in and expand our lungs similar to Capricorn or Cancer in the zodiac, or to the 10th house or the 4th house in the chart wheel? Many years ago in the 1970s, the great astrologer Dane Rudhyar (who was visiting my home) and I discussed how these various cycles line up. Rudhyar said you could line them up so they match in many different ways and they all would have “some” meaning, however odd that might be

However, the most logical approach, “logically,” is how they would line them up best, allowing those who don’t agree to do whatever they want with cycles that floats their boat. Here are the obvious:

MOST CONTRACTED VS. MOST EXPANDED

Lungs contracted vs. Lungs Expanded

Capricorn vs. Cancer

10th House vs. 4th House

New Moon vs. Full Moon

Conjunction vs. Opposition

Winter Solstice vs. Summer Solstice

... and so on

All of the above can be looked at cyclically, as a cycle. From the contracted part of the cycle, like the New

Moon, the solunar cycle (or breath) expands outward through the First Quarter and on to the Full Moon, the point of greatest expansion, and then begins to contract through the Third Quarter, crossing into the Fourth Quarter until, fully contracted, it reaches the next New Moon, and on around

It is the same with breathing, with the heart beating, and so on. All cycles can be examined in this way. I find it most helpful to look at any synodic cycle of two planets in the same way, where one is moving slower and the second is moving faster so that it makes a complete cycle of 360-degree compared to the first

If we look at the various aspects the faster moving body (in this case the Moon) forms to the slower moving body (the Sun), every one of the 360-degrees of the circle is legitimately an aspect, in that without it we would not have a cycle or circle. Astrologers over the centuries have called out these aspects as what I call the “sweet sixteen.”

000° Conjunction

030° Semisextile (waxing)

045° Semisquare (waxing)

060° Sextile (waxing)

090° Square (waxing)

120° Trine (waxing)

135° Sesquiquadrate (waxing)

150° Inconjunct (waxing)

180° Opposition

210° Inconjunct (waning)

225° Sesquiquadrate (waning)

240° Trine (waning)

270° Square (waning)

300° Sextile (waning)

315° Semisquare (waning)

330° Semisextile (waning)

360° Next Conjunction

This little e-Book goes over these cycle aspects, in order of their occurrence in a complete cycle, keeping in mind that the whole group make one continuous whole, just as a breath or heartbeat is a complete unity. Interpretations and diagrams are given for each of the sixteen main phases. Here is the-Book with more data

PHASES IN CYCLES

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Cycle%20Phases.pdf>

Dec 11, 2020, 4:48 AM

HERE'S LOOKING THROUGH YOU

Just in case you want to color me crazy or as a kook, here is a quote by Dr. Theodor Landscheidt, supreme court justice of Germany, climatologist, and astrologer that pertains to what I am writing about today:

In his seminal book "Cosmic Cybernetics," Landscheidt writes: "If there is substantiation for the supposition held by distinguished scientists such as Ambartsumian, Levit, Ducrocq, Holyle, Narlikar, Beauregard, and Reise, that our galaxy is organized like a cybernetic system, the complexity of which far exceeds that of the differentiated power of the organic nervous systems, then there would be reason to assume there are information links between the galactic center and the Sun, as the center of the solar system of such a kind that for instance the activity in the galactic nucleus is implanted in the gravitational waves as the characteristic information; the gravitational waves reach the center of the solar system and trigger activity in correspondence with the transmitted information." [if you want to read more by Landscheidt, you can message me and I will give you a link.]

Our daily life alternates between night and day, but the Sun never varies; it is shining on us 24x7. I can't help but wonder about that streaming sunlight and the endless solar wind blowing past Earth. Is there something we don't know and don't realize about this constant stream of solar energy, like some low-level hum or vibration from that light, which is like the deafening roar of the living sun that we call silence?

And so, perhaps we don't sense what's constant, too close, and always with us, but only notice the variations up and down as the solar tides play against the Earth.

Perhaps what we like to think of as the sunlight causing this or that effect on us, is in reality our lack of awareness of the sun as a constant stream and the source of many kinds of energies within us, much like an electric cord contains and is filled with electricity

What I am wondering here is that instead of the Sun effecting us here on Earth (dualistically), our bond with the Sun may be much more constant and closer than that, so close we are not aware of it, perhaps there being no actual difference between the Sun and our own inner life energy, because they are in fact one and the same

It takes light some eight minutes and twenty seconds to reach earth, not in a single shot (CMEs do that), but in a constant stream, just like electricity takes an almost infinitesimal amount of time to travel through an electrical cord. Perhaps there is a continuity of consciousness of ourselves, our psyche, with the sun, rather than the cause and effect assumption that we may like to dualistically think. What if we are NOT at a distance, but synonymous with the solar information, like: is an integral part of our consciousness that we have yet to realize

The consciousness that we think we we are is as cosmic as it is Earth-bound. If we are looking for intelligent life in the universe, we might first try looking in the mirror. In all truth, we are ourselves the space traveler we have been looking for to arrive from off-planet. We are (and have always been) already totally out there in space, embedded in the very far edge of a spiral arm in our Milky Way galaxy. Is that far enough out?

If we study cybernetics, as mentioned in the above quote from Landscheidt, whatever regulates any

system, the solar system, galaxy, or otherwise, we learn that for any system to itself remain coherent, to cohere and remain stable, some flow of information from the outside is required to enable that coherence. Is then our Sun some kind of node or transformer that we each link to by what we call our stream of consciousness? Is what we call now, this present moment also solar?

These kinds of questions are what makes studying the solar influx of our Sun to the Earth so fascinating. As the sunspot cycle increases in amplitude, the envelope of the solar wind expands, increasingly protecting the Earth from cosmic rays coming from catastrophic events happening in deep space and penetrating Earth. These cosmic rays strengthen when the sunspot cycle is weak and at its minimum

And so, we are alternately connected to solar influx on the one hand (when the sunspots surge) or connected to an increase in cosmic rays when the sunspots are at a minimum, an 11-years cycle. How these two forms of energy differ as to how they affect us is something worth learning about

My point here is to suggest that our local stream of consciousness is not just something between our two ears, but it must be part of the cybernetics of Earth, our solar system, and our Milky Way galaxy and whatever other systems (like the Tropical Virgo-Libra supergalaxy) there are out there. This must be a vast system of not only solar information, but cosmic rays, and also, what may ultimately astrophysicists wonder might be key as to information flow, what is called the "weak force," the gravitational radiation (gravity waves) that is passing right through us all of the time

Perhaps individuals, like each of us, are more like nodes or nexuses, in a much larger cybernetic system

of information flow. As mentioned, earlier, according to cybernetics theory, any structure (like the solar system or the Earth system) only coheres (remains together) for as long as it receives information from outside itself, from the “mothership,” so to speak

Instead of always thinking of ourselves being inside our heads and looking out, it is helpful to also see ourselves as the intelligence that exists in the universe that is outside looking in and through our eyes and thus able to see as we see, subject to our obscurations. Are we inside looking out or outside looking in, or both?

Obviously, in the dharma, the mind has no beginning and no end, which does not mean that there is no “science” in dharma. It may all be a dream we can’t wake up from, but that dream may be detailed and exact down to the last and finest detail

Dec 10, 2020, 11:38 AM

THE FERAL IN ME

The problem with “thinking” is that it’s not “doing.” Think about it or just do it. And by “doing,” I mean getting fully immersed in it. Lately, I have been just doing it and the difference is notable. Doing seems just clearer, cleaner, perhaps accumulating less karma than noodling and worrying about stuff

I’ve had a lifetime of just doing stuff and there seems to be a large difference between that and just being busy for busyness sake. My question now is whether just straight-ahead plunging into doing stuff creates less

karma than hiding in busyness, i.e. busyness for its own sake. The full plunge seems to be true option

If we follow our natural interest and enjoy the busyness that results from that, getting lost in what interests us, how alike or unlike is that from Insight Meditation. My guess is that it depends if we remain aware that we are aware. For me, this is a bit tricky to answer, but the answer seems to be that the dharma can't just be limited to what we would label as "religious." The dharma is everywhere and all the time

I used to be mildly disturbed to hear that, with learning Shamata (Tranquility Meditation) while focusing on the breath or a stick or stone was good, that we get extra points if the object of our Shamata focus was a little statue or image of the Buddha. I get the idea, but something in me objects

I'm not saying that an image of the Buddha is not good to use, but rather that feeling urged to use that as a preferred focus (the extra points) is a little like proselytization, IMO. It just feels like that to me. Of course, this "feeling" probably comes from my Irish Catholic upbringing, where I felt like I was being herded this way and that. I eventually rebelled and just opted out of Christianity altogether, not because I did not respect and care for Christ, but rather that the Catholic church as an organized religion was, for me, just a bridge too far. I didn't find that the nuns who taught me in Catholic school and hit my hands with a ruler (and other stuff that would get them jailed today) were very Christ-like

In other words, I found dharma in my main dharma teacher (and a few others), but not in organized Buddhism any more than I did in organized Christianity. There is something that happens to the human spirit

(and the natural dharma) that is quickly lost once you attempt to organize it. Just my opinion. Obviously, folks differ on this, and I respect that

At the same time, I have spent decades doing my best to support and help my particular lineage to prosper and grow. Happy to do that, to give to the dharma. I just don't like being told what to do

And to a marked degree, the dharma I discovered from back when I was a young child was the dharma of Mother Nature, the natural world, what in Tibetan Buddhism is called the "Lama of Appearances." I learned that

I realized later in life that nature (the fields, streams, and woods) in which I was raised were my natural teachers and, when it came time for me to discover the Realization practices (like Insight Meditation and Mahamudra), I did it out in nature and not on the cushion as I had imagined that as a dharma practitioner that I would. That was a surprise

It reminds me of the dogs we used to have that, when it came time for one of them to have puppies, would seek out some special place around the house, often in the basement to give birth, sometimes in the darndest places

That's the way it went down with me and recognizing the true nature of the mind, which I did out in the natural world rather than saying prayers or mantras on a cushion. This, because my earliest training was from and in Mother Nature and no other place. That kind of education stays with one, even if we imagine something different should be the case. At least it did for me. Part of me was somewhat feral and still is. Perhaps that is

why some folks have said I am a bit of a maverick. I guess I am at that

There is the old saying “You can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy.” This is true for me, only as to nature, since I was raised out in the country, with no other houses around. I had very little social training, but spent almost all of the time with Mother Nature, so I subscribe to: “You can take the boy out of nature, but you can’t take nature out of the boy.” Nature was my imprint, rather than social laws or civil conventionality. This was good for me personally, but probably means that I don’t always play well with others

Dec 9, 2020, 9:31 PM

WHEN THE SUN SPEAKS

[Sometimes I wing it and just feel for a bunch of words to leap over a subject that is too difficult to describe directly.]

My life has been wrapped around the Sun for many decades. The first book I ever published (1975) was a 400-year heliocentric ephemeris titled “The Sun Is Shining,” and my main contribution to astrology over an almost fifty year period has been a heliocentric technique called “Star Types,” a method of identifying one’s dharma type or approach, although few have understood this enough to challenge me with interesting questions

His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, when I first met him in 1997 in Tibet at 15,000 feet in his ancestral home,

Tsurphu Monastery, said to me “You are Tenzin Nyima,” which means “Keeper of the Sun.” My point? Aside from all this hyperbole, I must have some karma with the Sun

And recently I identified what I feel is an important fact, that in the last 500 years or more, the one time that the solar amplitude (solar intensity) was the highest it has ever been was in 1957-1959 at the height of the Solar Cycle-19, which maxed out at about March 15, 1958 and the previous min-max between time was 10.164 years (very short). This suggests that the current sunspot cycle (just getting underway) may very well have one of the strongest amplitudes to date. We will see

This, I believe, is a fact worth considering in relation to the unusual time period and event known as the 1960s or The Sixties, which actually did not start until the summer of 1965. Since I grew up in the 1950s and morphed into The Sixties, I can't help but wonder how such a powerful time of change (that was not a war) emerged. What caused the Sixties?

I used to say that perhaps LSD caused that core change, and that is still my fallback understanding, but I am openly considering that this highest amplitude, most intense, peak of solar cycle-19 embedded, imprinted, or was somehow the cause... planting the seed of change that developed or grew into the cultural change known as The Sixties

I'm already married to the idea that solar energy and its intensity is the bringer or cause of change internally, and that science has never gotten around to looking at it closely or sensitively enough to realize and monitor it. Until they do, I'm left on my own recognizance, with my own imagination and sensitivity. I feel the sun when it

changes. I feel it inside me churning me up and do my best to become aware and remain aware of it

Change is like an undersea oxygen vent or natural spring from which pour ideas and truth. And those of us who can, cannot help but cluster around it and inhale that oxygen to the best of our ability. And here is the part that so far is ineffable that I can't put it into words

We think of change like a cause that has an effect. Time has causes and then their effects. Yet, the kind of change that comes from the Sun through the various solar influxes is not linear like that. Please. bear with me

We have all heard the slogan "Be the Change." Well, solar change is more like that. The change itself is the effect, and not just the cause of an effect. In dharma language, we might say that solar change is non dualistic. It has no, as mentioned, cause and effect, but solar change, as pointed out, is also the effect at once. There is no subject and object

Yes, from solar change, there is development, so in that sense, solar change is a seed from which something develops in the course of time. It's OK to think that way, yet by doing so we will miss something important that is trying to be conveyed

I remind you of what I said earlier, "Be the Change," and by that I mean that rather than be changed by something coming from the Sun, like cause and effect, instead solar change changes us instantaneously, in real time. It is WE who are the change or another way of putting this is that what changes with solar change is the "Me, Myself, and I."

In other words, we cannot ourselves see or witness the change, because we, the viewer, who normally would monitor what changes, is what is instantaneously changing, changing in the moment. How we see the world and the whole of who we are is what is changed by intense solar influx. We can't be in two places at once and here our two places (subject and object) are one. We are the "one" changing. Solar change is what we call the "present moment" or the "now." Like a rollercoaster ride, we are too busy lost in the change to be objective. Solar influx or change changes us before we can even know it. Only in reflection can we perhaps remember what we were before the change. We have changed

At the risk of losing you entirely, I will go one step farther and suggest that not only does solar change morph us in real time, but that perhaps solar change brings truth to the old saying. "Coming events cast their shadow." Solar change totally possesses us to the exclusion of witnessing our own change; we can't be objective because we are too busy changing to be objective. There is nothing yet to observe but our attempts to observe. We are free-floating

And, somehow, we can (at times) feel this solar change coming before it even appears in our life. Our destiny, like a statue carved out of rock, is gradually revealed, yet the image is already in the stone. It is revealed

What I am describing is what we call the "present moment," the moment we are so involved in that we can't both BE in it and watch or comment on it at the same time. Solar change, IMO, is like that

I don't know how else to say this, although in time I am sure I will be able to. However, right now, I am still just putting this all together. Time is NOT what we think it is

Dec 9, 2020, 3:57 AM

THIS NEW SUNSPOT CYCLE MAY BE MASSIVE

A strong C7-class solar flare erupted on the sun's surface December 7, 2020, throwing a CME (Coronal Mass Ejection) directly at Earth, which ejection is due to arrive around Wednesday-Thursday (Dec. 9th – 10th), causing G1-class geomagnetic storms. This recent solar flare has already caused shortwave radio blackout over South Africa. So be ready for that

As for how solar activity affects us personally, more research is appearing, things like:

“Increase in cosmic rays, solar radio flux, and Schumann resonance power was all associated with increased HRV and parasympathetic activity. The findings support the hypothesis that energetic environmental phenomena affect psychophysical processes that can affect people in different ways depending on their sensitivity, health status and capacity for self-regulation.”

And this:

“It appears that increased cosmic rays, solar radio flux, and Schumann resonance power are all associated with increased HRV and increased parasympathetic activity, and the ANS responds quickly to changes in these environmental factors. These may well be some of the key drivers of Tchijevsky's Index of Mass Human Excitability that clearly tracks the solar cycle. These

findings support the hypothesis that these energetic environmental factors act as energy sources that outplay in different ways depending on an individual's health status and maturity level and capacity of self-regulation.”

If you are interested, there are an increasing number of scientific studies about the effect of solar influx and especially geomagnetic storms on the human psyche, starting with HRV (Heart Rate Variability) and ANS (Autonomic Nervous System) and moving inward from there. It seems this area of research, how solar influx affects us, is just coming up on science's radar. It's about time

I'm not going to spend my time trying to prove anything here, but rather let's just talk about how this variable influx of solar intensity may affect us, and this interests me because I have been watching it for many years, decades

In a recent post here in my FB page, I pointed out how the extreme increase in solar activity during the late 1950s may have served as a catalyst of change that spawned what we call “The Sixties,” the alternative culture approach of the 1960s. I can back that up in this article having done a little more investigating

I have done more research, this time getting deeper into the numbers. I have looked at the sunspot cycle as far back as I can, to at least 1600 AD and the Maunder Minimum. Beyond that, I don't see much data other than a series of other minimums. It was not until 1755-1756 That Johann Rudolf Wolf published an account of what he called “Cycle 1,” the first 11-year solar cycle that was considered reliable

And so, I believe it is safe to say that in modern times, there has been no period of intense solar activity greater than the years 1957 and 1958, plus a little in 1959, these years being the gateway and perhaps an external cause to the 1960s and "The Sixties." And we may be facing a massive amplitude in this solar cycle-25 that is just getting underway. More about that below

I've looked at the yearly, monthly, and daily sunspot counts, gathered the data and put that data into various databases so that I could better sort the results as they are recorded, at least back to 1600 and before that date there were some minimums, so that no high peaks probably have been there

It seems we can safely say that the highest sunspot peak was in the 1957-1958 period of time. Here are the top solar years of intense solar amplitude from that data. The numbers to the right of the date are the number of sunspots for that year

MOST INTENSE SOLAR ACTIVITY YEARS

1957.5 = 269.3

1958.5 = 261.7

1778.5 = 257.3

1870.5 = 232.0

1837.5 = 227.3

1959.5 = 225.1

1979.5 = 220.1

1787.5 = 220.0

$$1980.5 = 218.9$$

$$1788.5 = 218.2$$

$$1947.5 = 214.7$$

$$1989.5 = 211.1$$

$$1779.5 = 209.8$$

$$1848.5 = 208.3$$

$$1727.5 = 203.3$$

$$1991.5 = 203.3$$

$$1956.5 = 200.7$$

$$1981.5 = 198.9$$

$$1789.5 = 196.8$$

$$1948.5 = 193.0$$

$$1836.5 = 192.7$$

$$1990.5 = 191.8$$

$$1949.5 = 190.7$$

$$1937.5 = 190.6$$

$$1871.5 = 185.3$$

$$1738.5 = 185.0$$

$$1938.5 = 182.6$$

$$1849.5 = 182.5$$

1860.5 = 182.2

1859.5 = 178.3

1769.5 = 176.8

Looking at the numbers just for our modern period, we find this:

Sunspot Numbers by Intensity

1957.5 269.3

1958.5 261.7

1959.5 225.1

1979.5 220.1

1980.5 218.9

1947.5 214.7

1989.5 211.1

1991.5 203.3

1956.5 200.7

1981.5 198.9

1948.5 193.0

1990.5 191.8

1949.5 190.7

1937.5 190.6

1938.5 182.6

Modern Sunspot Numbers chronologically

1937.5 190.6

1938.5 182.6

1947.5 214.7

1948.5 193.0

1949.5 190.7

1956.5 200.7

1957.5 269.3*****

1958.5 261.7

1959.5 225.1

1979.5 220.1

1980.5 218.9

1981.5 198.9

1989.5 211.1

1990.5 191.8

1991.5 203.3

I looked at some 100,000 sets of data, by day, month, and year. And while “by day” is the most interesting, it would be hard to present that here, so a summary by year gives you the best general idea of solar intensity

It is my view (and hypothesis) that solar activity integrally affects human life, just as the light and warmth of the sun does. And it's not just that it gives us a sunburn or affects the heart and bodily cybernetics. It also affects us, the "me, myself, and I" psychology of us

Most of all, solar change is just that, "change brought" to us by the sun. And that change is like planting a seed in the ground of our life, a change of direction (or whatever) that we react to, yes, by changing. And, as I keep describing, that change is a change at first not in our surroundings, but rather a change in us and then we change our surroundings, if you get what I'm saying

And there are, so science tells us, two kinds of changes, change from the influx of solar energy and a second kind of change, change when solar energy is at its minimum which allows cosmic rays to overpower the temporarily weaker solar wind, allowing cosmic rays (from distant cataclysmic events) to penetrate the solar shield and reach Earth. Either way, we change, just in different ways

As to why science has not figured this out up to now, who knows? It would seem to me to be more subtle than awareness of sunburn, so we just now may be getting around to becoming aware of more subtle change

Many of us are aware of the 11-year sunspot cycle, but fewer understand that that 11-year cycle is actually part of a longer 22-year cycle (two 11-years cycles), which is the time it takes for the alternating magnetic poles to repeat themselves in polarity

Every 11 years the sun's magnetic-field poles switch polarity, with the result that it takes two 11-years cycles, 22 years, for a complete dual cycle. The time it takes for

these poles to come together also varies, from longer to shorter

If that time is long, scientists are now saying that this signifies a weak solar cycle, one with less amplitude, less intensity (which we had with this last cycle), and if that time is short (as was this last cycle, Cycle 24), then this signals a solar cycle with greater amplitude (intensity)

Scientists have determined that in this recent solar cycle (Cycle 24), the time for the poles to come together was very short, indeed which, in defiance of previous predictions that this new cycle underway now will be weak (cycle 25), instead, this new prediction is that Cycle-25 may be very intense, perhaps as intense as one of the few cycles I have listed above that have brought powerful solar influx to our planet

We have to wait and see. You can read about this more here:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11207-020-01723-y>

Dec 8, 2020, 10:27 AM

Dec 7, 2020, 7:54 PM

THE IMPACT OF LSD

THE ROOTS OF THE SIXTIES: PART III

This is the third and probably last article on the roots of the 1960s, where what we call The Sixties came from, the years leading up that decade. This is a long read and it is not for the faint of heart, so please take note

The 1960s was many things. I have looked through some of the dozens and dozens of books explaining it and understand why they wrote what they did, but I don't recognize my experience in them. Perhaps it is because I was raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, at the time a kind of weak sister back then to more aggressive (and progressive) cities like Berkeley and Cambridge. That is no longer true. Today Ann Arbor is state of the art. My experience of the Sixties was very much colored by my life in Ann Arbor. I can only tell it like I saw and remember it

The books say the Sixties was about the radical politics, anti-war movement, sexual revolution, women's liberation, rock music, the almost-socialism, and so on. And many say that the cause of the 1960s can be laid directly on the then button-down life of the 1950s. The Sixties is said to be a reaction to that decade. I can see all these different views and they make some sense. To me, those are just symptoms or results, but not the cause. For me it was simply the drugs that caused the Sixties to be what they were

And by drugs I don't mean to say that I was a druggie or that all drugs were responsible. To my mind it was only the psychedelic drugs that mattered in my experience. They alone were responsible for what made the Sixties memorable to me. Obviously, this statement requires

some explanation, although some readers will know exactly what I mean

I am not going to comment on any of the above movements and causes just now, except the one about the 1950s. That decade was indeed bland, too much about surface, and overly conservative. Beehive hairstyles, crew cuts, Pat Boone, non-fluid dancing, and so on were something my generation sought to get away from. I only wish I had recognized European cinema and Bergman films as just as foolish back then, but in the opposite direction, but I didn't

I worshipped the Beats in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but I was well behind the curve on that one. My time Beat-surfing left me high and dry, right back where I started. It went nowhere, but it did leave me with something of a liberal education

I have examined carefully what I did from 1960 until the Sixties actually started for me in 1964. Rebellious against the 1950s? Sure, but I was 20 years old! What twenty-year old does not carve out a little distance from the previous generation? OK, maybe a lot of distance and considerable time too, but that alone still does not explain the Sixties to me. If the Sixties had a wider gap between it and the 1950s than other generations, what caused that gap? The revulsion at my parent's lifestyle and the 1950s by themselves did not cause that gap

Which leaves me with drugs and one particular drug: LSD. Drugs like speed, pot, opium, and so on were mostly entertainment in my opinion. I was not really better or worse off for them. But the psychedelics are another matter, LSD especially

The Sixties began for me from the moment I took LSD in the bathroom of a small coffee shop in Berkeley

California on May 6th, 1964 at 10:30 PM. And I caution you to please be very careful in how you understand this. It is not really about the drugs alone. Drugs were all around and not all that interesting to me at that. And it was not simply the conscious-altering quality of drugs. Marijuana altered my consciousness too, but not in any lasting or meaningful way

However, LSD altered my consciousness in a lasting way and that altered-consciousness created just enough of a gap in my mind that I got a real glimpse of myself in my various dualisms. LSD let me catch myself in a few of the miss-takes in my life, for example that there was a 'me' and then an outside world that is separate from me that I fought against or lived in. And realizing any dualism is unifying, thus nondual, so in a very real way my first acid trip was my introduction to the how the mind worked, what in dharma is called Recognition, but it took decades to stabilize

LSD allowed me to clearly see that my own biases and thoughts colored and shaped not only how I saw the outside world but actually the outside world itself. I saw out in the world what I believed inside. Bias kills truth. Now this was a revelation for me. LSD enabled a gap to open that has never closed, but remains today a doorway into the mind itself. What I am trying to say is that this gap or dualism, once recognized, could then be closed into the unity it actually is. This was for me the defining parameter of the 1960s – an introduction to the mind and a way of understanding the “self”

In the last analysis, the Sixties was for me about seeing into the mind. I changed my mind during that time (or watched my mind change) and the mind's openings (at least for me) led to the decade known as the Sixties. I realize it is not romantic to link the Sixties to drugs,

even the exotic LSD. Anti-war, feminism, anti-establishment, and so on sound like a better cause or reason. It just was not the case in my experience. These various movements were results or symptoms, but not the cause or root as I know it

As mentioned earlier, when LSD appeared in my life I was happily being a 23-year old body trying to discover myself, find what I wanted to do as a career, and meet the woman of my life. I was quite happy to have some respite and distance from society as my parents lived it. None of these factors could add up to the Sixties as I eventually lived it

The wild card is missing, that bit of breakthrough or genius that made the difference between an average generational gap and a gap large enough to embrace the changes that actually took place. It may be embarrassing to find that my bit of genius came with the help of drugs rather than from between my own two ears, but the truth is that, at least back then, it did come from drugs. Would I prefer that my insights came directly from the "Spirit" and not from a drug? Sure, but I say to myself: "Get over it! It is all god or spirit anyway!" It was permitted. And here is the subtle part

I should add that there was one other mitigating circumstance and that is the 11-years sunspot cycle, something that can't be fudged or spun. As far back as I can look at the sunspot cycle, at least to the early 1700s, there has NEVER been a peak in the intensity of the solar influx like the one in the late 1950s (1958). It is WAY higher in intensity from any other peak in history that I can find. I believe that this incredible influx of solar change is what caused the 1960s; the 1960s alternative culture was because of the solar change that overwhelmed Earth at that time, which makes LSD also

a symptom or vehicle for that change. I even had a vision about this change, but I will refrain from getting too out-of-the-body in this article

I really can separate the baby from the bathwater here, the drugs from the insights of those psychedelics. The drugs may be regrettable, but the insights gained through them were and still are profound. Today there are other ways to get the same insights, like the Asian forms of mind training and meditation, but they take a very long time and lots of work. LSD did the job in hours, but it took a VERY long time and lots of work to stabilize those insights, if they could be stabilized. It's "pay me now or pay me later;" either way takes a lot of work. The LSD and other psychedelic drugs happen to be the way it went down for me. Meditation and mind training were not readily available back then and are just starting to really come into the picture now, here in the 21st Century

If my mind had not been opened by LSD, I would never have seen what I saw. I have no reason to believe that short of that kind of sudden cram course in the mind and how it actually works I would have come upon those kinds of insights normally. The course of my life changed then and forever. IMO, the insights from psychedelics opened my mind and allowed me to discover and appreciate all of the other important themes born in the Sixties, themes like home birth, home schooling of our kids, psychedelic music (obviously), the place of women in the world, food, health, and a spiritual life

And I will make a prediction:

Just as a college diploma or degree is the coin of the realm today, it will be replaced in importance sometime tomorrow by somehow measuring the degree of

realization an individual has attained through mind training of one form or another. The kind and degree of mental clarity and realization will be how we know one another. Just my two cents. And now for the story of my first trip on LSD, but I must warn you. The following is a graphic account of an LSD trip and may not be something you want to read about, in which case please don't

THAT FIRST LSD TRIP

The definitive experience during 1964, my year in Berkeley, California was taking LSD, acid. In the end I was not sure what it was that I was taking; almost no one did that early in the scene. It was May 6th, 1964. I was intrigued (we all were) by what we heard about the drug

More important, and the final impetus to take acid, is that I had reached a point in my life (a very tight place) where I really needed an alternative view. The stories I had heard were that LSD could provide that, whatever else it was or was not

Something had to give and in the end, I was willing to take a chance. Still, I was very nervous and worried about what I might do if I took acid, lost control, and then: what? I had no idea and neither did most folks that I spoke with, and I had asked around. Acid was still very new in 1964, even in Berkeley, California

I took LSD in a cube of sugar in the men's bathroom of a small coffee shop in Berkeley California on May 6th, 1964 around 10:30 PM. It was in the form of a sugar cube containing pure Sandoz acid, and at the time I had heard of no other kind

I was with Mary, an almost-girlfriend of several weeks. I had met her at Lucas Books where I worked part time. We had never really gotten past the foreplay stage, because I didn't always have the nerve to push things to the point of real intimacy. It was basically a fear of rejection. It seemed I would persist almost forever (with these kind of questions in suspension) waiting for one of us to make a move, but not daring to take the plunge. I am certain some few of you will echo this

We were given the key to a friend of Mary's house, where there was a record player and some albums. I chipped in 50 cents gas money to get a ride over to the place. The idea was for me to drop acid and listen to some serious music, something I might do on marijuana. This was Mary's idea, and a plan that seemed absurd to me from the outset—the idea of scheduling anything guided for this kind of experience. I knew that what I was looking for was WAY beyond that

You see, I already had plans for acid, even if I knew nothing about it. Oddly enough, LSD is a drug that happens to be whatever you think it will be. And I had long been apprehensive about this particular drug. Of course, I had tried pot, hash, uppers, and even opium. Acid, however, was different, if I was to believe the stories about it. I feared that it might permanently damage or affect me in some way—like make me insane or bring out whatever schizo elements that might be lurking somewhere in there. "In there" being everything I didn't know or realize about myself

At the same time, I was intrigued at all of the possibilities of acid. And most of all, I was desperate for change. It seemed to me that my entire life had once again painted me into a corner, and I wanted out. And then there is that fact that I hadn't really eaten for

almost three days prior to dropping the acid and I was in the emotional chaos of the disintegration of my study plan with the professor I had been working with. Once again, I could simply not follow any program of studies, and was back to square one. I also had an unsettling long-distance phone call the night before with an old friend in Ann Arbor

All of these and very little sleep prepared me for this particular night in Berkeley, California. But I had backup. Mary had given her word that she would watch over me and keep me from all harm. We agreed that no matter what happened, no matter what I might say to her, she would not leave me. That proved to be a joke

When we arrived at the house where the phonograph was, a record was put on. As I looked around, I could see that the house was in shambles—a complete wreck. I found this totally depressing, in fact disgusting to observe. To my chagrin, the driver decided to stay with us to “listen to the music,” but more probably to observe me take acid. I was immediately more than a little apprehensive about the extra (read: stranger) person there and began to wonder did the two of them just want to watch what happened to me. Of course, they did

Acid was still not all that common and everyone was curious. I was the only one tripping and it was already too late to back out as I had taken the acid almost 45 minutes before. The first effects of the acid were some heightening sensations similar to alcohol, like when you have had a little too much to drink and are on the verge of deciding if you are all right or going to be sick or nauseous

However, rising through and overcoming this feeling came a stranger sensation, one of extreme unrest that

soon became too much to bear without relief of some sort, a kind of slow shockwave was rolling through my system. Here we go, thought I

I was also realizing that I could be physically sick and so stepped outside. Mary followed. I told Mary privately that I wanted to get away from the driver and out of this house. By that time, I was realizing that this experience was not about to be as gross as the programmed music that Mary had in mind for me. Leaving the house, we drove back toward the Berkeley campus and were dropped off at the Café Mediterranum (Café Med) on Telegraph Avenue, where I used to work. From there it was less than two blocks to my small apartment. I was quite buzzed by this point and beginning to feel (psychologically) very peculiar—a certain hostile/non-hostile sort of thing. It did not feel good, but I was beyond choice

We entered my place and sat down. At this point, I began to have vivid and pronounced hallucinations and an obvious projecting of animosity (or not, as the moment would have it) toward Mary. The same kind of feelings I had toward the driver were now directed toward Mary. She turned on the small heater in the place and declared that it was interesting to come to an understanding of one's own home

Such a comment was way too crude for me at that point. These were not welcome words and triggered the reaction that Mary had somehow planned or trapped me into facing myself, and, worse, was actually enjoying or studying all of this. I could feel that I was being the object of observation in Mary's eyes

This actually was probably the case. I was not in the mood to be anyone's guinea pig, even my own. I soon was pacing back and forth in the small room. I could not

seem to remain in the lighted area of the room but, under pretext that it had become too warm, would dart into the smaller back room, through the narrow, kitchen, then the bathroom, and lean out the alley door, breathing in the cool night air. Then, I also opened the front door and began to make small sorties outside into the overhanging arbor of fuchsias

From this point on, this was (from my perspective) completely insane behavior on my part. I would normally never leave the door open at night. And the sight of the door opening in the night, as seen from outside, with the light leaping out from it toward me, reflecting on all of the leaves and the fuchsias was, well, eerie and a bit menacing

Inside was Mary, the light, and the growing feeling of slight hostility. And, when back inside, I found myself almost holding my breath and then dashing outside again to breath. Once outside, I never went far. I was afraid of what I might do to myself. Outside the plants, and particularly the ground plants along the walkway, became a stream of waving arms with barbed points, glowing red and green, arms waving like sirens, beckoning me, but where?. And don't forget the fuchsias all around me, certainly a plant fit for one of Dante's inner circles. Their red and purple flowers became waving projections of letters, words — a ground covered with a pattern of words. Scarlet letters. It was mad

My Catholic upbringing and imprint were in full sway. I continued to slip in and out of the doorways, but I began also to experience the outside and inside in the same way, and not a nice way. It made less and less of a difference as the drug took hold whether I was in or out.

The 'in' was out and the 'out' was in. There was no escape possible from my own imagination

And yet this mad world was comfortable in a strange way. It was strangely familiar. It was 'my' mad world. Nothing seemed too strange. Frightening? Yes, but not really strange or unfamiliar. These were just the kind of things I was always afraid of... somewhere back in my mind. In fact, these are just the things I might have expected, if I knew what to expect, these things and not others. I was just naturally so very used to them... deep down

I would slip into the cavern of the arbor outside from which I could look back and see the light from inside glowing and flinging itself from the door, rays of god-light piercing the darkness. The extensive arbor became a cave lit by fantastic florescent creature lights—waving beckoning siren-like arms and tendrils. I would dash inside to say something to Mary and then dash back out again. I could not remember when I had said something to her or even whether I had really even been inside recently and, if so, how many times had I come in and back out. Differences blurred

I also could not get beyond the front gate. I kept trying to, but would always stop short of the street and return inside the room under the pretext of saying something to Mary, who appeared (in my eyes) more and more of an observer each time. I could see then that I don't take objectification easily. I am mostly subject. My mental projections began to get way out of control. And I could see that I was projecting fantastic things, and that I saw what I wished and that any other person or event could be interpreted in bizarre and numerous ways. And it was clear that however close Mary and I had become, it

was not that close and she was soon designated as an “other,” and not in my little circle of confusion

At some point, I began to chew on some bread and Mary had cut some salami, still sticking with her agenda of what she thought a guided trip should be like. I would grab a piece of something and run off with it to ravishingly chew like mad. I was not really feeling the chewing or anything, and only occasionally became aware after the fact that I was now or had been recently eating. Time was almost a slideshow, where the slides were constantly being rearranged

Inside became still more oppressive. I now vigorously resented Mary’s presence and her comments more and more. She kept suggesting that I lie down and put out the light, which I refused to do. I kept inferring hostile motives to anything she said or I was embarrassed by her lack of subtlety. I felt she wanted me to really get the fear that I already felt approaching. She had no clue what I was really experiencing

When I just couldn’t stand it anymore, I insisted that we had to walk outside. Together we walked up toward the Berkeley campus. I had really developed an attitude by that time about Mary. She was just too coarse in her manner of approaching me. Whatever she said, I did something with in my mind, so that she became many different persons successively in relation to me. Sometimes she was loving, sometimes hateful, making fun, sadistic, not aware, aware—etc. Mostly unaware

Often, I would try on several ways of interpreting a statement and see her change right in front of me, even though she had made but one statement. I also knew that I was doing all the arranging. The streets, the cars, people and colors were simply beyond description. The emphasis was not on the heightening of sensations

such as with pot (although sensations were very vivid). Somehow, vivid colors were way beside the point. The real focus was in the change and manifestations of the world, and of each of the objects in it – rearrangements of time

To see something undergo complete change in character depending on what I was projecting was indeed frightening. It was also fascinating and illuminating. I was learning more this evening about myself than I had in my entire life thus far. Sometimes walking a block would take an infinite period of time to cover, although the walking pace remained the same. At other times, it was gone in a second. I could walk and walk and still the block would never end. The speed anything traveled by varied tremendously. A shoe, a dress in a store, would become animate or would change personality

The five minutes it took to walk a block or so in Mary's time seemed to last, for me, at least an hour. Time was simply very arbitrary, seemed ambiguous, and was entirely dependent on me. And I was not dependable right then. "Whose sense of time was real?" I thought

People that were passed in the street tended immediately to become stereotypes and adjust themselves to the various roles I projected, right in front of my eyes. An Asian walking by became a stereotypical 'Chinaman', bobbing, fattening, and hunching, while across the street a dull lanky bookworm raced furiously by us. This was simply astounding for me to see. I was doing this stereotyping!

All this walking toward campus had been free from the fears that had begun earlier at the apartment. Moving up Telegraph Avenue, we reached the student union at Bancroft Way, which immediately arranged itself like an

artist's blueprint, with all the trees becoming exactly the same—cropped and geometrical. We continued on deeper into the campus

As we walked around the large central fountain, Mary began to wander off, seeming almost to beckon to me. Once again, I resented this and began to project anxiety on her part until she finally went and sat on a wall. I did not like to be manipulated in even the most subtle way. I was way more subtler than that at this time. I thought she was pretending to not know me. Perhaps I was behaving badly and didn't know it. Her face would appear to be like my own, but glowing a stereotyped boyish-girl look, foxily, and cunningly leading me toward hell

By this time, we were walking all over the inner Berkeley campus. Everything was fantastic. Somewhere along in here, I began to become more actively paranoid and to project that paranoia into everybody and everything. This was enhanced when we reached Berkeley's famous outdoor Greek Theater. I, who had read all the classic Greek writings, went up and touched the marble front with the huge word "Greek" etched in it. I was terribly moved and I tried to go inside. The gate was locked. I rattled it

I was crushed and just couldn't understand why I was being locked out from the Greeks. This was, to me, a 'bad' sign and things kind of went downhill from here. The whole persecution thing picked up. I began to almost hate Mary at times. Trees were waving their arms like calisthenics, doing jumping jacks. The ground everywhere was littered in patterns of red letters. Grass and shrubs became tendrils red and grasping, holding, and tearing at my feet

Things loomed up ominously and then fell back again. The sky was shooting stars and falling heavens. Every car became a police car. Every person a policeman, complete in all the details. An actual police car caused a scare once and I started to run. I felt time slow down as I tried to pick up speed, moving my (seemingly then) huge body from a standing start into motion. I could feel the wind moving past my face, wind created by my own motion. Mary urged me not to hurry, not to run. I stopped

I had a fantastic feeling of time changing depending on the speed I traveled. By this time, I had more than enough of this state of panic and asked Mary to guide me home. She agreed and we started back. This trip took forever. We walked and walked. When we finally reached the student union (only a block or two), I wanted to just fall down because I couldn't face the four-block walk from there back to my place. I knew it would take positively forever. Forever!

I could see in my mind the complete physical distance home, all four blocks of it, and I knew that it had to be covered in this very mechanical way before I would be home—one eternal step after another. There was this problem with time, simply—the traveling of this mechanical distance. It could take forever. We walked and walked, with me constantly fearing policemen

I was still projecting hostile actions and intent on Mary, as if she were trying to get rid of me. Or, as if I was trying to get away from her. And then a very striking thing happened, something I have never forgotten. A couple came down and out of a dark alley. It was a drunk black couple, jostling each other as they came. They were somewhat crude and very happy. They got into a car and I saw that they were a middle-aged white

couple, and not particularly happy. This proved to me that racism existed in my own mind, although I never was aware of it before. I assumed I was not in the least bit racist. My mind did that. Out there what I saw was coming from me, from in-here. I was doing that, me

As we walked, Mary pointed out a ram's head shape in a shop window, her face was glowing and smiling, now somewhat evil, menacing. I simply could not imagine how I could possibly go the last two blocks without being killed. Simply, how could anyone get two blocks and still be alive in this world? It seemed that chance would destroy me or that my sense of time might stretch yet more and I would never be able to reach home, like the old conundrum of halving the distance to the finish line. Theoretically you never get there

As it was, it seemed to take at least one and one half hours to go the last three or four blocks. This was in my time, which 'WAS' time for me. When we finally reached the gate to my house, I told Mary that I was fine and to leave me. No problem. She said goodnight and walked off into the night and disappeared. Her promise not to leave me under any circumstance was canceled by my simply mentioning her leaving. She left as soon as asked. It was my own strength of will that caused it. I said "Go!" and she skedaddled. Gone

Although I had just asked her to leave, I was sad about how easily she just walked away, leaving me there in this state. Yet, I felt that I was fated for this and had realized by this time that no one could watch or prevent me from coming to harm because the harm was simply already in myself. There was no running farther and I felt myself closing in from all sides with a heaviness and a horror

I walked slowly up the path to my door, which was still covered (more than ever) with red, blood-like waving, grasping plants – fuchsia. The light from my doorway illuminated the arbor and the entire entranceway with a fantastic radiance, a brilliant cave that called, lured, and beckoned me to what I could no longer run from. This was it, and I knew that I had arrived at the business end of this project. I had

The door opened to the dull and scattered light of the lamp. As it swung shut, I felt that I was entering into myself completely. And I knew that all of me was here, that I brought it with me. The inside was now the same as the outside, secure only from chance or authoritative intervention by the door. I was simply trapped

Suddenly there seemed to be no more hallucinations, or rather, if any, it was the hallucination of the dull heaviness and exact sameness of my room now having full sway. I knew that I could not go out. I knew that I would now lie down and turn out the light. And I knew that I was alone in the largest sense of that word. I slowly removed my shoes, sweater, and pants, everything, turned off the light, and crawled into bed. Darkness

And I reached up and opened the small wooden shutters above my head to let a slight light in from the outside alley which looked into a carport. Then, lying there partially covered, things came to me all in one. I felt my aloneness. I knew that all the running and the fear, everything that happened during that evening, was only myself. I had witnessed it. And I could never escape, for I brought it with me. There was nowhere to find a reprieve now, simply nothing anyone could do

Mary could hold me, protect me, but never could she or anyone protect me from this, my very self. The thoughts

continued to roll in—my relationship with Professor David, my delinquency in studying, and its sad ending, and then my attempt to go on alone in study, without a teacher. Now I could see the fruitlessness of this approach, since I now saw that it was not the study, not any particular subject that was the point. It was the teacher, the student, the working together, the mutual care about the work that made the difference. I didn't feel like studying

I was overcome with despair. I realized that there was no one in the world who meant enough or could mean enough to help me if I could not even help myself. What, in a word, was happening was that the special something within me that I had valued all my life, my spirit, my soul, was trapped for the first time completely, and it was dying. Up until now, I had always used my quick mind to rationalize and escape these hard thoughts. It was easy to forget what I found so hard to remember

This whole evening I had been dying. Not quickly and fast, but slowly, ebbing. I was withering away bit by bit, relinquishing hold after hold on the world. Letting it go. Letting it go on. As if I could stop it. Fear was fantastic. I clutched and clung and cried and pleaded with myself. I felt it going, and finally allowed and OK'd its going. I knew that tonight I was going to die, that this was the end of my life. In fact, I was dying

As I lay there on the small bed in the darkness of the room, I became aware of a peculiar feeling on my chest and arms. There is only one substance that is warm and wet with a special slipperiness, a quickness of feeling—blood. I was bleeding to death there on my cot. I thought that maybe, without knowing it, I had cut my wrists and didn't remember or want to know. I touched

my wrists and realized that I was clawing and scratching at them. I madly tried to find the lamp switch, turned it on, and looked. I could see no blood. I turned the light out and lay back down

But again, I felt the slipperiness of blood, stronger now, and thought that perhaps I wouldn't let myself see it flowing. I jumped up before my strength was gone and turned on the overhead light. I stood naked before the cheap full-length mirror. The floor and the bed were covered with blood. I looked in the mirror and saw that I was, in fact, covered with blood

God, I was bleeding to death. Michael was dying. I felt weak. I had so little strength left. And I was already so exhausted. I did not know how or when I had cut myself, but I obviously had, and I knew that I had very little time anymore to live. I was alone and dying far from anyone I cared for. In fact, there was no one I could think to ask. I had all the people I knew with me, there in my head, and none could help

Was I bleeding to death or did I just imagine that I was? I could not answer this myself. Anyway, what was the difference? A thought occurred. Perhaps Professor David could tell me. Professor David, with whom I had argued many times, but for whom I did have respect. His reality somehow stood outside my own. I had not entirely compromised his relations with me, although even in that I hung on by a thread. I still had faith that the professor had an independent opinion from me

If somehow, I could get to his door, the professor alone would know the truth and be able to tell me if I was dying or not, and would do what could be done (if anything was possible) to save me. He alone in all the world I trusted to judge the truth. I frantically pulled on some clothes and rushed outside through the arbor and

out into the street. Everywhere was blood. The outside world was also bleeding and dying. The world and I were dying completely alone, together

As I faded, the world faded with me. Fear had me to the death. I began to have doubts about even the professor. I could not go to Professor David's. We were not even very friendly at that point. And I felt that I did not deserve any sort of reprieve. I deserved to die. I thought of Mary and started toward her house

But no, she could not tell me. She was already part of my world and that world was dying, was dying and bleeding to death. She was already within my world and therefore could not judge it. Was I in fact bleeding to death?

But there was perhaps one other world. Professor David's world was not my world. And, though I disagreed with the professor about all kinds of things, I discovered that the bottom line was that I believed the professor's world could judge the death of my own. I hurried faster toward the professor's home. It seemed to take hours. Behind me was blood where my feet had stepped, a trail of blood. I felt weaker and weaker. Each car was the police who would prevent me from reaching the professor. I would bleed to death there in the street if they stopped me, and everywhere: scarlet letters

The sky was blood red, dripping and hanging there where it had been ripped apart. Plants and houses dripped and poured blood in torrents onto the street. I would never make it. And it took hours and hours and hours. A car behind me overtook me after an unbearable length of time, pulled across my path and stopped. A huge black man waited there grinning at me and then pulled on into the driveway. I went faster. Time slowed

Now, only a block away, I ran with my last strength up stairway after stairway of the professor's house. The highest lights were on in the house. I rang the bell and slumped against the door. I then pulled away and stood there trembling, trying to pull myself together. The door opened. It was the professor. I stammered something. I went inside where I tried to explain. Professor David did not seem to understand. He of course had no idea what was happening. I told him I was bleeding, showed him, and watched the professor's face change again and again ... hostile, furious, helpful, kind

At one point I could see that the professor saw my bleeding, but was going to say nothing. He would let me die as I deserved. The professor seemed very impatient and kept asking me if I wouldn't have coffee as if to change the subject. I was horrified and broken. I prayed that I would not be left to die. Sometimes it seemed that the professor became mechanical, like a windup toy, sitting there jerking

I slowly calmed down. In time, I was able to speak and we talked and I felt his words and thoughts and his heart. I saw that the professor still cared for me and that he accepted the entire Michael, including the bad-student, and not just the 'good' part of me. There were two forces within my mind fighting and I saw that these forces were within myself. They were two parts of me, parts not distinct, but spread over a million thoughts and decisions

These two forces were forced to face each other that night in Berkeley. I saw these two opposite and hypocritical forces and had to admit them or die. They were there, part of me. I saw them and allowed that they both existed. They both were true at the same time

I then began to become still calmer and clear and saw for the first time into Professor David's eyes and soul, and at the same time, into myself. I saw that, aside from all the noise, I was clean, that I was honest, and that that part within me that I had always hoped was good and pure was in fact good and pure. I could see that I was a real and good person, one with an identity, and a fine one

I felt as strong as the professor and looked unerringly into his eyes. I was myself for the first time in my life. There was a real me and I 'was' that, and it was good. My self was a clear and a strong, tough thing. Indestructible. I was everything I had ever dared dream or hoped to be. I talked with the professor about our working relationship and I felt honest and clean—straight-forward. I was able to speak of all things, including our teacher-student relationship, my own failures and wrongs, my inability to enjoy studying

I could look at my quite ambiguous self and be unashamed of it. That was simply how it was, and I,

Michael, admitted it for the first time. Later that night I left the professor, who must not have known what was happening, and walked home. The world around me was also clear and clean. At home, I started to climb into bed thinking that I would sleep now and get up early to think about all of this. I stopped. No, that was what I always did, trying to save time, conserve time and energy, missing all the rewards. No. No sleep

I would have myself a sunrise and I dressed and went outside. And the world was clear and clean. I walked and walked and the sun rose. I was thrilled, delighted. The world was everything wonderful. I passed an old man and said "Good morning!". The man replied "good morning." "A fine morning too," I added out loud. And it

was. I thought about many things and for the first time from the point of view of a subject, no longer just an object in the world, an object subjected to the world and at its mercy

I was a person, a subject in this world. I met different people and spoke freely and hard brilliant straight into their eyes. So many things I had learned about time, about my own romanticism, about the self. My tightly wrapped person and life had cracked and some light shone in. The outer world that I had struggled with, the world of hard persons and ugliness, was found to be none other than my own mind, my particular world. There were not two worlds, my personal view and the external world. I had carried with me, oddly enough, my copy of Ovid's "Metamorphoses," and was reading from that

On that acid night these two parts of me were seen to be one and the same. And I saw this in real time and accepted this as true. It changed things forever for me because I now knew that all of what I saw was part of my own mind, how I saw life. And it could change and be changed. It was like a sailor discovering his sails. I

suddenly was mobile for the first time. I could change myself and the things around me. I was no longer a victim, a masochist being dragged through life by external events. All that had changed through this LSD experience

While I could not change all exterior events, I 'could' change how I received and viewed those events. I could change my mind. And I did. From that day forward, I had a mission: to find out more about how the mind worked. I wanted to endlessly revisit those moments of insight and clarity I had experienced. I had imprinted on that particular night in Berkeley and from that moment

on, I measured who I was from that time, from that experience, that imprint

I was born. My interest in the mind, the psyche, and all things psychological was peaked. I couldn't get enough of alternative culture—alternatives. I had experienced an alternative to everything I had known up to that point, and the comparison between this new experience and my life to that point gave me a new life. I was changed

Suddenly, alternate points of view made a lot of sense to me. I immersed myself in anything out of the ordinary, anything that gave me a new perspective My mind was open. I had experienced a radically new way of seeing myself and, with that part of my experience, I was a lot more willing to try other perspectives, including those of other people. And so, there you have it. You have heard my first acid trip. Marijuana never interested me much, but I thought long and hard before I would take acid again. At the same time, the acid experience was so important, so pivotal, that it took me decades to get over reifying it

That's the danger of any spiritual experience, which is like breathing. We have such an experience and like holding our breath, try to hang on to it. And life has to punch us in the gut until we let go of it and learn to breathe

Dec 7, 2020, 4:40 PM

Continuing with my story about searching for The Beats. Unfortunately for me, I never took to schooling. I guess I am hard to teach. I have ended up teaching

myself almost everything I know how to do. Well, there was one year when school was good, and one teacher. When I was in fourth grade, a benign teacher by the name of Mrs. Althouse took me under her wing. I flourished, but the very next year, in fifth grade, the mean Mrs. Ryder ended that exception and proved the rule, that I hate school. All the other years I went to school were just a long, long, and boring wait

There was one other uptick when I won the Biology Award for my high school in tenth grade and got sent to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) for a special showing of my study of the "Marine Fauna of the North Shore of Boston," but I followed that award by flunking out the same year, and having to repeat the whole grade. I should mention that I took Algebra One three semesters in a row because I could not understand that abstract a language. They finally passed me, just to get me out of there. Oddly enough, I got straight A's in geometry. Go figure

And I was not well-behaved either. Toward the end, I was thrown out of school a couple of times for bad behavior, and I finally just left school on my own accord, and never finished high school. I was perhaps too anxious to stop with all the teaching and just get out in the real world and live. And so, I did

About the first significant thing I did after dropping out of school was to leave Ann Arbor (along with my friend John Stanger) and hitchhike out the legendary Route 66 to Venice Beach in Santa Monica, California, where one of the great Beat Movement meccas was already in decline

We headed out U.S. 12 across Michigan to Chicago. There is nothing quite as lonely as being stranded in a poor section of Chicago in the rain in the middle of a

cold October night trying to hitch a ride. All I can remember is the wet pavement and the hazy light of the occasional streetlamp and waiting. It has been a long time, but I believe from Chicago, we hitchhiked to St. Louis, to Tulsa, to Oklahoma City, then Amarillo, and on to Albuquerque. In Albuquerque we got picked up by a fellow with a fancy new Plymouth who asked us if we wanted to take a detour for a night down to Juarez Mexico and have some fun

CIUDAD JUAREZ

Well of course we wanted to go and we did. I will spare you the blow by blow details, but suffice to say that in Juarez I could drink tequila at a bar, and before I knew it I was drunker than a skunk. The tequila led to a whore house and the rest followed the natural order of things. I woke up back in the U.S. in a cheap motel along Route 66 with a harsh hangover, but that was not all. Every cent we had was gone. That man had shown us a good time, waited until we passed out, taken whatever valuables we had (and they were few), and then was on down the road. I was left only with some experience that I had never had before and not to mention (later on) a case of the clap from the whorehouse

John and I hitchhiked on to Santa Monica with some money my parents wired me through Western Union. Can I ever thank my parents enough for being who they were? Back then, I just took it for granted

Anyway, I was already discovering the difference between expectations and reality. But hey, what good beatnik has not been with a whore or two? As mentioned, I came down with the clap. Worse, I had no medicine to cure it. What a mess. It really was no fun. I finally went to some public health clinic in L.A. (such as they were back then), waited and waded through that,

and was administered sulfur pills, a very slow cure indeed. There were no antibiotics available for someone like me, just off the street

VENICE BEACH SANTA MONICA

For a time, when we first arrived at Venice Beach, with the few dollars we had, John and I rented a two-room suite where we stayed. The rooms were in one of those buildings along Venice Boulevard, with all the Venice-Italy type arches and trim. The building was more like a home for winos and drug addicts than anything else, and therefore generally creepy. We shared the bathroom with the entire floor and with little to no furnishings; the rooms were more like a wasteland, a place we spent more time away from than in. But our money soon ran out and my friend John went back to Ann Arbor (I don't remember why), leaving me to find my own way. With no more rent money, the rooms were abandoned, and I was soon back out on the street. As I look back on it today, I can't remember anyone else my age there, at least not many. Of course, I always liked to hang with those older than myself anyway. After all, they had all the wisdom and experience that I so desperately wanted

For a short time, I worked in a small neighborhood convenience store stacking shelves, something I knew how to do from jobs at the A&P and Wrigley food stores back in Ann Arbor. I had so little food then that, back in the stockroom, I would wolf down anything I could find around the store and that would be my meal for the day. Of course, I had to do this without the proprietor finding out. I am not sure how I left that job, but it might have been when I found a room to stay in the basement of the Gas House. I never liked working for someone else

What did I do all day and most nights? In retrospect, not much it seems. I would mostly just hang out, ponder life, and talk. Conversations were big. And that was enough back then. Of course, I would look for women, but being naturally shy by nature, those opportunities were few and far between, not to mention that I had gonorrhea for most of the time I was in California that trip. That didn't help romance at all

THE GAS HOUSE

I am trying to paint you the flavor and I could go on, but I write this just to give you a sense of what it was like, where I was coming from, and what I was trying to do. By that time, I was living at the (now legendary) Gas House, the notorious art gallery and Beat gathering place at 1501 Ocean Front Walk right on Venice Beach. It held sway for three years, from 1959 through 1961, and was one of the main centers of the Beat movement during its demise. There I met and hung out with icons like Lawrence Lipton, Eric "Big Daddy" Nord, Mad March, the poet Taylor Mead, the artist Ed Newell, and Tamboo the conga player

Everyone came there, including Kerouac, and later Ken Kesey, and after I left, folks like Janice Joplin, Peter, Paul and Mary, and so on, also came. I remember drinking whisky with Joplin one night (she drank most of the whiskey), but that was later on at the Grande Ballroom in Detroit around 1966. Joplin and I spent the late part of an evening talking at the back of the Grande

This was still 1960 and I lived in an old walk-in cooler (a non-functioning one) in the basement of the Gas House. It was not large, but made of beautiful natural woods inside, and of course there were the racks where food was stored. That was where I slept

At that time, I was (or wanted to be) an artist, or thought I was, a painter in oils and, of course, a teeny bit a poet. Everyone was. I spent my days... or more likely nights... painting, drawing, and writing poems, "Beat" poems of course. By that time, I was not only yearning for the Beat life but, since misery loves company, I was also searching for a partner, a woman to love, one who would love me just as I was. Imagine that! I had no money and lived on what I could find or fall into, picking up old cigarette butts on the long wide sidewalk that ran up and down Venice beach along the ocean. I had nothing, but I was in California and I was living with the Beats. And that itself was something!

And then there was my artist friend (a really talented painter) found hanging from a rafter in his upstairs flat, an artist like me who decided to commit suicide, why I never knew. He was much more gifted than I

DRINKING SWEET WINE

I remember going to a party along Venice Beach in a small house of a friend or at least someone I had heard of; I believe it belonged to Tamboo the conga player and Mad March, his woman. I brought with me half a gallon of cheap wine to pass around. I must have been nineteen years old at the time and a young nineteen at that

When I came through the door of the house, where the party was being held, there were two federal narcotic agents waiting. They were frisking each person as we came in, looking for dope, and paid no attention to my wine or the fact that I was underage. They didn't even check my ID. I was directed to sit down along a wall with a string of other folks who already had gone through the same routine. So, there I sat while the feds continued to play their game, frisking each person who

showed up at the party. Needless to say, I was very nervous

In my nervousness I opened the wine and started to take a sip or two. Well, before I knew it, I drank the entire half gallon all by myself. I didn't want to bring attention to myself as underage by trying to share it. Later, free, and outside once again, I puked my guts out for hours. Nothing makes you sicker than a wine drunk, especially sweet wine

Venice Beach and the Gas House was the real deal, the dying remnants of the Beat Movement, certainly enough to give me a taste of what Beat life was all about. However, all in all, the bloom was coming off the rose. The characters I found myself with were stained by their own habits and made a better story in a book than close friends. It took me quite a while to acknowledge my disappointment and realize that I did not want to spend my life with these folks, bohemian or not

WILD RIDE TO NORTH BEACH, SAN FRANCISCO

I can remember one all-night car ride from L.A. to San Francisco, too many of us packed into the vehicle, penniless, and probably high on something, hurtling through the night and up along the Pacific Coast on highway 101, all squashed together like that

When we finally reached North Beach, San Francisco (which was then the heart of the bohemian culture in that city) near dawn, the first thing we did was to pull into an outdoor vending area and pile out of that cramped car into the cool night air. The stars were out. Someone pried open a cigarette machine and we made off with what coins we could find

And later, I found myself standing outside a bakery on one of San Francisco's steep narrow streets waiting for the bakers to throw out the day-old baguettes, and we feasted on those. Perhaps one of us would lift a sausage or some cheese from an all-night grocery and we would have that too. And cigarettes; somehow, we always had cigarettes. Usually wine appeared along the way as well; that and marijuana were the common denominators back in those days

I have a drawing of me sitting on a statue on Telegraph Hill, up near Coit Tower. I had climbed up there. It was 4:00 AM, November 2nd, 1960. I believe it was drawn by an artist named Verne Gagne or something like that

And I can remember spending time at the City Lights Bookstore, founded by the Beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti. I was finally in San Francisco, in North Beach, where the Beats hung out. I had been to the three main habitats for the Beat Movement, Greenwich Village (NYC), Venice Beach (Santa Monica), and North Beach (San Francisco). I came, I saw, and I was too late. The soul of the Beats had already flown. Only the remains remained. It was not long until my internal clock told me it was time to go back to tranquil Ann Arbor

My travels, the whole trip, was a bohemian phantasmagoria and I had been wanting something like that for a very long time. But life there was also very sketchy, like riding the edge of a vortex from which I could see deep within. And while I was thrilled by what I saw, in the last analysis I didn't want to be swept away in it. LSD would soon take care of that a few years later in 1964, but that's another story which I may tell

Plagued by my persistent gonorrhoea, it was time to go home to Ann Arbor and back to mommy and dad. I took

a bus to Barstow, California and hitched out from there with all my worldly belongings in a bag and my sketchbook under my arm. I was trying to get back to Ann Arbor

I finally caught a ride with a truly insane driver who held me captive for two days after asking me to put my precious belongings in his trunk and locking them there. He made me drive and, when the pieces of cardboard taped to the muffler gave out, he forced me to crawl under the car on my back amidst the overheated muffler and pipes and somehow put things back in place

I had to get away from the man, but my sketches and poems were all that I had to show that I was living the beatnik life, and I was loathe to abandon them simply to escape with my old ordinary life

And I was dead tired. I had been up for two days driving. Then somewhere near Gary Indiana, after perhaps 54 hours on the road and tired as tired can be, the man dashed into a rest stop to take a leak and mistakenly left his keys in the car

In a flash, I had my things out of his trunk and was standing in the café close by other people when he came out of the restroom. My hands were shaking but I was clutching my sketchbook to my heart. He gave me one fierce glare and went out to his car and drove off. Otherwise, I would have been headed for New York City and who knows what else. I hitchhiked on up to Ann Arbor

Dec 7, 2020, 5:19 AM