

– *Prelude* –

Underscoring Premises

I write from the vantage of two lifetimes: one beginning with my birth in 1932, the next beginning with a near-death experience in 1990. Bridging the two, like an overpass to the multi-lane road of life, is a very long span where I've heeded directions and other signs posted in my dreams.

Yes, I am now 89, still blessed with dreams and nightmares and the ability to record them. And yes, my dreams highlight a spiritual journey. The theme of journeying is a favorite in sagas, myths, and ballads from ancient times to the present. The theme of spiritual journeying is implicit in liturgies, labyrinths, and pilgrimages, and is basic to this memoir. The trail from birth to death—as charted in journals, memoirs, biographies, documentaries—has been of unceasing interest to humans. To these genres I add dreams that highlight my personal journey.

In the early 1970s my daughter Monica and I signed up for a weekend workshop on integrating dreams into waking life. We learned about types of dreams, how to record them, how to honor them in highly individual ways, and the benefits of using them as starting points for meditation. These practical steps led to group interaction, when a few of the participants' dreams from Friday night and Saturday night were examined and appreciated. By the end of the workshop, we were motivated to look for spiritual messages within our dreams.

In the new millennium, when I told Monica that I wanted to compile in a memoir what seemed most valuable in my dreams, she warned, "You may conclude that there is no conclusion." When I told my daughter Cathy about this endeavor, her immediate response was, "Don't let the book get all sweet and sentimental; keep some of the nitty-gritty in." Similar advice came from a volume that I was reading, Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul*: "Often care of the soul means not taking sides when there is a conflict at a

deep level. It may be necessary to stretch the heart wide enough to embrace contradiction and paradox.” In fact, almost from the start of writing dream notes, I allowed conflicting images, feelings, or arguments to have their say, trusting that meaning would eventually come through from unconscious to conscious awareness.

In compiling this memoir I have stayed close to the raw material, the dreams themselves. *I have made no additions but many deletions.*

That a single dream could well have been included in two or more very different sections is an indication of how interrelated all the dreams are. An example of this is a series of encounters entitled “Vignettes of Three Men Approaching Me,” which in its entirety, along with my reflections on it, could have been included in section 17, Erotic Encounters; section 18, Here Comes Everybody; or section 23, New Levels of Awareness. In this dream I observe that “the first man is forgettable, the second man not a good kisser. With the third, I lessen the distance between us. He is a good kisser and pleases me” (Jun 13, 2020). These dream encounters occurred during the fourth month of sequestering in the Covid-19 pandemic, by which time I was feeling an extreme loss of physical contacts.

For comparison, here is a dream from the eighth month of sequestering, when I was seemingly facing a void; it had qualities of a vision and reassured me on the emotional, mental, and spiritual levels. I include excerpts here:

Nov 27, 2020

Images That Would Do Credit to Dr. Seuss

I look out the ornate door of a large house (or possibly a resort hotel) where our family are staying. I see a very large truck piled high with goods—so high that they are held up there by tarpaulins with grommets. Now comes a larger truck with a larger load. Now comes a huge truck with goods piled sky-high. It’s a slow-moving caravan, like a circus parade, except the colors are muted, to sepia.

I call to my children, “Come! You have to see this!” They take their sweet time and miss the event. Oh well, the fact is, I am the one who is enthralled.

There's something wonderful about the caravan, its procession, and the abundance. In the tremendously high piles of goods, there are many wrapped parcels, each with bar-coding. If a customer wants a sweater, the driver of the truck can locate a parcel of sweaters readily.

REFLECTIONS:

1. That the goods are piled sky-high suggests a spiritual dimension to the abundance. I am awed by the procession, feeling as if the truck drivers high in their cabs are princes in full regalia, traveling on their prized elephants from one exotic place to another. Or the Magi traveling to Bethlehem on camels laden with gifts.
2. My allusion to illustrations by Dr. Seuss carries a tone of playfulness within a learning experience.
3. The call to my children is a call to my Child Self: Look at the abundance in life. Imagine that each of the parcels reveals a positive memory. Unwrap those memories to lift your spirit.

In this memoir, I have included some dreams in their entirety; but for a greater number, have relied on excerpts. Throughout, the *modus operandi* of dream groups was utilized: If a dream is exceedingly long and wandering, or if its scenes are completely disjointed, choose the scene that carries the strongest emotion. Even though a great many allusions, quotations, and references appeared in my morning reflections, I have included only the most pertinent.

The title *Dream Encounters* suggests a plurality of people in my dreams. Certainly a multitude of characters was available for illustrating my journey. Some have identifying tags, while others are simply strange bedfellows. For most of the persons, I have used first names only; for a few special ones, their surname, too. A principle regarding inclusion or exclusion of persons in this memoir was given to me in a dream in which a Voice from on high declared, "Whoever is important by his presence is here. Whoever is important by his absence is not important."

Because my children's names occur in several dream excerpts, I list them, their birth years, and given names here: Angelyn 1952, Cathy 1954, E. J. 1955, Monica 1957, Joe 1958, Chas 1961, Maggie 1962, Stephen 1964. Each has unique talents; all have earned one

or more college degrees and pursued a career. Three are world travelers, and two have marriage partners from far-flung countries (Japan, Argentina). All have a wide range of interests, and five have a family of their own. I am tremendously proud of all my children, admit to being in awe of them sometimes, and am unceasingly grateful to them for enriching my life.

Another name that recurs in dream snippets is Maureen. She is my sister (born 1940), who lived with us for a few years after she graduated from high school and who has remained important in our lives.

There are some major exclusions in this memoir. First, because three of my siblings and all of my children are alive, I have omitted dreams whose primary focus was on them. Second, even though my husband of 33 years (and ex-husband of 19 years) died in 2005, I respect his memory by omitting all but a very few statements that reference him—Edward (born 1930). Here it suffices to say, echoing *Jane Eyre*, “Reader, I married him.”

Year after year I consistently recorded nine nights of dreams each month, with anywhere from one to seven dreams per night. I stored those records in boxes and kept them through three changes of residence. For a very conservative estimate, multiplying $9 \times 12 \times 50$ years = 5,400 annotated dreams for me to sort through. Of greater interest to me than quantity, however, was the *span* of each dream theme: the period in which it developed, peaked in intensity and frequency, and then tapered off. My having recorded those spans was an aid in outlining this memoir.

My dreams are artifacts of personal progress, or lack thereof. The most obvious successes relate to performance in music and in drama. Although progress is shown in other areas, too, my focus has been on my personal journey, not on the tremendous societal changes in the United States during the past half-century. The dreams selected do touch on a few major issues such as racism, sexism, ageism, economic disparities, and the tyranny of insurance companies.

Well aware that memory is not based in chronology, I decided to compile sections of this book in *lifeline* order and entries within each section in *sequential* order. Collectively, there are examples of

two dozen almost universally recognized dream themes, including nightmares.

I propose that you look at my dreams as if looking within one gallery after another of an art museum that has arranged a retrospective. My sincere hope is that the images and themes challenge you to savor your own dreams, learn to appreciate nightmares, and apply the wisdom of both to everyday concerns.