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*Growing Old: Or Older and Growing*

What is it like to be seventy-five years old? It is not the same as being fifty-five years old, or thirty-five, and yet, for me, the differences are not so great as you might imagine. I'm not sure whether my story will be of any use or significance to anyone else, because I have been so uniquely fortunate. It is mostly for myself that I am going to set down a few perceptions and reactions. I have chosen to limit myself to the decade from age sixty-five to seventy-five, because sixty-five marks, for many people, the end of a productive life and the beginning of "retirement," whatever that means!

**THE PHYSICAL SIDE**

I do feel physical deterioration. I notice it in many ways. Ten years ago I greatly enjoyed throwing a Frisbee. Now my right shoulder is so painfully arthritic that this kind of activity is out of the question. In my garden I realize that a task which would have been easy five years ago, but difficult last year, now seems like too much, and I had better leave it for my once-a-week gardener. This slow deterioration, with various minor disorders of vision, heartbeat, and the like, informs me that the physical portion of what I call "me" is not going to last forever.

Yet I still enjoy a four-mile walk on the beach. I can lift heavy objects, do all the shopping, cooking, and dishwashing when my wife is ill, carry my own luggage without puffing. The female form still seems to me one of the loveliest creations of the universe, and I appreciate it greatly. I feel as sexual in my interests that I am still sexually alive, even though I can sympathize with the remark of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes upon leaving a burlesque house at age eighty: "Oh to be seventy again!" Yes, or sixty-five, or sixty!

So, I am well aware that I am obviously old. Yet from the inside I'm still the same person in many ways, neither old nor young. It is that person of whom I will speak.

**ACTIVITIES**

*New Enterprises*

In the past decade I have embarked on many new ventures involving psychological or even physical risk. It puzzles me that in most instances my engagement in these enterprises was triggered by a suggestion or a remark made by someone else. This makes me realize that frequently there must be a readiness in me, of which I am not aware, which springs into action only when someone presses the appropriate button. Let me illustrate.

My colleague Bill Coulson, along with a few others, said to me in 1968, "Our group should form a new and separate organization." Out of that suggestion came the Center for Studies of the Person - the zaniest, most improbable, and most influential nonorganization imaginable. Once the idea of the center had been suggested, I was very active in the group that brought it into being; I helped nurture it - and ourselves - during the first difficult years.

A niece of mine, Ruth Cornell, an elementary schoolteacher, asked, "Why is there no book of yours on our reading lists in Education?" This sparked the initial thinking that led to my book *Freedom to Learn*.

I never would have considered trying to influence the status conscious medical profession had it not been for my colleague Orienne Strode's dream of having a humanizing impact on physicians through intensive group experiences. Skeptical but hopeful, I devoted energy to helping start the program. We ran a great risk of failure. Instead, the program has become widely influential. Nine hundred medical educators have participated in the encounter groups, along with many spouses and some physicians-in-training, who bring in the "worm's-eye view" of medical education. It has been an exciting and rewarding development, now completely independent of any but the most minor assistance from me.

This summer we held our fifth sixteen-day intensive Workshop in the Person-Centered Approach. These workshops have taught me more than any other one venture in the past decade. I have learned and put into practice new ways of being myself. I have learned cognitively and intuitively about the group process and about group-initiated ways of forming a community. These have been tremendous experiences, involving a strong staff which has become a close professional family. We have done more and more risking as we try out new ways of being with a group. And how did I become involved in this large and time consuming enterprise? Four years ago my daughter, Natalie, said to me, "Why don't we do a workshop together, perhaps around a client-centered approach?" Neither of us could have possibly guessed all that would grow out of that conversation.

My book *Carl Rogers on Personal Power* (1977) likewise found its initial spark in a conversation. Alan Nelson, a graduate student at the time, challenged me on my statement that there was no "politics" in client-centered therapy. This led me into a line of thought that I must have been very ready to pursue, because portions of the book simply wrote themselves.

### *Foolhardy or Wise?*

The most recent and perhaps most risky venture was the trip that I and four other CSP members took to Brazil. In this case, the organizing efforts, the vision, and the persuasiveness of Eduardo Bandeira were the factors that caused me to agree to go. Some people believed the trip would be too long and hard for me at my age, and I had a few of these qualms myself about fifteen-hour plane flights and the like. And some felt it was arrogant to think that our efforts could in any way influence a vast country. But the opportunity to train Brazilian facilitators, most of whom had attended our workshops in the United States, in order that they could put on their own intensive workshops, was very attractive. Then there was another opportunity. We were to meet audiences of six hundred to eight hundred people in three of Brazil's largest cities. These were two-day institutes, in which we would be together for a total of about twelve hours. Before we left the United States, we agreed that with meetings of such a large size and such a short duration, we would necessarily have to rely on giving talks. Yet, as the time approached, we felt more and more strongly that to talk *about* a person-centered approach, without sharing the control and direction of the sessions, without giving the participants a chance to express themselves and experience their own power, was inconsistent with our principles.

So we took some extremely far-out gambles. In addition to very short talks, we tried leaderless small groups, special-interest groups, a demonstration encounter group, dialogue between staff and audience. But the most daring thing was to form a large circle of eight hundred people (ten to twelve deep) and permit feelings and attitudes to be expressed. Microphones were handed about to those who wished to speak. Participants and staff took part as equals. There was no one person or group exercising leadership. It became a mammoth encounter group. There was much initial chaos, but then people began to listen to one another.

There were criticisms - sometimes violent - of the staff and of the process. There were persons who felt they had never learned so much in such a short time. There were the sharpest of differences. After one person blasted the staff for not answering questions, not taking control and giving evidence, the next person said, "But when, if ever, have we all felt so free to criticize, to express ourselves, to say *anything*?" Finally, there was a constructive discussion of what participants would do with their learnings in their back-home situations.

After the first evening in São Paulo, when the session had been extremely chaotic and I was keenly aware that we had but six hours more with the group, I remember refusing to talk with anyone about that meeting. I was experiencing enormous confusion. Either I had helped launch an incredibly stupid experiment doomed to failure, or I had helped to innovate a whole new way of permitting eight hundred people to sense their own potentialities and to participate in forming their own learning experience. There was no way to predict which it would prove to be.

Perhaps the greater the risk, the greater the satisfaction. In São Paulo, the second evening, there was a real sense of community, and persons were experiencing significant changes in themselves. Informal follow-up in the weeks and months since then bear out the worthwhileness of the experience for hundreds of people in each of the three cities.

Never have I felt an extended trip to have been so valuable. I learned a great deal, and there is no doubt that we managed to create a facilitative climate in which all kinds of creative things - at personal, interpersonal, and group levels - happened. I believe we left a mark on Brazil, and certainly Brazil changed all of us. Certainly we have extended our vision of what can be done in very large groups.

So those are some of the activities - all extremely profitable to me-into which I have been drawn during this period.

### *Risk Taking*

In these activities there has been, in each case, an element of risk. Indeed it seems to me that the experiences I value most in my recent life all entail considerable risk. So I should like to pause for a moment and speculate as to the reasons behind my taking of chances.

Why does it appeal to me to try the unknown, to gamble on something new, when I could easily settle for ways of doing things that I know from past experience would work very satisfactorily? I am not sure I understand fully, but I can see several factors that have made a difference.

The first factor concerns what I think of as my support group, the loose cluster of friends and close associates, most of whom have worked with me in one or another of these endeavors. In the interactions of this group, there is no doubt that we actually or implicitly encourage one another to do the new or daring thing. For example, I am certain that, acting singly, no member of our Brazil group would have gone so far in experimentation as did the five of us working together. We could gamble because if we failed, we had colleagues who believed in us, who could help put the pieces back together. We gave each other courage.

A second element is my affinity for youth, and for the emerging lifestyle that younger people are helping to bring about. I cannot say why I have this affinity, but I know it exists. I have written about "the emerging person" of tomorrow, and I myself am drawn toward this newer way of being and living. I have wondered if I might simply be engaging in wishful thinking in describing such a person. But now I feel confirmed, for I have discovered that the Stanford Research Institute (1973) has completed a study in which it estimates that forty-five million Americans are committed to "a way of living that reflects these inner convictions: first that it is better to have things on a human scale; second that it is better to live frugally, to conserve, recycle, not waste; and third that *the inner life*, rather than externals, is central" (Mitchell,

1977). I belong to that group, and trying to live in this new way is necessarily risky and uncertain.

Another factor: I am bored by safety and sureness. I know that sometimes when I prepare a talk or paper, it is very well received by an audience. This tells me that I could give the talk twenty times to twenty different audiences and I would be assured of a good reception. I simply cannot do this. If I give the same talk three or four times, I become bored with myself. I cannot bear to do it again. I could earn money, I could obtain a positive reaction, but I can't do it. I'm bored by knowing how it will turn out. I'm bored to hear myself saying the same things. It is necessary to my life to try something new.

But perhaps the major reason I am willing to take chances is that I have found that in doing so, whether I succeed or fail, I *learn*. Learning, especially learning from experience, has been a prime element in making my life worthwhile. Such learning helps me to expand. So I continue to risk.

## WRITINGS

In thinking about this talk I asked myself, "What have I produced during this past decade? I was utterly astonished at what I found. The list of my publications, which my secretary keeps up to date, tells me that I have turned out four books, some forty shorter pieces, and several films since I turned sixty-five! This is, I believe, more than I have published or produced during any previous decade. I simply cannot believe it!

Furthermore, each of the books is on a distinctively different subject, though they are all tied together by a common philosophy. *Freedom to Learn*, in 1969, concerns my unconventional approach to education. My book on encounter groups, published in 1970, expresses my accumulating learnings on this exciting development. In 1972, *Becoming Partners* was published; this book pictures many of the new patterns in relationships between men and women. And now, *Carl Rogers on Personal Power* explores the emerging politics of a person-centered approach, as applied to many fields.

Of the two-score papers, four stand out in my mind - two of them looking forward, two backward. An article on empathy ("Empathic - An Unappreciated Way of Being") consolidates what I have learned about that extremely important way of being, and I think well of this paper. I also like the freshness of my statement on "Do We Need 'A' Reality?" Then, two other papers reflect upon the development of my philosophy of interpersonal relationships ("My Philosophy of Interpersonal Relationships and How It Grew") and my career as a psychologist ("In Retrospect: Forty-Six Years").

I look on this surge of writing with wonder. What is the explanation? Different persons in their later years have had very individual reasons for their writing. At age eighty, Arnold Toynbee asks himself the question, "What has made me work?" He responds, "*Conscience*. In my attitude toward work I am American-minded, not Australian-minded. To be always working and still at full stretch, has been laid upon me by my conscience as a duty. This enslavement to work for work's sake is, I suppose, irrational, but thinking so would not liberate me. If I slacked, or even just slackened, I should be conscience-stricken and therefore uneasy and unhappy, so this spur seems likely to continue to drive me as long as I have any working power left in me" (Toynbee, 1969). To live such a driven life seems very sad to me. It certainly bears little resemblance to my motivation.

I know that Abraham Maslow, in the years before his death, had a different urge. He experienced a great deal of internal pressure because he felt there was so much he had to say that was still unsaid. This urge to get it all down kept him writing to the end.

My view is quite different. My psychoanalyst friend Paul Bergman wrote that no person has more than one seminal idea in his or her lifetime; all writings by that person are simply further explications of that one theme. I agree. I think this describes my products.

Certainly, one reason for writing is that I have a curious mind. I like to see and explore the implications of ideas - mine and others'. I like to be logical, to pursue the ramifications of a thought. I am deeply involved in the world of feeling, intuition, nonverbal as well as verbal communication, but I also enjoy thinking and writing about that world. Conceptualizing the world clarifies its meaning for me.

Yet there is, I believe, a much more important reason for my writing. It seems to me that I am still - inside - the shy boy who found communication very difficult in interpersonal situations; who wrote love letters which were more eloquent than his direct expressions of love; who expressed himself freely in high school themes, but felt himself too "odd" to say the same things in class. That boy is still very much a part of me. Writing is my way of communicating with a world to which, in a very real sense, I feel I do not quite belong. I wish very much to be understood, but I don't expect to be. Writing is the message I seal in the bottle and cast into the sea. My astonishment is that people on an enormous number of beaches - psychological and geographical - have found the bottles and discovered that the messages speak to them. So I continue to write.

## LEARNINGS

### *Taking Care of Myself*

I have always been better at caring for and looking after others than I have in caring for myself. But in these later years I have made progress.

I have always been a very *responsible* person. If someone else is not looking after the details of an enterprise or the persons in a workshop, I must. But I have changed. In our 1976 Workshop on the Person-Centered Approach in Ashland, Oregon, when I was not feeling well, and at the 1977 workshop in Arcozelo, Brazil, I shed all responsibility for the conduct of these complex undertakings and left it completely in the hands of others. I needed to take care of myself. So I let go of all responsibility except the responsibility - and the satisfaction - of being myself. For me, it was a most unusual feeling: to be comfortably irresponsible with no feelings of guilt. And, to my surprise, I found I was more effective that way.

I have taken better care of myself physically, in a variety of ways. I have also learned to respect my psychological needs. Three years ago a workshop group helped me to realize how harried and driven I felt by outside demands - "nibbled to death by ducks" was the way one person put it, and the expression captured my feelings exactly. So I did what I have never done before: I spent ten days absolutely alone in a beach cottage which had been offered me, and I refreshed myself immensely. I found I thoroughly enjoyed being with me. I *like* me.

I have been more able to ask for help. I ask others to carry things for me, to do things for me, instead of proving that I can do it myself. I can also ask for personal help. When Helen, my wife, was very ill, and I was close to the breaking point from being on call as a twenty-four-hour nurse, a housekeeper, a professional person in much demand, and a writer, I asked for help - and got it - from a therapist friend. I explored and tried to meet my own needs. I explored the strain that this period was putting on our marriage. I realized that it was necessary for my survival to live my life, and that this must come first, even though Helen was so ill. I am not quick to turn to others, but I am much more aware of the fact that I can't handle everything by myself. In these varied ways, I do a better job of prizing and looking after the person that is me.

### *Serenity?*

It is often said or assumed that the older years are years of calm and serenity. I have found this attitude misleading. I believe I do have a longer perspective on events outside of myself, and hence I am often more of an objective observer than I once was. Yet, in contrast to this, events that touch me personally often evoke a stronger reaction than they would have years ago. When I am excited, I get very high. When I am concerned, I am more deeply disturbed. Hurts seem sharper, pain is more intense, tears come more easily, joy reaches higher peaks, even anger - with which I have always had trouble - is felt more keenly. Emotionally, I am more volatile than I used to be. The range from feeling depressed to feeling elated seems greater, and either state is more easily triggered.

Perhaps this volatility is due to my risk-taking style of living. Perhaps it comes from the greater sensitivity acquired in encounter groups. Perhaps it is a characteristic of the older years that has been overlooked. I do not know. I simply know that my feelings are more easily stirred, are sharper. I am more intimately acquainted with them all.

### *Opening Up to New Ideas*

During these years I have been, I think, more open to new ideas. The ones of most importance to me have to do with inner space - the realm of the psychological powers and the psychic capabilities of the human person. In my estimation, this area constitutes the new frontier of knowledge, the cutting edge of discovery. Ten years ago I would not have made such a statement. But reading, experience, and conversation with some who are working in these fields have changed my view. Human beings have potentially available a tremendous range of intuitive powers. We are indeed wiser than our intellects. There is much evidence. We are learning how sadly we have neglected the capacities of the nonrational, creative "metaphoric mind" - the right half of our brain. Biofeedback has shown us that if we let ourselves function in a less conscious, more relaxed way, we can learn at some level to control temperature, heart rate, and all kinds of organic functions. We find that terminal cancer patients, when given an intensive program of meditation and fantasy training focused on overcoming the malignancy, experience a surprising number of remissions.

I am open to even more mysterious phenomena - precognition, thought transference, clairvoyance, human auras, Kirlian photography, even out-of-the-body experiences. These phenomena may not fit with known scientific laws, but perhaps we are on the verge of discovering new types of lawful order. I feel I am learning a great deal in a new area, and I find the experience enjoyable and exciting.

### *Intimacy*

In the past few years, I have found myself opening up to much greater intimacy in relationships. I see this development as definitely the result of workshop experiences. I am more ready to touch and be touched, physically. I do more hugging and kissing of both men and women. I am more aware of the sensuous side of my life. I also realize how much I desire close psychological contact with others. I recognize how much I need to care deeply for another and to receive that kind of caring in return. I can say openly what I have always recognized dimly: that my deep involvement in psychotherapy was a cautious way of meeting this need for intimacy without risking too much of my person. Now I am more willing to be close in other relationships and to risk giving more of myself. I feel as though a whole new depth of capacity for intimacy has been discovered in me. This capacity has brought me much hurt, but an even greater share of joy.

How have these changes affected my behavior? I have developed deeper and more intimate relationships with men; I have been able to share without holding back, trusting the security of

the friendship. Only during my college days - never before or after - did I have a group of really trusted, intimate men friends. So this is a new, tentative, adventurous development which seems very rewarding. I also have much more intimate communication with women. There are now a number of women with whom I have platonic but psychologically intimate relationships which have tremendous meaning for me.

With these close friends, men and women, I can share any aspect of my self - the painful, joyful, frightening, crazy, insecure, egotistical, self-deprecating feelings I have. I can share fantasies and dreams. Similarly, my friends share deeply with me. These experiences I find very enriching.

In my marriage of so many years, and in these friendships, I am continuing to learn more in the realm of intimacy. I am becoming more sharply aware of the times when I experience pain, anger, frustration, and rejection, as well as the closeness born of shared meanings or the satisfaction of being understood and accepted. I have learned how hard it is to confront with negative feelings a person about whom I care deeply. I have learned how expectations in a relationship turn very easily into demands made on the relationship. In my experience, I have found that one of the hardest things for me is to care for a person for whatever he or she is, at that time, in the relationship. It is so much easier to care for others for what I *think* they are, or *wish* they would be, or feel they *should* be. To care for this person for what he or she is, dropping my own expectations of what I want him or her to be for me, dropping my desire to change this person to suit my needs, is a most difficult but enriching way to a satisfying intimate relationship.

All of this has been a changing part of my life during the past decade. I find myself more open to closeness and to love.

## **PERSONAL JOYS AND DIFFICULTIES**

In this period, I have had some painful and many pleasant experiences. The greatest stress revolves around coping with Helen's illness, which during the past five years has been very serious. She has met her pain and her restricted life with the utmost of courage. Her disabilities have posed new problems for each of us, both physical and psychological - problems that we continue to work through. It has been a very difficult period of alternating despair and hope, with currently much more of the latter.

She is making remarkable progress in fighting her way back, often by sheer force of will, to a more normal life, built around her own purposes. But it has not been easy. She first had to choose whether she wanted to live, whether there was any purpose in living. Then I have baffled and hurt her by the fact of my own independent life. While she was so ill, I felt heavily burdened by our close togetherness, heightened by her need for care. So I determined, for my own survival, to live a life of my own. She is often deeply hurt by this, and by the changing of my values. On her side, she is giving up the old model of being the supportive wife. This change brings her in touch with her anger at me and at society for giving her that socially approved role. On my part, I am angered at any move that would put us back in the old complete togetherness; I stubbornly resist anything that seems like control. So there are more tensions and difficulties in our relationship than ever before, more feelings that we are trying to work through, but there is also more honesty, as we strive to build new ways of being together.

So this period has involved struggle and strain. But it has also contained a wealth of positive experiences. There was our golden wedding celebration three years ago - several days of fun in a resort setting with our two children, our daughter-in-law, and all six of our grandchildren. It is such a joy to us that our son and daughter are now not only our offspring, but two of our best

and closest friends, with whom we share our inner lives. There have been numerous intimate visits with them individually, and similar visits with close friends from other parts of the country. There is the continuing and growing closeness with our circle of friends here - all of them younger.

For me there have been the pleasures of gardening and of long walks. There have been honors and awards, more than I believe I deserve. The most touching was the honorary degree I received from Leiden University on the occasion of its four hundredth anniversary, brought to me by a special emissary from this ancient Dutch seat of learning. There have been the dozens of highly personal letters from those whose lives have been touched or changed by my writings. These never cease to amaze me. That I could have had an important part in altering the life of a man in South Africa or a woman in the outback of Australia still seems a bit incredible - like magic, somehow.

## **THOUGHTS REGARDING DEATH**

And then there is the ending of life. It may surprise you that at my age I think very little about death. The current popular interest in it surprises me.

Ten or fifteen years ago I felt quite certain that death was the total end of the person. I still regard that as the most likely prospect; however, it does not seem to me a tragic or awful prospect. I have been able to live my life - not to the full, certainly, but with a satisfying degree of fullness - and it seems natural that my life should come to an end. I already have a degree of immortality in other persons. I have sometimes said that, psychologically, I have strong sons and daughters all over the world. Also, I believe that the ideas and the ways of being that I and others have helped to develop will continue, for some time at least. So if I, as an individual, come to a complete and final end, aspects of me will still live on in a variety of growing ways, and that is a pleasant thought.

I think that no one can know whether he or she fears death until it arrives. Certainly, death is the ultimate leap in the dark, and I think it is highly probable that the apprehension I feel when going under an anesthetic will be duplicated or increased when I face death. Yet I don't experience a really deep fear of this process. So far as I am aware, my fears concerning death relate to its circumstances. I have a dread of any long and painful illness leading to death. I dread the thought of senility or of partial brain damage due to a stroke. My preference would be to die quickly, before it is too late to die with dignity. I think of Winston Churchill. I didn't mourn his death. I mourned the fact that death had not come sooner, when he could have died with the dignity he deserved.

My belief that death is the end has, however, been modified by some of my learnings of the past decade. I am impressed with the accounts by Raymond Moody (1975) of the experience of persons who have been so near death as to be declared dead, but who have come back to life. I am impressed by some of the reports of reincarnation, although reincarnation seems a very dubious blessing indeed. I am interested in the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and the conclusions she has reached about life after death. I find definitely appealing the views of Arthur Koestler that individual consciousness is but a fragment of a cosmic consciousness, the fragment being reabsorbed into the whole upon the death of the individual. I like his analogy of the individual river eventually flowing into the tidal waters of the ocean, dropping its muddy silt as it enters the boundless sea.

So I consider death with, I believe, an openness to the experience. It will be what it will be, and I trust I can accept it as either an end to, or a continuation of, life.



## CONCLUSION

I recognize that I have been unusually fortunate in my health, in my marriage, in my family, in my stimulating younger friends, in the unexpectedly adequate income from my books. So I am in no way typical.

But for me, these past ten years have been fascinating - full of adventuresome undertakings. I have been able to open my self to new ideas, new feelings, new experiences, new risks. Increasingly I discover that being alive involves taking a chance, acting on less than certainty, engaging with life.

All of this brings change and for me the process of change is life. I realize that if I were stable and steady and static, I would be living death. So I accept confusion and uncertainty and fear and emotional highs and lows because they are the price I willingly pay for a flowing, perplexing, exciting life.

As I consider all the decades of my existence, there is only one other, the period at the Counseling Center at the University of Chicago, which can be compared to this one. It too involved risk, learning, personal growth, and enrichment. But it was also a period of deep personal insecurity and strenuous professional struggle, much more difficult than these past years. So I believe I am being honest when I say that, all in all, this has been the most satisfying decade in my life. I have been increasingly able to be myself and have enjoyed doing just that.

As a boy, I was rather sickly, and my parents have told me that it was predicted I would die young. This prediction has been proven completely wrong in one sense, but has come profoundly true in another sense. I think it is correct that I will never live to be old. So now I agree with the prediction: I believe that I will die *young*.

## UPDATE --- 1979

I choose to fill out this chapter by concentrating on one very full year - 1979 - in which pain, mourning, change, satisfaction, and risk were all markedly present.

### *Living the Process of Dying*

In the eighteen months prior to my wife's death in March 1979, there were a series of experiences in which Helen and I and a number of friends were all involved, which decidedly changed my thoughts and feelings about dying and the continuation of the human spirit. The experiences were intensely personal, and some day I may write fully about them. For now, I can only hint. The following story is mostly about Helen, but I will concentrate on my portion of the experience.

Helen was a great skeptic about psychic phenomena and immortality. Yet, upon invitation, she and I visited a thoroughly honest medium, who would take no money. There, Helen experienced, and I observed, a "contact" with her deceased sister, involving facts that the medium could not possibly have known. The messages were extraordinarily convincing, and all came through the tipping of a sturdy table, tapping out letters. Later, when the medium came to our home and *my own table* tapped out messages in our living room, I could only be open to an incredible, and certainly nonfraudulent experience.

Helen also had visions and dreams of her family members, which made her increasingly certain that she would be welcomed "on the other side." As death came closer, she "saw" evil figures and the devil by her hospital bed. But when it was suggested by a friend that these might be creations of her own mind, she dismissed them, finally dismissing the devil by telling him he had made a mistake in coming, and she was not going with him. He never reappeared.

Also in these closing days, Helen had visions of an inspiring white light which came close,

lifted her from the bed, and then deposited her back on the bed.

In this chapter, I mentioned that in these last years the distance between us had grown increasingly great. I wanted to care for her, but I was not at all sure that I loved her. One day, when she was very near death, I was in an internal frenzy which I could not understand at all. When I went to the hospital as usual to feed her her supper, I found myself pouring out to her how much I had loved her, how much she had meant in my life, how many positive initiatives she had contributed to our long partnership. I felt I had told her all these things before, but that night they had an intensity and sincerity they had not had before. I told her she should not feel obligated to live, that all was well with her family, and that she should feel free to live or die, as *she* wished. I also said I hoped the white light would come again that night.

Evidently I had released her from feeling that she had to live for others. I later learned that when I left, she called together the nurses on the floor, thanked them for all they had done for her, and told them she was going to die.

By morning she was in a coma, and the following morning she died very peacefully, with her daughter holding her hand, several friends and I present.

That evening, friends of mine who had a long-standing appointment with the medium previously mentioned held a session with this woman. They were very soon in contact with Helen, who answered many questions: she had heard everything that was said while she was in a coma; she had experienced the white light and spirits coming for her; she was in contact with her family; she had the form of a young woman; her dying had been very peaceful and without pain.

All these experiences, so briefly suggested rather than described, have made me much more open to the possibility of the continuation of the individual human spirit, something I had never before believed possible. These experiences have left me very much interested in all types of paranormal phenomena. They have quite changed my understanding of the process of dying. I now consider it possible that each of us is a continuing spiritual essence lasting over time, and occasionally incarnated in a human body.

That all of these thoughts contrast sharply with some of the closing portions of the chapter, written only two years earlier, is obvious.

### *Activity and Risk*

Perhaps partly in spite of, and partly because of, Helen's death, I have recently accepted more invitations than usual to participate with other staff members in workshops at home and abroad. The list includes a workshop for educators in Venezuela; a large, turbulent workshop near Rome, with an international staff; a brief but deep experience with a Paris program for training group facilitators; a very rewarding regional person-centered workshop on Long Island (the second year with the same eastern staff); a person-centered workshop at Princeton, with many foreign participants; a fascinating workshop in Poland, held at a resort near Warsaw; and a beautifully flowing four-day workshop on "Life Transitions" in Pawling, New York.

I would like to comment on two of the programs mentioned above. The Princeton workshop, consisting of ninety persons, was probably the most difficult for me of any of the workshops in which I have participated. Yet, at least one of the staff feels it was the best such program we have ever conducted. For me, it was very painful, and the group only reached the edge, I felt, of becoming a community.

I perceive a number of factors as having made the workshop a painful experience. The staff had decided that this seventh annual person-centered workshop would be our last in this series; we felt very close to one another, but we were moving in different directions individually and we did not want these person-centered workshops to become a "routine" experience. The staff, from its long experience together, was probably more acceptant of negative, hostile, critical

feelings than ever before - and they were expressed in abundance by participants, directed toward one another and toward the staff. There were a large number from foreign countries, and their scorn, contempt, and anger at the United States and at the American participants was freely voiced. There were two persons who knew exactly how the workshop should be conducted. (The two views were very different, but they both were strongly against our unstructured approach, and each attracted quite a following, though not enough to change the general direction of the workshop.) There were also several participants who showed evidence of deep personal disturbance.

When all these factors were added to the usual chaos of a large group trying to develop its own program and find its own way, the result was horrendous. Frustration and anger were very frequently expressed. When some members endeavored to move in creative and positive ways, they were blocked by others. It seemed genuinely uncertain whether the trust placed in these individuals to sense and use their own power constructively would be justified. We were all our own worst enemies. Only toward the end of the ten days did the faint beginnings of a unity in divergence, and a community built on diversity, show themselves. Yet, to my surprise, many participants wrote later to tell of their very positive learnings and changes, which emerged from the pain, the turbulence - and the closeness. I too learned, but it was difficult learning.

The Polish workshop was unusual for a number of reasons. I could hardly believe the degree of interest in my work, which drew together ninety people, both professional and nonprofessional. The Polish staff felt insecure, so the facilitation came largely from the four Americans who were present. This was a disappointment at the time, because I had hoped for more Polish leadership. In the middle of the week-long session, as individuals sensed their power and began to use it, many, especially the professionals, used it to hurt others. Hurtful labels and diagnoses, skillful put-downs, became quite prominent. To me, it resembled Princeton, and I thought, "Oh, no! Not again!" But largely due to a beautifully honest Polish woman, a staff member, people began to be aware of the consequences of such behavior, and it dropped away. By the end of the week, we were a close and loving community.

I was unaware of the full measure of what had occurred until I received a letter from a participant some months later, from which I quote: "People here talk of the 'historic event' that took place in Leskarzev - so many diverse people, so many professionals, psychiatrists and psychologists (each of them possessing the ultimate truth about the helping relationship), hating and putting each other down constantly on an everyday basis - all of them now integrated, and yes, without losing their own personality, without any imposing." I am happy that I did not know in advance of the professional rivalry and backbiting.

I found the group as a whole to be very sophisticated, intelligent, and often more scholarly than a similar American group. Although they lived in a Socialist country, their problems, feelings, ways of coping, and their desire for openness and integrity seemed very similar to what I have found in every land.

### *Personal Matters*

As the year drew to a close, I was increasingly aware of my capacity for love, my sensuality, my sexuality. I have found myself fortunate in discovering and building relationships in which these needs can find expression. There has been pain and hurt, but also joy and depth.

The year was capped on January 8, 1980, when a large group of friends came to my home, bringing food, drink, songs, and surprises to celebrate my seventy-eighth birthday. It was a wild, wonderful, hilarious party - full of love, caring, fellowship, and happiness - which I will never forget. So I still feel I fit the second part of the title of this chapter. I sense myself as older and growing.

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