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The Other World Trek II
Summer '72

ENVELOPED BY THE MYSTERY

I discover these days that I just don't recognize myself, I find myself turning to glance into a mirror -- only to ask myself, "Who is that stranger?" And my heart leaps into my throat. I discover these days that it's that way for me all the time. I come upon myself as a stranger over and over again. Yes, yes, indeed, I am a stranger in Paradise. It's not quite clear to me how I got to Paradise: it wasn't on a train, or a ship, or a plane. . . I seem to have just shown up there. . . Except that I seem to remember bits and pieces of the journey.

It began in Australia when I experienced a bubbling up of new life -- sporadic though it was. It seems like it lasted about three years -- actually, I guess it was only two years. On the way home from Australia we stopped in India, and it was there that the bubbling became a flowing stream. One day it dawned on me that the gift of the West is expanded time, and that the gift of the East is expanded space. But the content is not in itself important. To others, I'm sure that it even seems a bit mundane. When I got back to Chicago, to my surprise I discovered that things were bubbling for my colleagues as well. And somehow in the midst of that realization, it dawned on me that I was in Paradise, or more precisely, it dawned on me, that I was a Stranger in Paradise.

The the joke was on me, for I began to realize that the bubbling and the flowing river had not begun in Australia at all. I remembered the bubbling spring and the flowing river where I grew up. Oh, things really bubbled in those days--my father used to tell stories. He was the most fantastic story teller! I wish I could tell stories like he did! I would say, "Do it again, Daddy, do it again," And there were only about four stories that I had him go over again and again. The bubbling was everywhere I turned. Why, when it rained, it was a real celebration. We used to go out into the kitchen and the whole family would make donuts. My mother made the batter; my father cooked them and my brother and I rolled them in the sugar. Then we would go out on the screen porch and eat donuts, play cards and watch it rain. Yes, I suppose that from the beginning of my consciousness things were bubbling for me. What I began to realize was that I had been a stranger in Paradise all of my life.

Therefore, as you might imagine, Paradise is fairly familiar terrain for me. There is the Land of Mystery, the River of Consciousness, the Mountain of Care and finally, there is the Sea of Tranquility. Yes, I know the topography like I know the palm of my hand. But it is like being an explorer: it's a lot more fun being on this side of the expedition than it is being in the midst of it.

I remember my first encounter in the Land of Mystery. . . Well, maybe it was not the first, but it was the occasion in which I became aware of the Land of Mystery as I had never been aware before. My aunt and uncle had come out to stay with my brother and me, while my mother went about a hundred miles away to the hospital for minor surgery. She would be back in a week. A couple of days later the telephone rang, and I was in the room next to the telephone when my aunt answered it. As I overheard the conversation, I said to myself, "No, you can't think things like that." The next morning we drove into town, and on the way into town I said to myself, "No, you can't think things like that." We got into town and drove by the hospital and my father came walking down the steps of the hospital. He was red in the face as he always got on particular kinds of occasions, and I said to myself, "No! you can't think thoughts like that." Three hours later my mother was dead. I was nine years old at the time. Oh! I had been stopped by the Mystery. Why? Why? FOREVER UNKNOWABLE. It was so unexpected: The mystery was ETERNALLY REMOTE. Nothing was secure. But, oh my, the honoring of the mystery; the singular

adoration from that point forth. Since then the mystery and I have walked hand in hand. If you've been to Africa you've seen how the African men walk down the street with their little fingers interlocked? That's like the mystery and me -- our little fingers are interlocked. I've walked hand in hand with the mystery ever since.

And then there is the River of Consciousness. You can't imagine how I came to know the River of Consciousness. It started when I was very, very young, with the fact that I never got to do any of the things I wanted to do. I never got to go hill climbing . I never got to go swimming because there were only boys and you know they went swimming in the river. . . I never got to do anything, because I was either a girl or too little. That is to say, I grew up with the most fantastic victim image one could ever imagine. And by the time I got married, I mean, it was highly polished. Now that wasn't a problem for my husband at all. As a matter of fact, he played it to the hilt. He won 90% of our fights that first year, (and that was a lot), solely by using, playing overagainst, my victim image. Well, as time went on, something happened to my victim image. It flipped. And I was a child of the fate and that began to intensify until it illuminated my destiny and I was able to BE my destiny. that is to say, I sensed myself as predestined. Now I don't know what that means theologically, but, oh boy, my Presbyterian grandmother would love that. I sensed myself with my DESTINY in my hands.

And then there was the Mountain of Care. Now this is relatively new terrain for me and yet not unfamiliar. One day, well, I don't remember the context exactly, but I remember that I was particularly present to the mystery and it suddenly came clear as a bell to me that there was no difference from one man to the next. It came clear that there is no distinction. Everyman is nameless. There is no quantitative or qualitative difference. No distinction. That was the experience of the Mountain of Care for me.

Then there is the Sea of Tranquillity. It seems barely within my reach. It's like I am standing on a cliff, looking down into the Sea of Tranquillity. It's really weird. What's happened is that I've discovered I just don't get angry anymore. That is to say, one of my resources, hostility, is just gone. I don't know why but I don't have any "natural" hostility anymore. Oh, I can stage a "mad" all right. You should see me. It makes my husband so nervous. He is always afraid my colleagues down the hall will hear me. And I know they can. That makes it all the more exciting. I mean when I am really putting one on that's the whole point. I had lots of practice with such drama before my hostility disappeared so it's really perfected. When I think the situation needs it, I just stage one. But the difference is that when I finish the show and turn to go away, there is always a grin.

As you can tell the topography of this paradise is quite vast. I am going to spend more time now in the Land of Mystery in the area of Enveloped by the Mystery. Now, when you go to the Other World, there is always an occasion -- something always occasions the trip. You don't just decide to go to the Other World. No one would dare such a venture.

I remember another occasion in which I had been particularly present to the mystery just one day after another after another after another in which I could see that mystery was everywhere I turned, and then all of a sudden the mystery was in me. I wasn't in the Other World; the Other World was in me; and I was in the Other World. And when you're in the other world, you don't go around observing, judging, weighing up, deciding and acting. You simply behold; you BEHOLD. And the mystery took its form in me. It was as though I wasn't there at all, but I was standing outside myself watching the whole thing -- watching the mystery. Then all of a sudden, there is ONLY the mystery. And then, oh my, awe is everywhere. There is awe there and there and there.

I remember another occasion that flipped me into the Other World. And these occasions happen in the most mundane moments. We have for the last two years lived in New York City. Ah, that's quite a

place. You look up at the buildings--awe! We lived near the only private park in New York City -- that's where the Religious House is -- I mean there is awe in that little private park. And then there's this lady known as the Grammercy Park Lady. She wanders around with several overcoats on. In the winter time that made great sense to me, but then it came spring time and she still wore them. I mean there is AWE. But that isn't the story I was going to tell.

The particular incident I wanted to tell you about that occasioned my visit to the Other World did happen in New York. It could have happened almost anywhere, but not to anyone. My husband had warned me before we married that having the name "Buss" was utterly unique but not unrelated to other parts of the universe. That phenomenon is likewise available to our children, Elizabeth, who is six years old, and Lindsey, who is four-years old. One day the children and I went up town shopping and when it was time to come back we caught the bus. And my, the AWE, as we rode along in that bus peering out the window. It was fantastic. Then we got off at our bus stop and began to walk home when Lindsey looked up at me and said, "The bus, my last name, they match." Awe! Unrepeatable! Uniquely manifest! You couldn't have destroyed the awe if you tried. My daughter tried: "But they are not spelled the same." But the awe is eternal.

Our awareness may pass on, but the awe never does. But have you ever noticed that when the awe gets too much for you and you just can't stand it any longer you try to destroy it. You begin to do battle with the mystery and you begin to bargain with him. But, the mystery always wins. He provides me with a kind of immovable design of the situation. He boxes me in, and in the midst of that boxing in, he determines -- that is to say, the possibility is only freighted in that box and nowhere else. Finally, that box is the sole vehicle through which any possibility is actualized and it is only on the other side of coming to terms with the fact that the mystery is in charge that he will bargain with you a bit. And then he'll let you bargain -- once you're utterly clear on that.

And I love to bargain. I'm really good at it, too. I grew up in South Texas, where if you went across the border, you learned to bargain. Have I ever told you about my theory about bargaining? It is different in the red man ur than it is in the yellow man ur. In the red man ur, what you do is that just as you get them going on what you really like, then you walk away, and they say, "Come back, come back, come back, come back." And so you reluctantly go back. You repeat that methodology about three times and if you are really good, you get the price-down. I tried that when I went to Asia, in Hong Kong. I'd walk away, and they didn't tell me to come back. Well, that disturbed me a bit, and so I did my homework trying to figure it out. Well, it's utterly different. What you have to do when you go to Asia is to say how much you'd really like that, and then you shuffle your feet a little bit and then you say, "That is really fantastic," and then occasionally you drop in that you were not going to pay that much for it, but you never walk away. You never walk away. Well, that's free. The other point about bargaining with the mystery is that it is never the same way twice.

Well, another thing you have to keep in mind when you are reminiscing about paradise is that it doesn't always strike you as paradise. One of the occasions I remember was when I was about 4 or 5 years old. I can't believe I was that young, but I'm sure I was. It was on the ranch 25 miles from town and there weren't any girls to play with but there was one little boy just my age. Though I was really a good little girl, he was a little bit of a devil. One day he had some matches, so we began to play with them. Well, you know, when you get started, it really gets fascinating. There is nothing to stop you. And so I am sure it was his idea that we go to the outhouse and start tearing off pages of the Sears catalogue (for you younger ones, that's not for reading), lighting them, and dropping them down the hole. My, was that fascinating! You get a little momentum with a Sears catalogue, they're thick. And we kept dropping them down the hole. And these gorgeous flames came up, and they got bigger and bigger and suddenly the whole outhouse was on fire. I didn't know what to do! I mean I was caught. Finally, I crept back and told my father that I couldn't

tell for sure, but I thought I saw the outhouse on fire. The flames swelled, and soon there was nothing. And I knew all eyes -- there were only 8 or 10 people -- were on me. My father didn't say anything. He never confronted me with how it was that that outhouse had gotten on fire. And so I was left with a kind of vacuum; but during that vacuum I kept wondering when he was going to mention that to me. Well, whether or not he knew that I had done it, it dawned on me who I was; that good little girl, an "outhouse burner-upper." What a mess, and had I made it! The universal eye was on me. Utterly, utterly exposed.

The various occasions that flip you into the other world somehow bring you into an intense awareness that has a clarity way beyond the intellectual. It has a kind of cleanness, a sharpness that allows you to be particularly present to those awarenesses. It has to do with what it's like to be a "stranger in paradise." And whatever else you know, you're a stranger there; and whatever else you know, it's paradise; and whatever else you know, you know that the only paradise there is, once you've been there, is the paradise of the Other World.

Well, let's talk about the area of Enveloped by the Mystery in a little different way. It's sort of like having x-ray vision. You can see to the dead center of -- Jodi Dressler -- like that. And you don't miss any situation, but you are able to pierce to the center of it. You are transparently involved in every situation. It is also like having the Midas touch. Everything you touch turns into gold -- only it is AWE it turns into. Then you want to say "on the other hand," but there is no "on the other hand" in the Other World. Another experience of the Other World is that it is like being on an expressway and suddenly you come upon a detour sign. You're no longer in charge! It's also like knowing you are being watched through a keyhole. All of which is to say, you begin to get whirled. The mystery engulfs you and you begin to whirl and whirl and whir I. And then if you'll let me, I'll tell you more.

And you'd better believe it. There is a kind of levitational submission. It's like you're traveling three feet off the ground all the time. Travel isn't the right word, because there is no movement, except a stationary kind. You find yourself all over the whole universe, only it is like over the whole world because

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it's three feet off the ground; that submission is due to the fact that you don't go out into never, never land but rather you're related three feet off the ground. It's like that movie "Around the World in 80 Days," except you never touch ground. And you'd better believe it!

Then sometimes there is a kind of panting, a welling. Did you ever find yourself utterly short of breath? You weren't running or anything, just sitting there, and you found that you were short of breath, and finally you had to take a deep breath and sigh? That kind of panting, or welling. You'd better believe it!

Another experience of this paradise of the Other World is a raging paralysis; all your passions are unloosed, and yet you are utterly paralyzed. Did you ever wake up trying to scream in the midst of a dream in which you knew you had to cry out for help and you couldn't? Perhaps in your dream you were trying to run, but try as you may you were utterly paralyzed. Or maybe you'd rather talk about a sense of chastened humility. You show up discovering yourself, just meek as a lamb. What happened to all that passion? -- a sense that I really got burnt. However you concretize it, you are Enveloped by the Mystery in raw particularization.

Then there is another kind of a flip, whereby I am no longer a stranger in paradise -- paradise is in me, who will be forever a stranger to this world forever strange. "Strange isn't enough. It's madness. It's madness. Do you want to hear some of it? **THE WHOLE WORLD BELONGS TO ME.** It's madness isn't it? It's madness all right. Do you want to hear more? **EVERY MOMENT IS A CELEBRATION.** Let those moments pass over your eyes. Every moment is a celebration. Do you want to hear more? Like it or not: **THIS IS MY FATHER'S WORLD.** Just period. And you may as well say it in front of all the witnesses, because they will see any way. **IT'S NOT MY WORLD: IT'S MY FATHER'S WORLD.** want to hear just a little bit more, like it or not? **I AND I ALONE AM RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WHOLE SHOW.** It's madness, isn't it? And none of it makes sense. Yet, I know that I am condemned to be a madman, forever possessed with the madness of a stranger in paradise.

Sarah Buss