

The Other World
Trek VI
Summer '72

I AM MY CREATIVITY

Several weeks ago in looking through an old hymnal -- the kind of hymnal from which my church sang on Sunday night -- well, I was shocked by the poetry and metaphors and images that were in those old hymns. I was not really shocked by those images and metaphors, but as I realized the lack of images and metaphors out of which you and I have been living for the last twenty -- I do not know how many years. You and I have been living out of a kind of black and white. I do not mean absolutes. But I mean we are living in times where we are getting clear on our sights and getting clear on where we stand and where things are in the universe. But it is almost as though what happens when the black and white breaks through and you hit transparency is like the carousel lights going on, the calliope beginning to play a waltz, and the horses starting their dance. The fullness of life begins to break through. The multi-coloredness, the multidimensionality breaks through. You and I are beings which live out of images; and on top of that, you and I are living in times in which brand new images are breaking through.

I used to worry, "Now what is it that I will tell my children when they ask me, 'What is life all about?'" Well, now, I figure it is very simple. Life is about four things: It is about the land, and it is about the river, it is about the mountain, and it is about the sea. Now, if that is too simple for you, I would say life is about mystery or wonder -- the wonder at just the surprise that is existence, and the surprise of my own showedupness and disappearingness in the midst of that. Life is awareness -- awareness of my freedom to relate to the mystery, to that final reality and to create an existence in the midst of that reality. Life is care or love or service released when one dares to struggle the struggle of God. (Then one finds he can have, or has the passion or love for his neighbor.) Finally, life is tranquility -- it is peace -- it is happiness that is in the midst of one's daring to stand before life, struggling freely the struggle that is his own existence.

I do not know what kind of images you have, but I have got several images of the land of mystery. For me the land of mystery is like the Scottish Moors with the sound of bagpipes beckoning you, frightening you, luring you. Now, the river is something else. I figure that it must be very, very deep and very wide. But there must be only four ripples as it flows along. Sometimes those ripples swell to huge waves, but still there are only four as it flows along. One of those is my awareness of my life as relationship. The second one is my awareness of my life as creativity. The third one is the awareness of my life as decision. And the fourth ripple is the awareness of my life as obligation.

Now, I want to read a script to you. And I would not say this to anyone else; but you being the group that you are, having seen what you have seen, I am going to read the script that you saw last week.

John 4: 815

As he walked down the street, Jesus throwing these words over his shoulder, said, 'Now, the Son of Man is glorified and in him, God is glorified. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in Himself, and He will glorify him now. If you knew me, you would know my father, too. From now on, you do know Him. You have seen Him.' Now, Phillip was wandering down the street a little bit further behind and he catches up and he says, 'Well, Lord, just show us the Father and we won't ask any more questions.'

Jesus answered, 'Phillip, have I been with you all this time and you still don't know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father.' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? I am not the source of the words which I speak to you. It is the Father who dwells in me doing His own work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. That is true. Or else, accept the evidence of the deeds themselves. It's the truth, absolutely. And I tell you he who has faith in me will do what I am doing and he will do greater things still because I am going to the Father. Yes, anything you ask in my name, I will do so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. '

I showed up with a string of names: Aimee Margaret Williams Hilliard. And I showed up a twentieth century, white, female...sort of tall and just-about thirty. But these last few years, it has not been that part, exactly, of me that was sort of my fate that I have struggled with. I find myself coming face to face with fate itself and I ask myself, "Why me and the Church? How did this happen?"

As I look at my history, it seems like it was all laid out from the beginning. Some character asked me one time, "Why are you here with the Ecumenical Institute?" And the only answer that I could give him in the first instance was that it all has lead to this point. You know, I could have had another set of parents who did not go to church every Sunday. My folks did not make me go to church every Sunday, we just always went. I could have lived someplace else. I just happened to live in a place where the back door was at the front door of my church. Of course, the Baptist Church was just across the street to the front, and the Christian Church was (that's what we called it in Missouri) down the street to the right. I never had to worry about a ride, when the doors opened, I was there. I just stepped out my door, across my dog, and I was in church. And I do not know -- my brother, he never had that same problem; he went sometimes and sometimes he did not go. I always seemed to go... never out of a rebellious fit or beating or anything -- I just seemed to go.

I do not know why one summer I decided to go on what Presbyterians called a caravan or Mission Study Tours, but I did. Two days before it left, I decided to go on the trip going to the South. I had been to the South before, but I decided two days before to go. I soon saw that I had never been to the South before; and, in fact, I had never talked to black people before. Why was that possibility opened to me? And why that next summer did I wind up going on a study trip going to the industrial cities of the East Coast. Again, I had been to the city before. Every summer, my family went to St. Louis or Kansas City to attend a musical show and a ball game. But then, I realized that in actuality I had never been to the city before. What happened to me? Why did that route seem all laid out? Why did I stick with the local church in college when everyone else got disillusioned and began falling away? Why did I, though disillusioned, hold on?

As I think about my history being all laid out before me...it is as though I had been destined, as though I had had no choice within my particular history to show up here today. Why is it that I happened to join up with a group of people that came up with something called a galaxy that looks like it is going on for more than 4 40 years? It all just seems planned for me...Why?

It is rocking to see that life is so impersonal and arbitrary and that in one sense there is no choice but to show up the way I am. Out of the anger and astonishment, I began to realize the obvious: -- That this is the only life I have got. It is certainly the only one that seems available for me and for you, I might add. And then, a strange wonder becomes very clear, once you have made your peace with fate, creativity pulses forth. It is as though what I decide today is my fate tomorrow. It is as if I have permission to depart

from my fate. I have permission to use that fate as a sort of fantastic palette of paint with which I can create the future.

In the midst of the experience of seeing my life is just given to me, In the midst of the impersonalness of it all, my first response is just sort of panic. Remember the Edgar Allen Poe story in which the ceiling and the floor start coming together -- well , that is what first happened in my interior. And yet, at the same time, I saw that my given is my given and there is a kind of releasing delight that I do not have to shop around anymore for raw materials. It also occurs to me that coming to terms with my fate, realizing that I am my fate, is like having to eat jalapeno peppers...When you eat those hot, hot, scorching hot peppers, you have two choices: either frantically try to find something to extinguish the fire -- which is impossible; or to decide that you have eaten jalapeno peppers and just lean back allowing the heat to be part of you, letting your eyes flame and your ears smoke and your nostrils dilate, You and your hotness become one thing and there is something new to work with.

I was in a situation once that was very hot. It was in the last part of my junior year. I was having a very particular kind of a problem, which can be referred to here as "the wallflower problem" (You understand, of course, that is not a botanical problem). I was in deep despair about not having what I would consider an exciting dating life with young men. Now I unconsciously realized that my despair was not about young men. It had nothing to do with that. It had to do with what I was going to do with myself the next year, and the next year, and on into the future. I finally decided that I would wander into the office of the person who went by the name of school counselor. I sat down at his desk and began to tell him about my problem of being a wall flower. Now I was not like the ordinary wall flower, and he was very clear about that; for I had been elected President of the Student Body and I had a lot of men friends. And so he started to remind me of these facts. I patiently said that he did not understand, that there was more to this problem than I had told him (as I was beginning to see myself). I tried to explain further and then, he would respond and I would internally call him a stupid idiot and ask him if he thought I was so stupid that I had not thought of that before. And then he would suggest something more and I would just scream inside about how this man could be so dumb. I finally got up and ran out of his office. I started wandering around campus with a kind of...do you know what the wandering sadness is? It is like there is just nothing that can fill you up and yet, you cannot stop looking for something? But you sense you have stumbled across the fact that there is never going to be anyone who can give you any advice. That is, that you alone are your situation and that you alone, finally, have to create your own response. Now, what I finally did was to race to the tennis courts and solitarily pound that ball against the backboard. I was furious. I was mad that this could be what life was about. I remembered another situation which happened very often as I was growing up: I would race in to my mother and I would say, "Mother, what should I do about this?". Mama would always suggest something. And I would say, "I thought of that," or "You don't understand!"

I realized that all my life I had been aware of the fact that no one else can decide my life for me. Finally, I show up deciding my own life. My situation is not something external to me. It is the way I relate to the givenness of what is there. That is to say that my situation is always open because I am very clear that I have permission to create, to change, to turn a corner, and that no one is going to decide for me. I have got the whole catastrophe on my hands! I am totally alone. It is only at this point that I begin to feel and sense after what creativity is all about.

The wandering sadness is the kind of sadness that makes you sick to your stomach. It is an emptiness and wandering around that goes on in your interior being. But yet it is a kind of tantalizing intrigue. It is all yours. Come on! Do it! Come on! It is a magnetic kind of beckoning of your future, of recreating your past, that calls you into being, because it is yours. This kind of awareness is like being in a storm at sea. I was in a storm at sea once. It started out to be a very beautiful day and then all of a sudden the sky turned black, the wind came up, the waves were huge and the lightening was flashing all around me. Fortunately, I was in a fishing boat on a Minnesota lake and the shore was not so very far away. But I was clear that it is a morbid solitariness which surrounded me.

Well, the kind of solitariness that breaks loose, that helps you to see that "I am my situation" (and that is nothing external to me), that my relationship to it is also me, leads you to other kinds of insights about life -- or radical awakening. One of those awakenings occurred to me in an encounter with a Chinese waiter. I do not know if you have ever encountered Chinese waiters, but there is something about the selfhood of a Chinese waiter that is not to be outdone by any man, any place.

This encounter happened in January, the day of my daughter's birthday her fourth birthday. And we had decided that to celebrate we would go out. That is pretty much the way you celebrate in the order; you go out -- since you do not have a kitchen in your own house. We had decided to go out. And strangely enough as we got into the car, Frank and I, neither one of us had thought of a birthday cake. But ah ha, Li Lin had! And she said, "I want a birthday cake. I want a birthday cake. I want a birthday cake." Now where could you get a cake at that hour?

As we drove along, we decided to go to Chinatown. When we got there, I was secretly commissioned to go inside and see if they had a birthday cake. And they said, "Yes, we have birthday cakes." So I went out to the car and announced, "They have birthday cakes. Let's go in."

We were seated at the back of the restaurant. (You know how when you have a very young child, you are quickly ushered to the back of the restaurant. This always sort of hurts me a little bit; while at the same time, I am relieved because it is true.) And so, we were ushered to the back of the restaurant, and being at the back you always get the waiter that slinks by on his way to the door to the kitchen. We finally got the waiter, and Li Lin was saying, "I am gonna have a birthday cake. I am gonna have a birthday cake." We made our order concluding with, "We want a birthday cake." The waiter said, "Yea. Our cakes are too big, but I'll bring you just the thing you need." And so we ate our meal. And all the time Li Lin was saying, "I want a birthday cake. I want a birthday cake."

We finally got to the end, announcing, "We're ready for the birthday cake now." In came the waiter with a piece of apple cobbler with a tiny candle burning on top. Li Lin's face fell twenty feet. But being a girl who loves sweets, she dug right into it. And I thought we had made it through. But Frank came alive, "I thought you said that they had birthday cake here. We've got to get a birthday cake." I said rather nervously, "Be quiet. Let's not cause any trouble in this place." So he gets up and walks out of the restaurant and leaves us for about fifteen minutes and comes back in and shouts, "We've got to find a birthday cake!" loudly. And I scream, "Let's be quiet! This thing is alright. She's satisfied. Let's go." So we left.

But we left for a mad chase around the city of Chicago and a screaming battle on birthday cakes. "Are you a Mister Milquetoast after all?" You said they had a birthday cake at that place. Let's go back and see.

How do I get there?" He always asks me the directions. So I did not tell him, which resulted in a wilder ride. By the time we finally found ourselves back at the restaurant, we went in. Or rather Frank went in and bought the biggest birthday cake they had.

Now what I realized a couple of weeks later was that the propensity of the introverted man or the Mrs. Milquetoast, as I could be called in that situation, is to assume that the Universe is all set up for you, that you have a particular role of gracious guest that you play -- not causing any trouble. When anyone else messes up the whole plan, whatever that might be, they have also messed up your role, too. That is to say that I was assuming there was another universe that someone else had already set up, where if a waiter takes charge (and that man obviously knew that he controlled his universe), that you just let the thing just sort of play out. The address of "Are you a milquetoast after all?" was (it occurred to me) that I was living out of a totally different universe than what was really on my hands. That is to say that what I realized was that I create my universe. That no Chinese waiter, no kind of objective machine rolls out my script or creates my universe.

It has been that kind of an awareness -- that it is my universe, that there is nothing out there that creates it for me; but that I create, in my relationship to the given, my universe. I am master of my fate with no one to blame. No one hands out my parts. No one bands out my roles. And I would like to whisper, "You can't even blame God!" because God be's in your relationship to God. So, if you are going to get angry, mad or blame anyone, it has to be yourself that you are angry at or blaming, because it is your universe. When you come to terms with that, the spark of creativity, of designing out of nothing, can and does occur. When you realize that there is nothing rolling out parts, scripts or roles, it is your universe.

At first, you may be sort of disappointed. At least I was because all the time I thought I had been going along the right track. Then you are sort of fear filled. A kind of suffocating fear takes hold of you. You know the D. H. Lawrence poem, "Everything is tainted with myself. Skies, trees, people, grass, machines, war." Everything is tainted almost to suffocation. Yet there is a kind of liberated boldness that occurs because you are not waiting around for anybody. You are striding on because that is just the way it is.

I figure it is something like recruiting a thousand people for Summer '72. Ken Ellison on the night before this thing started, came to the buffet line exclaiming, "Two weeks ago Marian Hamje said there were going to be two hundred people here from area East, and do you know that is exactly, to the nose, how many registrations we have counted from there tonight" After which he gasped, "My goodness I am the architect."

Well, the kind of creativity that begins to blurp itself -- to explode -- must be something like the kind of creativity, or the kind of awareness that occurred to us as we were developing and giving birth to the 5th City Preschool. After spending a year in studying the great classical minds in early childhood education and the molders of the current trends, and pulling together the most comprehensive of curriculum models for the child today and for the community as well, we began to realize that conceiving this child was one thing, but bearing it was another.

What you have to take into consideration in delivering this child are the doctors that society has not prepared to deliver it. In this situation the doctors would come in and look at what was about to be a new possibility. They would think it was going to be something like a stillborn, or an idiot; and it should, therefore, get misplaced somewhere because they had no framework in which to understand it. "But were

the cot sheets the right size? Was the sick room big enough?" It was like something that had appeared out of nothing. And they had no way of appropriating it.

All the while, you were sort of wild and irrational when people would raise a question to you. You are wild and irrational because you are pulling it out of nothing. Of course we gestalted; of course we used the wisdom of the great minds; but still it was out of nothing that this was being born. "This area isn't possible to be licensed because it's three feet lower than ground level.!' You want to hit him over the head' You had to hold yourself back to keep from screaming at him: "There are 800 preschoolers in this neighborhood. You'll deprive them of superior education -- any education at all -- because of three feet?"

A kind of wildness erupts when your creativity is about to take form and questions get raised and someone starts diverting your attention. One doctor who was required in order to deliver this child, that is to say she was the government's funding agent, said, after a very sterling description of the proposed program, "This curriculum is all fine, but what children really need is mothering." Wild irrationality breaks loose, and you have to intensify your discipline simply because it is crucial that you exist in order to get this thing created; and it follows that society has also to exist in order to use it.

Now, an amazing thing happens when you do get your creativity into form, when you get that package prepared. There is a kind of power that rushes through you in such force that you think that you could lift a mountain, or you could lift ten tons. "We'll try for four more or seven more classrooms. Give us a demonstration grant". That kind of power just surges up. You can do anything when you have produced your creative idea. And of course, after that you are sort of wrung out. There is that sort of wrung out kind of time that everyone sort of goes to bed on for a minute.

It is like there is a kind of impertinence when you dare to create. You see society was telling us, "You cannot do this. It is impossible. The community does not need this. This is unprecedented. No one has ever built a curriculum like this before." And there is the kind of impertinence that we had in just going ahead and doing the thing and saying, "There it is done. It is possible."

You are sort of terrified at your own power. Maybe when you are about to create something and you sense that power surging through you, you just doze off for a while; or maybe you get wildly frantic. Well, what you begin to realize is that creativity is always present within you. Creativity is not something that some people have and others do not, or that I have some of the time and not other parts of the time. But creativity is always there, always raveling out.

Now sometimes I use that intentionally and sometimes I do not. The problem is, when I do not, you never see what it did. It just sort of continues to ravel out. And it ravel out your whole life. Maybe you save the last six inches of that creativity as it ravel out to die yourself one great creative death. But it will last until then. And now you see that Being is Creativity. That is why God is called the Creator. Being be'd me. He created me. I am Creativity! I am creativity! It all comes clear and what a scandal it is. I am the hands of Being itself. I am the channel of Being. Being has no stuff with which to create except my stuff. I do the work of Being. I am Creativity.

Then, out of the nothingness, that is the future, you see that you are really that which creates, molds the future. It is a kind of impertinence that is so frightening you are afraid to say it out loud or to sense it self-consciously. You articulate it to yourself in the mirror.

It is like all your life you have been living like a little pigmy. With this realization, suddenly, the giant just breaks loose inside you and you Be the Giant, which is the Creative One that you are.

I tell you, with these kinds of awareness, or this awareness that has broken loose in me, I will never be the same person again. As a matter of fact, I will go to my grave with the kind of awareness that I have never had before. You see that one thing is that I never expect anything in life but surprise. And I use all of the faith that I am given and I use it up, every bit of it. I do not pretend it is not there. I do not wish something. I use every bit of it as a part of mixing up the oils for the future. For I see myself as having made friends with Fate.

I guess, when you do that, when you make your peace with Fate, when you make friends with it, it becomes sort of personified. You sort of just shake hands with it. One of our colleagues was going down the stairs with another colleague the other day, and he said, "Have you ever noticed that going down stairs is easier than going up?" And the person next to him who probably thought this kind of scientific knowledge was surprised and said, "I think it has something to do with gravity." To which our colleague responded, "I think I will just make friends with Gravity." Well, when you decide to embrace your Fate, to be your Fate, to create your Fate. you make friends with it.

One of the souvenirs of this kind of awareness is no more scapegoats or counselors. You may have collegial advisors, but no more counselors, because you see yourself as radically self-conscious to the fact that you alone are responsible for relating to your situation and no one else can do that for you. Also you find that you are never going around looking for answers. I have found myself, when preparing a lecture or a seminar, always looking for answers. I mean that I have books piled up a mile high.

What I realized, when struggling with this state of consciousness, is that, when you create, it is always out of nothing. You just dare to walk out and mold and pull together and create. That means that, every moment that you are creating your situation, you are going to have a belly full of anxieties till the day you die. That is just one of the souvenirs that goes along with it. But you see yourself at the Center. You know yourself to be at the Center of Creation itself.

Finally, it is always from nothing that I create. It is out of nothing that I create the future. But I do create and determine the future. I see myself as a sign of Creativity itself. Whenever I walk down the street people look at me and see Creativity itself. That is not whether I am doing a good job or not. That is just the fact. I am Creativity. I am a sign of the glory of God.

Aimee Hilliard