

Reflections Before and after my 80th Birthday

Don EVANS MINI-MEMOIR #3, June 17, 2008

(A Sequel to mini-memoirs dated Jan.1 & Feb.10, 2008)

Introduction

My life has been very rich and very turbulent since I emailed my Mini-Memoir #2 to most of you on February 10. Now, in mid-June, I've completed some reflections concerning what's happened since then. In my reflections I'll be relating these events to earlier events in recent years and long before that. As you'll see, I'll even be going back earlier than that, to a past life.

In late February I had a wonderful week in Cuba. The first section of #3 arises from that holiday. It has two parts, "On Being Happy in Cuba" and "An Ocean of Divine Love".

The second section of #3 arises from a new experience of divine-masculine energy that began in March. It has two parts, "Becoming a Hunk after 80" and "Together at Last after 2000 Years".

Before beginning Section 1 on Cuba, however, I'm going to tell a story that for me expresses much of the spirit of Cuba. It all happened in about ten minutes last summer, not in Cuba, but in Toronto.

I hailed a taxi on Bay Street north of Bloor to get down to a restaurant near Roy Thomson Hall where I was meeting my son Luke. When I got into the taxi, I shouted to the driver to turn down the music so I could tell him my destination. I told him, and I immediately commented, "That's Latin American

music, but it's special: it's so happy and full of life. It must be Cuban music." He replied, "Of course it's Cuban music. I try to get down to Cuba at least half a dozen times a year, and I always bring back a stack of cds. You won't believe it, but when I'm there I dance for five hours without stopping!"

Then he gave me a long discourse on Cuba, celebrating everything Cuban: the women so full of life, the lively music to enjoy everywhere, the food (grown locally, and with much ecological respect), the educational and health systems (for everybody, not just the privileged few). "It's not a place for people who want to show off their wealth with big houses and luxury cars. but nobody starves and the people there know how to enjoy the simple things in life."

He spoke passionately, with his whole body, and I said to him, "Then you're Cuban yourself?" His reply totally surprised me: "No, I'm from Croatia". I expressed my surprise, joking with him as if complaining: "You're destroying my stereotype of Croatian men. The ones I've met seem unable to enjoy life or to tolerate it in others. They're like a prominent Croatian priest I've seen on TV. He puts a chill on everything passionate and he only gets excited about Catholic dogma." (I hadn't really been assuming that all Croatian men must be like that dignitary, but I had been imagining the driver dancing to Cuban music and when I thought of the priest doing this I had started laughing inside.)

My Croatian driver commented, "Oh, he just needs a woman!" He then went on to say, further challenging any remnants of prejudice I might have, "Back in the fifties and sixties, in my part of Croatia, Cuban music was very popular. That's all I ever listened to."

“What part of Croatia was that?” I asked.

“Dalmatia, on the coast, near Italy”, he replied. That’s where the greatest Roman emperor came from: Diocletian.

Then came his punch-line, shocking to some Christians, but for me very funny, especially in it’s sub-text of concern for a species endangered by the advance of European (Christian) civilization: “Yes, Diocletian was the one who threw so many Christians to the lions. If they hadn’t stopped him, there would now be fewer Christians and many more lions!”

Then he immediately apologized, explaining, “Of course, I’m just joking!” But inwardly I was chuckling at the thought that he didn’t know that I’m a Christian minister. Somehow he had sensed that we were kindred spirits in our dislike for a strand of Christianity that is primly puritan, repressing human spirituality and sexuality in one sweeping condemnation. I was enjoying his company immensely, and when we got to King Street I was reluctant to step out of the taxi. The moment I did so, he cranked up the volume of his beloved Cuban music once again and drove away inside his private, pagan temple of delight! I could hardly wait to tell Luke about my encounter with this Croatian who was more Cuban than the Cubans!

Section I: A Wonderful Week in Cuba

Part I: On Being Happy in Cuba

At the end of Mini-Memoir #2 I was celebrating the orgasmic/erotic dimension within human love. On the basis of my own experience I was exploring the varied ways in which it can colour and enrich my life:

- in obviously-sexual activity**
- in affectionate connection**

**in creativity and healing
in heightened appreciation of whatever is going on in my life,
whether momentous or trivial.**

**I was also considering how such an enlivening of my
whole body makes me more playful and light-hearted and
spontaneous.**

**Ten days later I was on holiday in Cuba, experiencing all
this as never before, continuously delighting in every moment,
full of orgasmic energy, in love with life! I am very grateful to
my companion in Cuba, whom I had not met prior to the trip.
Her very special heart-presence, both to me and to everyone
we met, was crucial in all that happened. But I'm also aware
that what I brought to Cuba was also crucial: the deep changes
already going on within me. And I'm very grateful to the
Cuban people. For me their love of life, especially their love of
music and dancing, is amazingly congenial and contagious.**

**My memories of moments during my week in Cuba are
still vivid. I remember all of them in my body, but one of them
is also captured in a photo: it's me enjoying the energies of a
dolphin who is nuzzling my left cheek as I as I lie back on the
water, held up by my life-jacket. I also remember resonating
in my body with a trumpet veteran as he showed me what he
could play, and then with each of the others in his band,
delighting together in the vibrations of their expansive sound.
Still another memory is exchanging energies at the disco with
the beautiful young choreographer for the hotel dance troupe.
She obviously enjoyed sharing her passionate creativity with
me and enjoyed my appreciative response.**

**And there were so many times with my companion,
laughing and connecting with each other wherever we
happened to be:**

endlessly chatting on a shady bench by a beautiful walkway,
enjoying champagne and smoked salmon at breakfast for the first time in our lives,
savouring the simple innocence of some Schubert Impromptus on the cd-player as we lay on the bed in our room,
spontaneously dancing with each other and with members of the dance troupe.

Three months later, as I look back on what happened, I'm moved to reflect on the significance of such a time of personal happiness in my own spiritual path. I'm very aware that what happened was especially healing for me because of the sexual traumas in my own early history, which discouraged ventures in love, numbed pleasure and squelched playfulness. I realize that the personal histories of many readers probably involved very different traumas, or none at all, so my reflections concerning happiness may not seem directly relevant. I hope, nevertheless, that what I say will be interesting. I'm sure that it has some relevance to people who, like me, have been influenced by puritanical religious teachings. It is also relevant to people who, like me, have focused much of their lives on achieving future success rather than on living fully and bodily in each moment.

Some religious people are not puritans, frowning on all pleasure and playfulness. Nevertheless they insist that what matters most in life is not whether one has found happiness. The ultimate test is how much affliction one can undergo without succumbing to despair and closing one's heart. I have a deep respect for people who can somehow go on loving in the midst of terrible personal suffering. But for myself, and I suspect for many others, an equally important test is how much happiness one can enjoy without eventually wrecking it by letting someone, or something inside oneself, trigger a

familiar worry or fear or distrust or melancholy or other emotional contraction. When I let this happen, I stifle my love, or box in my spontaneity, or constrict my playfulness or weigh down my light-heartedness. In retrospect, when I now look back on Cuba from a serious rather than a playful perspective, I can see it as a “test” that I passed through remarkably well, a confirmation that I have shed a great deal of emotional baggage. In the past I’ve occasionally been told by people and by Spirit, “Don, you need to lighten up!” In Cuba I really did!

Although I’ve been moving towards this in recent years, my previous record would show that usually in a “happiness-test I either barely passed or failed dismally. Failure can be okay. Sometimes I had become too cocky, and it was helpful to be humbled in this way, especially if it moved me to uncover some resistance to happiness that had been unconsciously at work within me. From time to time, however, I need to have some awareness of success, feeling confirmed by a sense of personal growth or progress. Such confirmation encourages me to go on risking disappointment, venturing further in spontaneous loving than I have before. Yes, it’s important for me during times of relentless suffering to remain steadfast in my commitment not to fall out of love with life. But it’s also important during times of expanding personal happiness to remain deeply in love with life for as long as possible, not sabotaging myself.

Some people hope for personal happiness only after death, but that’s not true for me. In so far as I see my life as a pilgrimage, it is not a journey to a heavenly place after death (when happiness replaces misery). Rather, the journey is towards a transformed state while still on earth, a process of living, more and more, an embodied human life within divine love. If perfect personal happiness were possible it would be a state of human fulfilment or flourishing or abundant-life that

is fully human and fully divine. Although no such perfection is possible, we can undergo transformation towards it during this earthly life. Such a this-worldly emphasis is of course very different from what is most prominent in many religious traditions, where the quest is for an escape from this earthly “vale of tears” into a heavenly place where there is no more suffering because one has become a spirit, more like an angel than an embodied human being.

Of course I’m not denying that human life as such involves suffering, not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. And the suffering is not only as individuals but also collectively, for each of us is profoundly interdependent with other human beings so that in our suffering “We’re all in this together”. What distinguishes my this-worldly approach is not a conviction that all of my life can be like my week in Cuba, minimally miserable and maximally happy. Rather, although I believe that human suffering is an inescapable part of human life, I believe, on the basis of experience, that it can be transformed when it is filled with love. I also believe that this process of transformation is an essential part of our human fulfillment or flourishing or “happiness”. That is, the core of human happiness is living an embodied human life within divine love, whether the context is a rhapsodic holiday in Cuba or a tragic personal loss.

Such a perspective on happiness involves finding or creating some pleasure and playfulness every day, even when the going gets very rough. And although it would seem to me obscene, if I had the money, to live year-round in extreme luxury in a world where so many are starving, I have no regrets about excesses during my week in Cuba: indulging in champagne and smoked salmon for breakfast and dancing with chorus-girls in the evening. I know that it’s very possible, and necessary, to find great pleasure in simple ways:

**drinking water rather than wine, and eating very ordinary food that I've prepared myself
dancing by myself in my room as I listen to my Cuban trumpeter's cd.**

Thus far I've also found that an element of playful humour is always possible, even in the midst of much suffering. Of course I haven't been tested by the extreme situations that are the daily lot of millions in the world today, but I'm inspired by the many stories I hear about how people in the developing world manage to find pleasure and playfulness in the midst of poverty. I'm also inspired by some hospital patients who suffer from chronic, complex diseases and disabilities and nevertheless appreciate simple pleasures, refusing to succumb to despair. Some blurt out "Life sucks!" and go on to admit, "I find some comfort in knowing that there will be an end to my suffering when I die." It's not that they are contemplating suicide when they talk in this way. Rather, they are being honest about what a part of them actually feels. When I consider the possibility that before I die I may be similarly afflicted and may have similar feelings, I hope I can have a similar commitment to go on loving life in the present.

Postponing happiness entirely into the future is always a mistake, whatever I predict as my future time:

**when I graduate from college,
when I marry my soul-mate,
when I achieve success in my career,
when I retire and do what I've longed to do,
when I die and go to heaven.**

The mistake lies in understanding life as essentially a quest towards a culminating goal that keeps being forwarded into the future. It is folly to live so much in the future that one is not living in the present.

Often this future focus is linked with success in relation to a rating-system within which I continuously compare myself to others in status and power. The assumption is that only if I am higher rather than lower can I be the one who controls or possesses my sources of pleasure. This assumption fosters anxiety, for in real life, one's comparative status and power is unreliable, like the advances and retreats in a board-game such as "Monopoly". These depend partly on skill but mainly on chance. If one plays "Monopoly" too seriously, as if it were not merely a game, one's focus is entirely on the successful end-moment. Playing it playfully involves enjoying each moment for itself. Living my life can also involve a similar moment-by-moment approach, but this is not easy. It requires not letting a narcissistic preoccupation with my "rating" to define my identity. Playful engagement with the present is possible only to the degree that I shed my concern about my comparative ratings: not only how other people rate me, like the ratings of a TV show, but also how I rate myself.

A preoccupation with achieving goals is especially inappropriate on a spiritual path because progress spiritually consists in living more deeply and continuously and lovingly in each successive moment! What matters is the transformative process, which can be progressive overall, but typically involves many mini-"successes" and mini-"failures". Although there can be progress overall, there can be no final culmination-state for any individual by himself or herself. There are four reasons for this:

(i) new life-circumstances constantly emerge, containing new challenges of pleasure or pain,

(ii) even as we uncover and shed unconscious resistance to divine love, further layers always remain within us as human beings,

(iii) one's ability to live fully in each moment involves being receptive to a divine love that we can not manipulate or control.

(iv) none of us as individuals can become completely human, for each of us is limited in our human capacities by our history, our talents, our gender and sexual orientation, our kind of creativity – indeed by whatever makes us unique! Only humankind as a whole could theoretically become completely human: each person filling in what is lacking in others, and vice versa.

Although I don't aim at a final culmination for myself as an individual, I do hope that each of us can progress in personal transformation. It's appropriate to celebrate this when it happens, rejoicing and giving thanks as more of an individual's inner riches and resources emerge in his/her life. And such a celebration is appropriate not only when the person is someone else but also when it is me. It's not that I should be monitoring my progress in every moment, seeing everything as a new "task" to cope with, another "hurdle" to leap over. a further "test" to pass or fail. Such an ultra-serious perspective destroys spontaneous appreciation of each moment, and completely inhibits all playfulness. It distorts what is involved in living within divine love, as if divine love could include no divine playfulness. Religious workaholics dutifully take up the burden of John Milton's Calvinistic view of life: "As ever neath the Great Taskmaster's eye". On this view, earthly life is a period of harsh schooling from which we can only graduate at death if we've passed all the tests.

(An aside: In our society workaholics who have rejected religion become their own "Great Taskmaster" and hope that those who survive them will recognize from obituaries that they passed all the "assigned" tests! Such workaholics are influenced by a secular version of puritanism that has

pervaded Western capitalistic society, tolerating the pursuit of present pleasures only if this is subordinated to the work-ethic. Contemporary capitalism complicates this by encouraging hedonism in so far as it supports the dynamics of consumer-culture. Indeed, whenever some people find ways towards happiness that are independent of the market, these ways are quickly co-opted to become consumer-items within the market! Even spirituality and fun become “commodities”, like oil and gold!)

Is happiness possible and appropriate in this life? Puritans tend to say, “No”. They discourage various ingredients of happiness, frowning on all sexual pleasure as “worldly”, castigating all light-heartedness as “frivolous”, denouncing all spontaneity as “exhibitionistic”, rejecting all celebration of the human spirit as “idolatry”. Even when some puritans go beyond dutifully serving others by acknowledging some value in loving others, they deny that it is ever legitimate to love oneself. I agree with them when they reject a self-love that is a narcissistic preoccupation with one’s own happiness, a love that conflicts with loving others and traps the self within itself. But they wrongly assume that all self-love must be narcissistic. On the contrary, narcissism itself arises from a lack of healthy self-love. One is preoccupied with how one “rates” in comparison with others because one has no other basis for accepting oneself as one is.

As I pointed out in Mini-Memoir #2, the deepest version of healthy self-love arises when a person is living within divine love. In such a context, love of self and love of others arise in the same way and the two loves have a similar content: I celebrate and foster an inner abundance in myself and in the other. Living within divine love involves a transformative process that both requires and facilitates a shedding of one’s narcissistic self-love. Instead of constantly being preoccupied

with my status and power, I welcome being lived by divine love.

Thus living within divine love involves a transformation not only of human suffering but also of human happiness. I no longer try to find ultimate happiness in something other than divine love and then become attached/addicted to it as a substitute for living within divine love. When various components of human happiness are no longer idols, they can be transformed and included in an abundant human life.

Is it legitimate to hope for some final culmination for humankind and all living creatures? Such an eschatological End may never come, and if it were to come it would not be in the foreseeable future. What I hope for is more progress for more individuals towards living embodied lives within divine love and in loving service to humankind. So I celebrate this whenever and wherever I witness it, in many diverse groups and movements. If an End ever comes, it will be because human transformation has become more and more widespread and inclusive. And this depends on human beings co-operating with each other and with the Mystery.

If the envisaged End depends on an apocalyptic intervention by an all-powerful deity who gives the ultimate “rating” and divides humankind for eternity into the “sheep” (the saved) and the “goats” (the damned) there is no real hope for humankind. Such a vision of a Last Judgment merely reformulates in god-language our human tendency to divide humankind into ‘Us’ (who are acceptable) and ‘Them’ (who are not acceptable). What we need instead is a hope for gradual human transformation within a divine love that is inclusive.

Section I: On Being Happy in Cuba

Part 2: An Ocean of Divine Love

In section II of my 2nd Mini-Memoir I described experiential initiations into five mysteries, five uncreated energies of the Divine Mystery:

- the divine orgasmic/erotic passion
- the divine compassion and appreciation
- the divine peace and joy that passes all understanding
- the divine glory as radiant light
- the divine creativity, originating all creatures

I also noted how one or more of these usually predominates in a particular experience, while the others are in the background. I expressed my conviction that all five are dimensions of divine love, but my only experiential basis for this was that “the one quality common to all the mysteries is an expansive inclusiveness, like the crucial quality of a loving human heart”.

During one afternoon in Cuba I was meditating by myself in our room. My companion was away horse-back riding. I was aware of various mysteries within my body, starting with the orgasmic/erotic and moving on through the others. Then, very suddenly, a new bodily state arose within me. I was for the first time experiencing divine love itself as including all its five components. Out of it arose everyone and everything and it flowed through everyone and everything. My bodily feeling was like moving within a universally-pervasive ocean.

When I went outside I found myself doing what I call “fake Tai Chi”, but realizing that what was happening was what Chinese practioners of that flowing bodily movement were hoping some day to experience as a gift if they persisted

in their very-real practice! I was also aware of connecting in all four horizontal directions and with heaven and earth. And then I went for a swim in the physical ocean, being helped in and out of the water by a very gracious stranger, linking me back very clearly to the ordinary, everyday world of my physical limitations and human kindness.

Afterwards I was cautioned by Spirit that such a state would not necessarily occur often and that usually one of the five mysteries would predominate. Since then, however, the gracious gift has occurred again from time to time, and it has been crucial in revising my notion of divine love so that it clearly includes all five components and is not distinct from, say, divine creativity or divine radiance. I use the vague term “notion”, following the example of the English philosopher, Berkeley, for “concept” could imply too clear a grasp of divine mysteries.

Much later, in early June, I realized that although being aware only of all-inclusive divine love is awesome and illuminating it also has a drawback. I was at a contemplative gathering, and the meditation leader asked us to go into a deep inner silence that is totally without any judgment of anyone, whether positive or negative. My way of trying to follow her instruction was to remind myself of being immersed in the ocean of divine love. When I’m aware only of divine love, anyone else is experienced simply as a fellow-existent within that ocean. The insight within this powerful but abstract awareness is twofold: we are absolutely equal and ultimately not distinct. The drawback is that I am not aware of qualities in the person that are unique to them, as I am when, for example, the appreciative/compassionate dimension of divine love is prominent. Then I discern the distinctive quality of light and the distinctive quality of suffering that distinguishes the person from others. A similar awareness of uniqueness arises

when other dimensions of divine love are prominent. In such contexts the distinctive joy or peace or sexual energy or creativity in each person is discerned.

Although it is important to experience our oneness as creatures arising from the One Loving Divine Mystery, it is equally important to experience our plurality as unique human beings, each of us proclaiming both ourselves and that Mystery in a unique way. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins expressed a Christian version of this when he wrote:

“Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces”.

Is it obvious that there are there only five kinds of uncreated energies coming directly from the Divine Mystery? No. My proposed “map” is merely the product of current reflections on my own limited experience thus far. And it’s not even clear whether I should include peace and joy together as one mystery or distinguish them as two! At this stage in my life my first priority is being open to further transformation experientially. If I can find the time, I’ll then revise my “map” accordingly. For example, some Christians seem to have a distinct experience of divine justice as a divine mystery. For me thus far divine justice is a practical implication of divine compassion for human conduct. But this may change for me.

Within Muslim tradition the great mystic-philosopher, Al-Ghazali, reflects not on five divine mysteries but rather on “The Ninety-Nine Glorious Names of Allah”! He links each of these scriptural divine perfections to a lesser but significant human version of the quality. And the great Muslim mystic-poet, Rumi, in some ways similar to Hopkins, depicts each person as uniquely “sounding” both him/herself and the Divine Spirit. Both of these men, while respecting their religious

tradition, draw mainly on their own experiences as they reflect. In the next section I'll be reflecting on a particular experience of mine that happened during a meditation on March 3, 2008 in the Monday-evening group.

Section II: A New Masculine-Divine Energy

Part 1: Becoming a Hunk after 80!

As the meditation began I was already strongly aware of the presence of Jesus pervading my body and outside me to the front to the right. What was new was a strong awareness of a male presence near me at front to the left. My immediate impression was that this presence was one of Jesus' disciples/apostles. Who was it? It was not a prominent one such as Peter, John or Paul. I inquired further, but soon realized that, for some reason, identifying him didn't matter. What did matter was the man's distinctive energy and image. He was clearly a "hunk"; that is, he was impressively muscular, powerfully focused and unwaveringly self-confident. Later on I realized that this was a visual way of getting me to discern an aspect of the risen Jesus himself that was new for me.

Next morning during meditation, and in the afternoon when I lay down to rest, I was aware of a new energy/presence moving through my body. It was Jesus, and the awareness began as usual in my genital region, spreading from there throughout my body. What was new about this energy/presence was not that there was a distinctively-masculine dimension, for a very strong version of this dimension had been present since, in 2002 when I began connecting to Jesus via Piero della Francesca's "Resurrection" painting. This Jesus who was in stark contrast with the subtly-

radiant gentleness and compassion of Fra Angelico's "Transfiguration" which for me had been central for many decades. In Francesco's painting, Jesus' eyes expressed an awareness of having emerged triumphantly through harrowing-of-hell horrors. Also, his transformation did not make him seem less earthly and more heavenly as in Angelico's Transfiguration, like an alchemical change from iron into glowing gold. Rather, in the Resurrection painting Jesus seemed even more fleshy and earthy, yet divine. It was as if there were an alchemical change from gold into iron that "goldenized" the iron.

What I gradually became aware of after March 3 was prominently earthy and physical did not include a triumph over hell and over death, though it was. It did, however modify the erotic, orgasmic character of Jesus' presence in my body that has been central in my initial awareness of him during recent months. These were the changes:

(i) The erotic, orgasmic resonating included an urgent energy that (for some reason) I associated with flooding testosterone. I sensed a lot happening in my prostate.

(ii) The context was entirely masculine in that I was not "distracted" by thoughts or images of women or of the divine feminine. There was a sense of being a vibrant, confident man among men.

(iii) My "third-eye" focus between my eye-brows was laser-like in its intensity and concentration and assertiveness and was linked to my genital energy-centre.

(iv) I was exhausted after what felt like an overwhelming process that relentlessly transformed my body and ejected whatever was resistant or in the way.

I should explain why I needed to receive the image of the "hunk" apostle/disciple as a visual way of getting me to discern a dimension of the risen Jesus that was new to me. In so far as

I had any central image of Jesus during the year or so prior to March 3 it had been neither Angelico's nor Francesca's. About a year previously I had asked Jesus during a meditation what image I should have of him, now that he had become for me my lover. His answer was, "Just look in a mirror". To this he casually added, "But any human face will do!" This was his graphic teaching concerning his presence in all of us human beings, loving me and calling forth my love in everyday encounters with people. But the teaching did not bring any facial image at all into my meditative awareness of Jesus' presence. That's why I needed to receive the "hunk" image as a signal that Jesus was bringing into my body a new and transformative masculine presence/energy.

And transformative it certainly was! In subsequent days after March 4 I had to lie down very frequently, either to cooperate with the process or simply to rest. I could not rely on my bodily-stamina in advance, for fatigue would suddenly hit me. I felt that I was in the grip of a bodily-spiritual change that was very strenuous, taxing my system to its limits. (My blood pressure was also up, though not in any alarming way.) This went on for about two weeks.

By the Easter weekend the process of bodily adjustment to the new masculine energies was becoming less intense, and instead I was aware of feeling both generally happy (as I had felt in Cuba) and somewhat upset. The sense of upset became clear during the morning meditation on Monday, March 24th, when a new stage began. I was feeling the masculine-confidence energies but I was feeling overwhelming grief concerning many disappointments-in-love from infancy through to recent times. Although there were few specific flash-back memories, it was clear that what I was experiencing was an accumulation from eight decades. Why? Because what had happened in the past had damaged my masculine

confidence and thus had to be re-experienced and transformed if this confidence were to be maintained in the present. Also, I was aware of how the lack of such confidence had adversely affected women in my life, so I was feeling grief. I was undergoing an intense attack of self-critical thoughts: “If only I had not done that” and if only I had done that”. In recent years I had occasionally felt regret concerning break-ups that might not have happened if I had at the time been the person I now am. Such regrets I could note and then calmly set aside. But what I was feeling during the week after Easter was not mere regret. I was grieving, I was mourning, and my body was convulsing in uncontrollable sobbing. I was reviewing my life in its grief-dimension.

In contrast with most of my life, my teen-age years were less difficult to remember. My sense of grieving concerning those years was lessened by a positive sense that in my new “hunk”-present I had some testosterone-lustiness that I lacked then. I was feeling more “horny” than I had in a very long time. Of course the big difference from my teens is that now I am extremely limited physically in what I can “do” sexually and whom I can attract! These limitations had not, during the previous months, loomed large in my consciousness, but now they were emerging as threats to my emerging masculine self-confidence. In previous weeks and months it had seemed easy to accept that all or almost all my close connections with women, like all my connections with hospital patients, would be “platonic”, at best involving exchanges of loving spiritual energies, plus exchanges of basic human affection. Now, however, it was difficult to accept this reality. I needed to undergo some new bodily-emotional-spiritual processes, involving both a new level or kind of self-acceptance and empowerment and further letting go of attachments to outcomes.

Another complicating ingredient contributing to my lack of inner harmony was the influence of spring, which was more intense and more bodily than in previous years, accentuating the testosterone-teen-ager restlessness inside me. The newly-awakened energies in the trees outside my window were evident in the daily growth of the buds. My restlessness was, of course, welcome as a confirmation that in spite of my aging I still felt “juicy” inside! But it was difficult to combine this with my awareness of obvious ailments and limitations in my 80-year-old body. Indeed, my sense of being unable to rely on my stamina had moved me to make a difficult decision that was in itself quite upsetting.

The decision was not to teach the full-year undergraduate seminar again in 2008-9. Not only did this involve an end to 48 years of undergraduate teaching, so central in my history and thus my identity, but I was finding the class especially rewarding in 2007-8, keenly involved in penetrating discussions of deep themes concerning human nature. But having a deadline each Wednesday for reading, and commenting on, 40 mini-essays, had become too stressful. By the weekend prior to each deadline, if I had not done much, I seemed unable to avoid having some anxiety concerning whether I would be able to find enough energy/time to complete the task. The decision to really-retire also involved no longer having the remuneration that had enabled me to have holidays in nature, etc. and also having to consider more seriously my limited financial resources when, eventually, I become incapacitated. I knew that in the fall of 2008 I would be teaching my last graduate course – on Christian Spiritual Healing – so the sense of academic/financial apocalypse has been somewhat softened. But overall I was feeling very vulnerable, and I was ripe to be triggered by any disappointment in life, especially in love, that might arise.

Soon after Easter this happened. For a short time I was extremely upset. Soon, however, I was able to regain my equilibrium, and by late March I was beginning to find a way to adjust to the bodily-emotional-spiritual changes that had been taking place since March 3. It was a long process, and I won't go into the details, but an essential part is that from time to time, with her permission, my masculine orgasmic energies are welcomed and received by a feminine spiritual presence with whom I continue to be heart-connected even though she lives far away. I continue to hope that I'll meet someone with whom I can be literally in touch as an ongoing partner in sexual-spiritual-mystical intimacy; but I am not attached to this possibility.

Another essential part of the process of adjusting to the “hunk” energies in my body involves becoming aware of how they are providing an additional vigour and clarity in the way I'm connecting with people in a variety of contexts where the orgasmic component of love is very much in the background. This was happening in ordinary, everyday situations such as a brief contact with a stranger on the subway or a penetrating conversation with a taxi-driver. It was also happening in extraordinary ways: I surprised myself a few times when instead of bringing gentle peaceful energies to hospital patients I spontaneously and confidently focused healing energies into ailing bodies (without, of course, raising any false hopes of “cure”).

The “hunk” energies were gradually being integrated into me: bodily, emotionally, and spiritually. By May, however, a new inner conflict arose in a way that was initially very puzzling. I became aware of a new kind of resistance to the kind of masculine-divine presence that Jesus had brought into my life, a new struggle against the “hunk”. The resistance was from “Poco”.

In order to introduce Poco, I have to tell you about something that happened over 20 years ago on the Caribbean island of San Andres. Until now, I've only revealed it to a few people. I've felt reluctant to do so, not because I feel ashamed of it, but because many people will be inclined to dismiss not only the story but also me as "too weird"! At this stage in my life, however, I no longer care! What happened involves a past-life memory, which is still a strange and unacceptable notion to many people. That aspect of it was not surprising to me, for I had not only undergone many such experiences myself but had also been present with many people as this was happening for them. There were, however, further complications that were initially weird, even for me!

Section II: A New Masculine-Divine Energy

Part 2: Together at Last after 2000 Years

Before I describe what happened in San Andres, I must first present my initial encounter with my personal spirit-guide in the early 1980s. My initial awareness of him was mainly vibrational, but I also received some visual sense of his appearance. He was clearly aboriginal and was from the southern States or Latin America. After a few weeks my morning meditations often began by becoming aware of his presence in front of me and within me. His very first appearance was very dramatic and funny. The first thing that happened was that he got inside me and moved me to make sounds like a rooster! For some reason that I now don't remember I playfully gave him the name "Poco". Although his rooster-guise didn't continue, he was at times a playful trickster in other ways. Usually, however, his guidance was straightforward and practical. He did not seem to be my teacher in matters shamanic, though he seemed to be a

shaman. So far as I knew, he did not subsequently initiate me into various shamanic states and practices. These initiations occurred during the Monday night men's group and in follow-up meditations through other aboriginal spiritual presences.

In 1987 I suddenly felt called to go by myself for a week somewhere in the Caribbean, partly to have a holiday from work, but also as a setting for a personal retreat. I felt a need to ask myself and Spirit, "Where do I go from here?" In a few days I had booked a cheap flight to an island off the coast of El Salvador but owned by Columbia: San Andres. Once I got there I was pleased by my choice for a holiday: relaxing, swimming, dancing, eating the local fish and meeting new people. It also involved exploring some tourist sites. One was a cave into which ocean waves crashed and were then hurled up through a spout on to the land. It was truly a spectacle to see and hear, and I also had a sense that it had been for aboriginals a "power-centre".

I enjoyed being near the spout and I stayed there for a while. But then I was drawn to a non-descript grassy area about one hundred feet further on. When I stood in the middle of it, I realized why I had selected San Andres for my retreat, for I was immediately filled with an overwhelming spiritual energy. In this altered state I soon began re-experiencing a past life. Poco was not my spirit-guide. In this past life I was Poco. I was the leader of a large spiritual community, not in San Andres, but somewhere in Colombia or Peru. It was about 2000 years ago. The community was very advanced spiritually in the intensity of its spiritual energy and the transformative processes going on within it: a very exciting setting, bubbling with creativity and hope and inspiration. (In some ways it was similar to Therapeutics, the Toronto community in which I was immersed from 1969 to 1980, but with more heavenly-spiritual

energies and far less exploration of the unconscious dimension of human existence.)

This idyllic past-life memory continued for a while, but suddenly there was a tragic upheaval. The whole community exploded in conflict. Many members of the community were killed and the rest fled for their lives. The violence completely destroyed all the human and spiritual connections. Poco was so totally devastated and demoralized that he died and split into two selves. One self continued as Poco-spirit on another timeless and unchanging “plane”, no longer involved in the cycle of births and rebirths through various lives. The other self continued without Poco’s spiritual gifts to be born and reborn through many lives, most recently as Don Evans.

Many of the past lives I had re-experienced in the 1980s, prior to visiting San Andres. Some of them were prosaic and unimportant, but others were significant, including a series involving many unresolved repetitions of betrayal and revenge. Overall, however, some progress had been made spiritually by the time Don Evans was born in 1927, and during the first sixty years of this life. For two millenia Poco-pure-spirit had remained split off from Poco-as-human, who could not draw on the lost spiritual resources to enrich his lives. Nevertheless enough progress had been made for Poco to return to connect again with me, Don.

A momentous moment in San Andres! From this moment on, we were together again as one person. I knew that I was beginning to live with a new identity as “Poco-Don”. During the remaining years of this life, I could draw on the resources renounced 2000 years before. When I returned to Toronto, I confided to few people what had happened. And I privately pondered what it all meant. Two things became clear:

- (i) uniting with him involved in some way taking on new responsibilities as a spiritual leader.**
- (ii) I must not repeat his terrible mistakes.**

As I pondered, the causes of the disintegration of the community emerged:

(i) The institution was hierarchical, and so too much had depended on my defective integrity and wisdom as an authoritarian leader.

(ii) The men immediately below me indulged in competition for power in relation to each other and to me, and I lacked the clear, firm masculine assertiveness required to impose boundaries on their behaviour.

(iii) Women were subordinated to men, and many of the leaders manipulated them in sexual ways that created much jealousy, rivalry and bitterness. Although I did not do this myself, I lacked the discernment and decisiveness to put a stop to it. I myself was too much of a “macho-man” (secretly afraid of women’s hidden power) to interfere.

(iv) The spirituality of the community was not sufficiently grounded in our human dependence on Mother Earth and tended to fly up into the heavens. This encouraged an ignoring of our human shadow-stuff, which nevertheless continued to grow within us and eventually exploded. In this respect the community resembled many “charismatic” and “gnostic” and “New Age” movements 2000 years ago and ever since.

During the following years that followed I tried to adjust to my new identity, which involved both new resources and new responsibilities. I gradually came to realize that, although I was flawed in many ways, I was being called to become in some way a spiritual leader in a community. No details were clear, but some guiding principles were emerging. The community’s structure had to involve, or move towards, co-operation between peers. There also had to be an equality between

women and men, a cultivation of our connection with Earth, and a willingness to uncover our unconscious destructive tendencies.

About seven years later these principles were being applied within a shamanic community, dedicated to healing rifts between the masculine and the feminine and between men and women. Initially I was the leader in the sense of being the main visionary. Out of this community emerged the “Institute for Shamanic Psychotherapy” which thrived for about five years. For various reasons it dissolved. What continued was not an institution but a network. The Monday-night meditation group out of which the community had emerged has continued, as have some connections between the people who were in the programs of the Institute. In recent years one of the four founders of the Institute, Heloisa Porto, has started her own school for shamanic psychotherapists. Once again, as in the days of the Institute, there is an ongoing shamanic group for men, co-led by a founder (Robin Noya) and an ongoing member of the meditation group (Chris McDonald). Also, Robin and Chris and Catherine Stone, another founder, are faculty in Heloisa’s school.

Although I still have a sense of being called as a spiritual leader, it is not as a founder or co-founder of a community. Rather, and especially as I mature as a male elder, I am called to encourage individuals and existing communities as they uncover their untapped resources for loving service. My celebration of them often includes gratefully receiving whatever they bring to me from their expanding resources.

But I must return to consider my theme: the “hunk”. His recent arrival in my life was not the first stage in my own personal development towards becoming a manly man. The initial challenge began 25 years ago in the men’s group. For

over ten years we persisted in our weekly commitment to meet as a “spiritual boot-camp”, working through our crucial fears as men. By 1994 the group could include women because by then we men were no longer terrified in the presence of women who were claiming and expressing their own spiritual-emotional-sexual strengths. That terror leads most men to become, in varying degrees, either brutish “macho-men” whose fear makes them try to keep women subordinated, or knightly “women-pleasers” whose fear makes them try to protect “helpless” women who must remain helpless. Instead, we were beginning to celebrate womanly strengths and to celebrate our own manly strengths in ways that enhanced both. And we were beginning to be able to help other men to change in similar ways.

The deepest changes in me as a man, however, have taken place quite recently. In Part 1 of this Mini-Memoir I described the impact of the earthy, manly Jesus depicted in Francesco’s “Resurrection” and then the even more powerful “hunk”. The challenge to the “hunk” that emerged in May had to do with Poco. He had integrated so much into my life that I had almost forgotten about him as in any way distinct. In general, the changes within me since 1987 had included changes in him. In May of 2008, however, the new “hunk” masculine energy in my body was too much for him. He protested.

I became aware of his resistance when I asked in meditation for discernment concerning what within me was resisting the “hunk”, for I knew that a new kind of struggle was going on within my body, causing extreme fatigue. The response to my request for discernment was, to my great surprise, a memory of what happened near the water-spout on San Andrés, and the realization that Poco, who is within my body, needed further transformation from how he was 2000

years ago. Without such transformation he (and therefore I!) could not thoroughly assimilate the “hunk” energy.

The process that ensued was very strenuous. I was greatly helped by an energy-worker who detected what she called “cognitive energies” (embodied assumptions) that blocked full integration of the “hunk” into my body, especially in my brain, my nervous system, my lower body and my right (masculine) side. It was Poco who was blocking change in this way. He could be thwarted and changed, however, by drawing on the energies of the “hunk”. These energies arose in my crown and my heart and (less strongly) in my feet, and my helper could direct them into the resisting parts of my body to disperse the blocks. Her considerable experience in facilitating bodies to “catch up” with spiritual changes was invaluable in this arduous but necessary process.

During one session I also became aware again of bodily blocks in my right shoulder that began when I was traumatized as an infant. We had been reducing these blocks several months ago. Now it was as if Poco had recruited “little Donny” to join in his protest against transformation! This excess, this double mutiny, struck me as funny, and I found myself laughing. No doubt my playful response helped. The only alternative would have been to feel further victimized, and therefore helpless.

After about two weeks of daily processing by myself, the vigorous struggles suddenly ceased, and it became clear that Poco had undergone most of the needed transformation within my body. The integration of Poco left me feeling happy but also very tired physically. This fatigue has continued: on most days I have to lie down for a while several times to rest. In my reduced stamina, as well as in my scrawny legs, my aging gait

and my growing paunch, I'm physically even less of a "hunk" than I've ever been. But in spirit, I've never felt as vigorous. And I know that my presence is more manly, more of the time, than ever before.

When I woke up on the morning of Sunday, June 1 much of the stress of the previous three months had fallen away. Since then I have engaged briefly each morning in a gentle process, bringing energies down from my head and heart into my abdomen and genitals and legs. My morning meditations have also been consistently and pleasantly brief. When I ask Spirit whether at this time I need to discern anything about myself, my relation to God, or my connections with anyone, the answer is usually "No!" I'm enjoying a temporary holiday from transformation!

On Monday, June 23, I head off on another adventure. A new friend is driving me to a workshop/retreat at Shalom Mountain in the Catskill mountains west of New York city. I feel very much at home with the innovative spiritual community there. The topic for the week is "Sexuality and Spirituality". Wish me the best! And all the best to you!