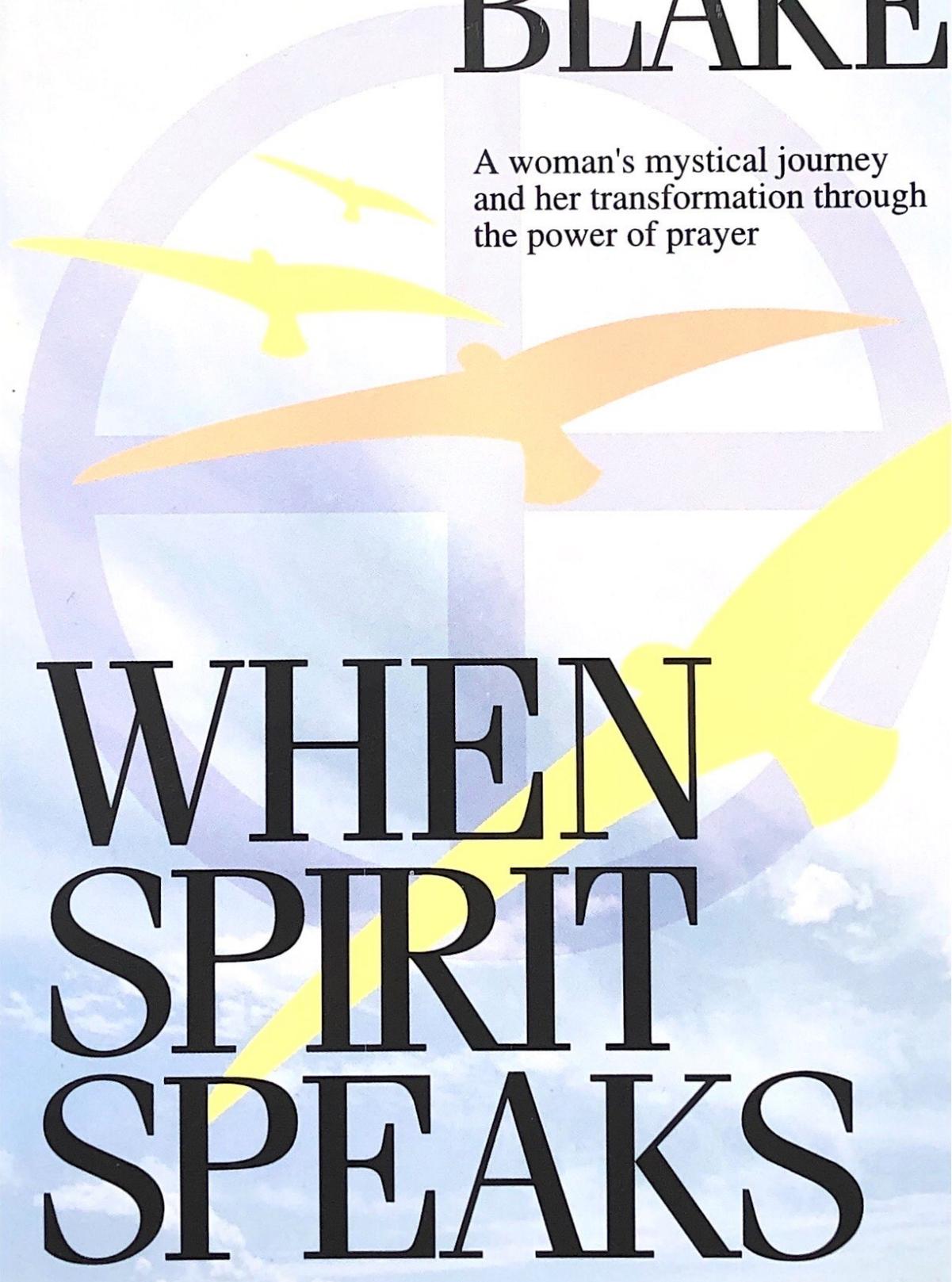


SUSANNE BLAKE

A woman's mystical journey
and her transformation through
the power of prayer



WHEN SPIRIT SPEAKS

THE STRANGER

It was one of those spaces in life when I felt I must be experiencing the best of times, even though I was having severe financial difficulty. My funds were low, so low that Jet, Dawn, and I made the decision to spend Christmas together and not buy a single present. We gave only the present of love. My two children were in their early twenties. They had moved back home for a short time while going to college and working. We were grateful that I was still in my home. This lack of money brought an unexpected gift. It forced us to spend time together to heal our past.

The best part of life was that I finally regained enough energy to step over some of my self-limiting boundaries. This kept presenting me with new understandings about life. Illusions were being stripped away, and new truths replaced old, worn-out beliefs. Glimpses of more answers were coming to me as I listened and watched for signs from that higher source I call God.

I had finally quit filling up much of my time with a schedule of activities. Instead, I had learned to give myself the space to be spontaneous. People did not understand why I did not want to plan on Monday what I wanted to do on Saturday. I knew that I was changing, and this change was amazingly wonderful. My life felt more gentle and I was happier.

Then on a beautiful spring morning in 1989, I got up and prepared for another day. As I dressed, I listened to the birds in the back yard singing. I was sitting at my desk when a friend from New Mexico telephoned. She was attending a convention in Oklahoma City and wanted us to get together. We made arrangements for dinner.

We had not spoken in over two years. Her name popped into my mind only a few days before her phone call. This situation seemed to be one of many that was teaching me more about an invisible telegraph that manifests thought. I looked forward to seeing her and contemplated what would transpire in our evening together.

When I arrived at the hotel, a very large group of people was milling about in the lobby with her. I quickly learned that reservations for fifty had been made at one of Oklahoma City's oldest restaurants, Cattleman's Cafe. All fifty were attending a conference for university public relations officers. Eight of us crammed into my Ford Taurus. We were just ready to pull out of the driveway when the back door suddenly opened. Another man had appeared from nowhere and was trying to get into my car.

"Hi, mind if I ride with all of you?"

In unison, we shouted, "There is no more room in this bus."

The response obviously told him there was no room, yet he continued to stand by the car with the door open. Others were calling to him inviting him to ride in decidedly less packed vehicles.

He waved them on with a firm "I'm riding in this car." I could not understand why he was so insistent on being in this car, my car. Perhaps he found one of the women in the back seat attractive. I was in a hurry and I just wanted him to either get in or go to another car. Obviously I could not move until the door of the car was closed, and others were now honking at me to move forward.

Finally those in the back seat gave in and began to make room. One sat on someone else's lap and another moved to the front seat. The stranger squeezed into the back seat of my car and seemed quite content considering his cramped condition. I sat sideways as I drove.

This newcomer's dark, pulled back hair revealed an olive complexion. I did not get a close look at him at first, but I listened in on the lively conversation he carried on with the others. I had assumed he was a participant at the conference, but I quickly learned from compliments directed toward him that he was some sort of speaker or panelist.

Squashed behind the steering wheel, I rushed us to the restaurant. I deposited my passengers at the front door. The stranger told the others to go on and slid into the front seat with me, telling the others that he was going with me to park the car. I assured him that he did not need to escort me, but again, he insisted.

We drove straight to a parking space only a half block or so away. I began to ask him about his connection with the conference and learned that he was the only presenter, the main presenter, for this convention.

I looked closer at him now that he was sitting in the front seat beside me. His hair formed a very long braid that trailed down between his shoulders. He wore jeans and a plaid shirt. His eyes were jet black. He seemed very gentle and kind.

After a few more simple exchanges about life, we walked to the restaurant, chatting along the way. He shared with me about his speaking career. I quickly explained to him that I had also presented seminars and was preparing to do so again. Then I said, without any particular reason, "You are obviously Native American. Do you follow the spiritual ways of your people?"

"Yes."

Sensing the strong presence of this man whom I had just met, I felt very calm as we entered the restaurant. I was pondering why I had questioned him about his spiritual practices. I had been around Native Americans in New Mexico and loved them; however, I knew little about their culture. Where did my question come from?

Inside the restaurant, he noticed the only two seats remaining were together. He looked at me and said, "Well, I guess you are stuck with me."

Everyone at the table wanted to visit with him, so we exchanged only a few more words before he turned and chatted with others nearby.

Shortly thereafter, and without warning, he leaned over to me and asked a strange question. "Do you know an Indian who can adopt you?"

"Excuse me?"

He repeated the question.

"No" I replied, caught somewhat off guard. I understood the question, but could not figure out why he asked.

He continued by very seriously asking, "Are you certain?"

Laughingly, I replied, "I only know one full-blood Indian and he would not even consider adopting me. He is the President of my bank and he knows the state of my finances all too well."

He laughed and returned to his other conversations, but soon he turned to me again and intently asked, "Have you been thinking? Are you certain that you do not know anyone who can adopt you?"

I looked at this strange, insistent man. "No, I know of no one. Why?"

"It is important that you attend some ceremonies and it will be easier for you to get into them if an Indian adopts you."

This was crazy. I looked at him. Although he never looked directly into my eyes, I knew he was studying me. I gently smiled and replied, "Well, if God wants me to go to a ceremony, I guess He'll find a way. It will not matter to Him if someone adopts me or not."

"But it will be easier for you if you are."

"I understand, and you would understand what I am saying if you only knew what has happened in my life in the last three or four years. I truly know that if I am to attend a specific ceremony, a power beyond myself will make it happen."

He listened attentively and then turned back again to the other conversation. I was more than a little curious. After playing with my food awhile, I gently nudged his arm. When there was a break in his conversation, he leaned back towards me.

"What ceremonies should I attend?" I said.

"There is one specific ceremony you are to attend...The Sun Dance."

"What is a Sun Dance?" He did not respond. It was obvious that he was not going to answer me. He turned away again, ignoring my question. My mind flipped to danceathons, in which participants dance a specific number of hours while supporters pledge money for a particular cause. Surely it was nothing like that.

I asked again later that evening, but he would say no more. With everyone happily full, we left Cattleman's. I chauffeured my passengers to see various sights in Oklahoma City and then returned to the hotel.

As he climbed out of the car, he smiled and said, "I am certain you will learn more about the Sun Dance." And that was that.

Although it was late when I arrived home, I took the time to journal the feelings I had about this unusual encounter. I had intended to get together with an old friend, but spent absolutely no time with her. Instead, the whole evening seemed to be orchestrated for me to spend time with this unknown Native American.

I never saw this stranger again. I wished I had written down his name. Surely I could get it later from my friend.

During the following six weeks, I kept reflecting on our conversation. I also thought about other events that had happened recently, and I made a decision to change my name. Born Susanne Stapp years before, I was nicknamed "Susie" almost immediately. It was time to let go of my childhood name. A silent voice from within

kept calling out “Susanne.” As Susie, my energy exuded achievement on the outside while I struggled against low self-esteem on the inside. As Susie, I learned early on how to mask my life with illusions, forcing myself to be happy in bad situations, never really seeing circumstances as they were. After the death of my husband of seventeen years and the rebound marriage that ended in great pain, my old method of handling difficult situations began to fail me. I now wanted to become Susanne.

Perhaps this retrieval of my birth name would bring me closer to the real me, closer to my purpose in life. This was the true name given to me by my parents in the first few minutes after birth. In that first moment when I became Susanne, I was trusting and innocent. Now I wanted another birth. I wanted to be trusting, happy, and ready to participate in life again without fear. I wanted to be able to communicate my wants and needs in a new and better way. I wanted not only to exude self-esteem on the outside, but also to feel that self-esteem on the inside. I wanted balance. Perhaps recapturing my birth name would create a new energy. After making the decision, I began to ask my friends to make the attempt to call me Susanne. They really worked at it and they understood. I introduced myself to everyone new as Susanne. Initially I stumbled with it, saying “Susie, I mean Susanne” and then I became more comfortable with the name, speaking a clear “Susanne.”

Although it was my intention to change, the difference in how I felt inside when I introduced myself to new people as Susanne was surprising. I exuded more confidence and seemed more firm within myself. My tone was even different. As Susanne, I hoped to attract healthier relationships.

I intended to continue the practice of giving unconditional love to others with no expectation of anything in return. I wanted to learn to receive when a gift chose to come my way. When I became angry, I began to focus on what was happening within me rather than blaming someone else. I assumed a new energy in my work that was more creative and seemed to reach more people.

Six weeks flew by. I seemed to be enjoying every part of my life now and looked forward to what would happen next. Occasionally I thought about that Indian and wondered if God would really place me in the ceremony he mentioned.

JOHN BRINGS CONFIRMATION

Only six weeks after my encounter with the stranger, I, Susanne, walked up on John's porch and knocked on the door. It had been three years since I first met John and his wife, Susan, at a family gathering in Pauls Valley. I found him very attractive, but had the sense not to react to the attraction since he was married.

At that first meeting, John told me how much his house looked like my grandparents' home. He also told me that following my grandmother's death, a portion of her home was purchased by someone he knew before the lot was cleared and a nursing home was built in its place. I understood John to say that they may have even used another portion of my grandmother's home when renovating their house.

John and Susan had invited me to come by and see their house that night we met, but the time never seemed right. I sensed there was trouble in their marriage. Every six months or so, I asked a couple that I knew in Pauls Valley about John. After the third time, the husband told me to stop asking about him. He said, "Why do you keep asking about John? You know he is married, so just forget him."

I smiled and said nothing else. This couple knew me quite well for we had shared many good times and often visited in my more difficult times. We were always comfortable in each other's homes. Several times I drove to their home and just sat on their front porch and prayed. Sometimes they weren't even there, but I always left feeling much better. My thoughts would continue as I drove home. Answers often came on these trips. One day I was having dinner with them in Pauls Valley and they began sharing the history of their house with me. I learned it previously belonged to John's grandparents. It had been a long time since I asked about John. Perhaps this presented me with an opportunity to ask again. I did. I got no information, only a smile.

Three years after the first and only discussion I had with John, I saw Susan in Oklahoma City. She was with another man. When I asked her what she was doing, she told me that she and John had

gotten a divorce and they were trying to sell their home. With the house for sale, she suggested that I hurry to see it if I were ever going to do so.

The following Sunday was a beautiful July afternoon in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma. My cousin, Judy, and I were visiting relatives there. We decided to see what John and Susan's home looked like. I telephoned to see if it was all right to stop by. I assumed Susan was living in the home. John answered, to my surprise, and seemed pleased we wanted to see the house.

As we drove up into the circular drive, I was stunned. The house was a charming Queen Anne style with a wrap-around porch. I had two quick insights as I walked up the steps to the porch. First, I knew I was walking into an old home very similar to the one where I experienced many happy times as a child. Just as John had originally told me, his house did look much like my Grandmother's. Later I learned that in the early 1900's, the same builder built two houses in Pauls Valley, my grandparents' home and the one where John presently lives.

Second, the street in front of this home was made of red brick. I immediately thought of a statement I often made in my seminars and to friends. "If I ever need healing and you cannot find me, I will be in the mountains of New Mexico or on the red brick streets of Pauls Valley, Oklahoma."

We knocked on the door. John greeted us and gave us a tour of the house. We visited for a while. As I was leaving, he said to me, "Please stay. I want to talk to you. I have wanted to visit with you for a long time."

I responded, "You did not want to talk to me very badly, because you have been divorced for six months and have not telephoned." We all three laughed. Judy and I continued walking out to the car. John followed.

John attempted to get Judy's assistance by saying, "Judy, do you know your cousin is the only woman in my sixteen years of marriage that I wanted to get to know better?"

Judy knew I found John attractive from the moment we met. Now she knew John also found me attractive. She did not reveal my secret. Instead, we both laughed. He looked at my expression and said, "Was that too strong?"

"Yes, with what I have been hearing from the opposite sex, that was pretty strong. I have heard many lines that have meant very little."

He and I bantered playfully back and forth. As I put my purse in the car to leave, he said, "This is my last try. I have wanted to have a spiritual discussion with you for years, and I have something I would like to share with you."

With my purse already in the car and me sitting in the passenger's seat, I laughed and said, "What kind of spiritual discussion?"

I wondered what he was going to come up with now. His reply stunned me. "I just returned from an amazing experience that I want to share with you. I have just returned from a Sun Dance in South Dakota, and I would like to tell you about it."

My attention riveted on his words. I was having difficulty believing what I was hearing. I immediately slid out of the car and took my purse with me. I said, "Judy, I'm staying."

Judy was surprised by my change of plans. She said, "You're not really staying, are you?"

"Yes, I am going to stay. I have to stay." She knew nothing about my encounter with the Native American. She looked concerned, but left us to our discussion as she drove off to Norman alone. I was intrigued as I carefully listened. John shared with me the events that led him to the Sun Dance. I found his story fascinating.

We began the discussion over pop corn in Pauls Valley. He took me home that evening. We talked all the way to Norman, arriving just in time to take in a movie I had already seen. From our discussion, I thought he might truly enjoy this movie, *Field of Dreams*.

After the movie, we went to eat. I shared with John why this movie meant so much to me. He already knew some things about my past. He listened intently as I told him about an experience I had eight years earlier. I began by explaining that in the few weeks before Don, my husband, died of cancer, I asked something of him that he did not expect. One afternoon, I said, "Don, will you please talk to God or Jesus for me when you get there? Would you please ask them if you can come back to share with me what it is like on the other side? See if you can tell me what you are doing or just tell me whatever else they will allow you to share with me."

I watched for John's reaction. He was accepting, so I continued. "Don was initially shocked by my question. He said, 'You know that is impossible. I do not even think I'll go there yet. I believe that I stay in the ground until Jesus' return.'

I was insistent, as I said, 'I disagree. That is not what I believe.

Your spirit is not in that ground. I believe your Spirit does something else when you cross over. All I am asking is that you attempt to ask God or Jesus if you can tell me some things, perhaps give me some answers while I am still on this earth. I do not want to wait until I die and leave this earth to receive some of the answers to my questions. I would love to have answers while I am still here on earth to help me understand more about life.'

Don knew I had my own ideas about what takes place on the other side. Finally, after a long discussion about the Bible, he said, 'O.K., I'll do this IF, and that is a big IF, I have the opportunity to talk to God or Jesus. I do not believe it can happen, but if given the opportunity, I will ask to come back and share some things with you. I will even ask them to send you some answers.'

I said, 'Thank you. I know God can do anything He wants to do and I believe He will listen to this request. Ask and ye shall receive.'

Then I shared with John what happened during the two years following Don's death. "After he died, I had three vivid dreams about him. I knew he was fine. Shortly after my second marriage, I had a fourth rare and vivid dream of Don. It was one of those times when, upon awakening, it took a few minutes to remember where I was. I even turned over and called my husband, Virgil, 'Don.' Suddenly I realized that I was not in bed with Don. It took me a few seconds to figure out where I was and what I was doing. When I was thoroughly awake, I realized my mistake. I quickly said, 'I am so sorry I called you Don.'

Virgil replied, 'It's O.K., I know why you called me Don.'

His statement was confusing, and then I became even more surprised as he continued speaking. 'You called me Don because he was in the room. He was standing at the foot of the bed. When he saw me open my eyes, he turned and walked away. By the time he got to the door, I could see through his body. By the time he got to the end of the hall, there was nothing to see.'

I felt joy over Don's appearance. It was confirmation of my belief that there is much more out there than we can imagine. I then began wondering if other relatives who had already passed on were present in the room when I dreamed about them. Were these relatives who showed themselves still helping us from the other side? Who else was out there to help us?"

I felt a renewed excitement as I visited with John. "Now this

movie has come along. Surely someone else must have had a similar experience for this movie to be conceived.”

This led us easily into a fascinating discussion about how we prepare the fields in our lives and then they come. That seems to be exactly what happens whenever a person begins to work on self. We agreed that when each person prepares his or her field, answers do come.

Our conversation went on and on. Luckily we were at a restaurant that stayed open all night. After being at that first restaurant for hours and becoming embarrassed about taking up a booth for such a length of time, we decided to move to another all-night restaurant.

During the evening’s conversation, I learned that John had considered telephoning me many times, but that he felt he was not ready to do so. He thought it might be too soon. He said that he wanted to heal more before we connected again. I wondered what would happen from this moment forward? At about 3 o’clock in the morning, he drove me to my house. I knew something significant was happening.

On the way home, I thought about how my fields of life were fitting together, with one field helping me learn about another field as I took a walk through each one. Was another field preparing to grow? What would it look like in the future?

The following day, John phoned. He said, “I have been thinking about all we discussed last night, and I want to try this relationship on. I want to see what will happen.”

“John, it is all right if you want to wait and heal more.”

“No. I’d like to try it now. You would not have shown up right now if you weren’t supposed to do so.”

I felt happy as I responded with “I’d love to try this also.”

“O.K. So how would you like to go to dinner on Saturday night?”

“Fine.”

“And how would you like to go to a Lakota sweat lodge in a few weeks?”

“I’d love to go with you to a sweat lodge.” I had no idea what he was inviting me to, but I accepted his invitation.

During the next few weeks, we visited on the telephone a few times, went out to dinner one evening, and met once for ice cream at Braum’s in Purcell. Finally, it was the weekend of the sweat. When I asked questions, he told me very little. He did suggest I bring a

comfortable dress to sweat in, preferably of cotton, and a towel.

3

FIRST SWEAT

It was a sunny Saturday afternoon when John came to Norman to pick me up for the sweat. I wondered where we were going and who else would be there. We drove out into the country to a beautiful home. When we arrived, everyone seemed happy to see John. They all knew him and seemed to know one another well. He introduced me, one by one. Then John asked, "Would you like to see the sweat lodge?"

"Yes."

We walked down the hill from the house about fifty yards and around a corner. The lodge came into view. It was a dome-shaped frame of bent willow branches. People were completely covering the frame with canvas tarps, leaving a small opening for the doorway. A few feet in front of the lodge was a dirt mound upon which people had laid a few strange objects. The objects included some beaded items, feathers, and fur. John explained that the mound was like an altar. About ten feet from the mound was the fire. A man was over at a big wood pile selecting more wood to place on the fire. John said that he was the fire man for this sweat and was charged with the responsibility of carefully tending the fire.

As I sat on the ground nearby, I wondered what would take place within that dome. I turned my attention back to John as he brought out his picnic-type basket filled with colorful cloth, yarn, and scissors. He began to share with several of us attending for the first time about prayer ties and what happens in the lodge.

The concept of prayer ties was not unfamiliar to me. I had made a God Box several years before which helped me through so many difficult situations. I used the God Box whenever I found myself wrestling with a problem with no success. When I felt powerless over a problem and could do nothing more about it, I turned it over to God with the help of the God Box.

First, I wrote my problem on a piece of paper. Then I got on my knees and held the paper in the palm of my hand. I said a prayer and

raised the problem up to Him, releasing it to Him. Next I placed the problem in the small box and replaced the lid. After surrendering the problem, it was no longer mine to deal with. I had to let the energy build. I could only sit back and wait to see what God and those helping God might do. I no longer made any telephone calls about the problems in the God Box, and I gently eliminated any discussion that came my way on the subject. I could only take the problem back if I was ready to tell God that I knew best how to handle the problem and did not like how He was doing it. I had never been able to tell God I was smarter than He on any subject. Some days I did pick up my God Box and nudge God a little saying, "I know you are working on this."

Miracles came with that God Box. I found that until I truly stepped aside, God could not handle a serious problem of mine, because I was handling it. I kept getting in the way.

Now I was learning how to "let go" and pray in the same way with these mini-God Boxes, these prayer ties. John showed me how to first take a piece of cotton cloth and cut it into two inch squares. Then he began his instructions. "Next, you say a prayer as you place a pinch of tobacco in the center of the square cloth. Then you carefully fold the material in half. Now you fold it again, and it looks like a tiny pouch. By doing this, you do not spill the tobacco. You can now tie this small pouch onto this string of cotton yarn I am giving you. Repeat the procedure, making more prayer ties. Add each prayer tie a few inches after the previous one on the string. Depending on the purpose of the sweat or other ceremonial requirements, a string may have a single prayer tie or it may have hundreds. Cotton is preferred because it is natural."

I understood quickly in my own logical way. Prayers are released into these prayer ties. The prayer ties allow people to have something tangible they can touch and see. This form of prayer is experiential. A person's energy changes as the tobacco offerings and the prayers go into the small cloth, because the body releases the problem. The problem literally moves from inside the body to the outside. The tying of the prayer tie closes the prayer inside the pouch, holding the energy of the prayer to be answered.

John gave us the number of prayer ties in six different colors we were to make for this specific sweat. I learned it was not the same for every sweat. In this Lakota way, colors represent the directions. He said, "Black material represents the West. Red material represents

the North. Yellow material is for the East. White material is for the South. Blue material is for all that is above, and green material is for the earth and all that is below.”

This making of prayer ties felt unbelievably good to me. As my mind settled, I could focus on prayer in a way I had never been able to before. I made more and more prayer ties. We kept our prayer ties with us when we finished, so we could take them into the sweat lodge.

After completing the ties, I sat in anticipation waiting for more instruction, but no instruction came. I watched the fire and the people. I wondered what type of people would do this. They all looked to be sane and very kind. Then someone said, “Time to sweat.”

I found a place to change into the loose cotton dress which John told me to bring. I grabbed my towel and returned to the sweat lodge area. While I waited, several people asked if this was my first sweat. Upon hearing my reply, they warned me that I would never be the same again. I wondered what they meant. Still there were no instructions.

Many thoughts ran through my mind. The line to enter the lodge formed to the left of the small door I faced. The door opened to the West. The women lined up first, and I stepped in behind them. I held a fistful of sage in one hand along with my towel, and a string of bright colored prayer ties in my other hand. I wondered, “Have I lost my mind? What am I doing here? Have I gone too far?”

Then I remembered my prayer. I said that I would turn my life over to God and Jesus and allow them to guide me. I agreed to stop trying to do it all by myself. I told them I would watch for signs. Their signs had brought me to this very moment. I reminded myself to simply keep trusting. I kept praying the same prayer repeatedly. “I am open and ready to receive. Thank you.”

I stepped toward the small opening to the lodge. I took off my shoes and placed them next to others outside. I watched. A man held a smoking wand made of sage and cedar. He moved it in small circular motions around each person, allowing the smoke to cover them. It was called smudging. This was a first for me. The woman behind me knew that I was new and said, “Sage and cedar are used in the purification ceremony to purify and remove negativity.”

I stood in front of the man, turning around slowly so he could smudge me well. I followed the woman in front of me, who was on all fours, and we crawled clock-wise around a central pit which was about

two feet across and ten inches deep. I found myself sitting in the South. The men followed and sat on the north side.

The fire man stayed outside the lodge. I watched intently as he began carrying the large, hot stones from the fire with a pitch fork, one at a time. When the first one entered the lodge, the man sitting next to the door in the South touched the stone with the stem of the pipe. The stone was carefully positioned in the pit on the West side. Everyone sat in silence. Then the next hot stone entered, was touched by the pipe and placed in the North. This continued with a stone placed in the East, one in the South, and one in the Center. The last two went between the Center and the North for above, and between the Center and the South for the earth. Out of respect, no one spoke until after the last of those first seven stones were brought in and placed in the small pit in the center of the lodge. I had been told these stones represented the six directions and the Great Spirit or, to many, God. After the man at the door touched each of the first seven stones, he handed the pipe to the fire man who rested it against a rack on the small mound outside the lodge. From where I was sitting, I could look out the door and see the pipe on the altar and the fire glowing behind it. It made a beautiful picture against the sky.

John had explained earlier, "You will be watching the creation story as the rocks are brought in. The sweat lodge represents the whole universe. We are at the center of the universe when we sit inside the lodge."

I looked around the inside of this dome and thought about those words. The heat was becoming stronger with the entrance of each glowing, red hot stone. The fire man continued to bring more rocks into the lodge, handling each one very gently. I understood so little. All I knew was what I felt. Although this experience was very different, I thought about all the churches I had previously attended. "I learned something in every one of them. Now what will I learn here? What will happen when the door is closed?"

I contemplated the coming darkness. The man carrying the stones lay down the fork and passed in a bucket of water. The bucket was touched to the rocks in the center of the lodge and placed beside the man who was to pour the water on the rocks. The door of the lodge was closed. We sat in complete darkness, except for the rosy glow coming from the stones.

A prayer was said. Jesus was mentioned. The man pouring

the water began to sing in Lakota. Those who knew the words began to sing with him. I heard water being slowly poured on the rocks. The hot steam circled inside the lodge, enveloping all of us. Sweat coated my body. It was a good thing John had told me to remove my jewelry before entering the lodge. It was truly hot. I began to hum along with others singing the songs to shift my focus away from the heat. I had been told that if I got hot, I was to go within and pray. I tried this and it helped. The praying that took place amazed me. Everyone in the lodge prayed individually and aloud. When my turn came, I prayed aloud, too.

The door to the lodge opened four times. After the fourth round, the man in the South asked for the pipe to be handed in for everyone to smoke and share. This sweat was finished, and I had completed my first sweat.

One at a time, we all crawled out of the lodge. I asked someone for the time and found that we had been in the lodge for about two and one-half hours. When the doors had been closed during the rounds, I saw images and colors inside the lodge in the darkness I wanted to journal. This was different from anything I had ever experienced.

As I walked away, I felt something gritty on my arms. This puzzled me. I knew it could not be dirt, because I had showered before coming. I discovered it was salt. I tasted it several times to make sure. Salt was coming from the inside of me to the outside of me!

After the sweat, everyone shared a meal and visited. They were all gracious and interesting people. One man I visited with was a preacher. During our conversation, he asked, "How did you like the sweat?"

Before I could answer, he continued, "This road is not for everyone. Wait until tomorrow and see what thoughts come to you before making any decision about how you feel about your first sweat."

The following day, I felt very peaceful. I literally stared at the walls, pondering my first sweat lodge experience. I was fascinated with the salt that had come out of me. This salt reminded me of negative experiences I had stuffed. I felt as if I was being told to release what I had buried deep inside me. I recalled the story of Lot's wife. She was told not to look back. She did so, for she could not let go of the past. As a result, she was turned into a pillar of salt. I got the message. I heard.

I would not look back. I would learn to release things I no

longer needed. I would move forward. I knew that the many changes I was making since the death of my first husband made my mountain steep to climb. Those changes included a quick second marriage of five years which ended in divorce. Though it was a difficult, dysfunctional marriage, it made me face my obstacles on this mountain so that I could reach a field of beauty. Now God was showing me how to climb it the rest of the way. I picked up my Bible and read. I saw scriptures and verses in a new way. My understanding of what I read was very different.

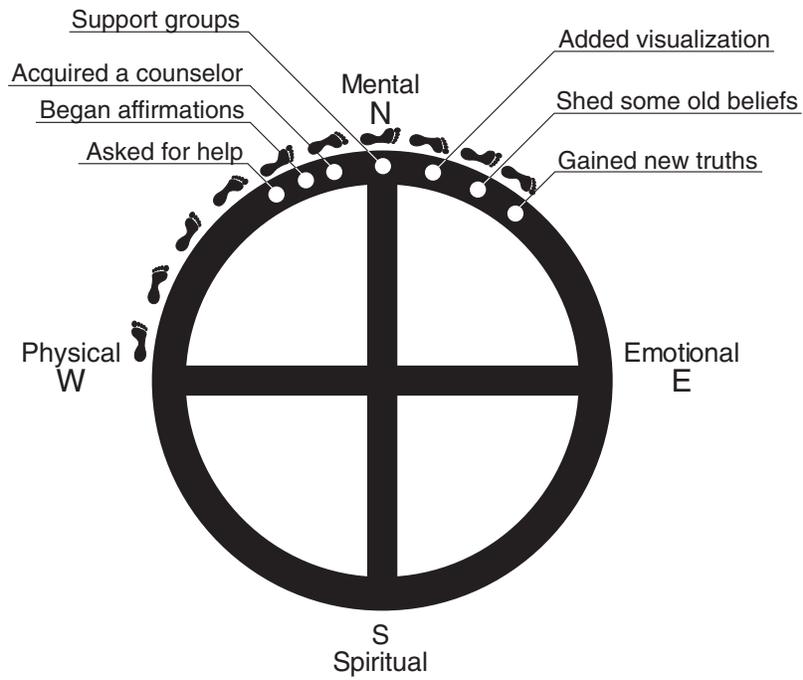
It had been a fascinating weekend. The following Monday I went to lunch with a friend of mine, Gloria Star. Gloria studies astrology and has written many books on the subject. I had not seen her or visited with her for months. We were catching up on one another's activities. She was doing most of the talking. I listened and waited to share my recent experiences with her; meeting the Indian, my reconnection with John, and my experience at the sweat. Before I could begin, she took me by surprise when she said, "Susanne, have you ever thought of looking into the Native American way? It might be really good for you at this time in your life. It just may have some answers for you. In fact, a vision quest might be in order."

I couldn't believe my ears. More confirmation from God that I was on the right path for me at present. As she talked, I felt like looking up and saying, "O.K., God. I get it. I hear you. I understand. You are doing a wonderful job orchestrating this sequence of events to show me the way I am to go next."

I then watched Gloria's expression as I told her about my recent experiences. She shared my excitement and enthusiasm about the coincidences. We both are believers that there truly is no coincidence.

As more people learned what I had done, they suggested books I might read to give me more information about the Native American ways. Some even brought books they felt would help me. Although I love to read and have learned from many books, I instinctively knew that this was something I had to experience first hand instead.

I had taken these steps to reach the Northeast of my Medicine Wheel when I entered my first sweat.



4

THE TEACHER

A few weeks later, John and I returned to the same home for a weekend of sweats with a Lakota medicine man and his wife. They traveled by bus from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota to Oklahoma City. I knew a rare opportunity was being presented to me.

When we arrived, I recognized some of the people I'd met at my first sweat. There were other faces I did not know. I felt happy and anticipation grew as I waited to meet this couple from the Rosebud. Then a petite blonde woman walked up to the porch. I listened to her accent and knew she was from Louisiana. I learned she was the medicine man's wife, Elizabeth.

Again John and I walked down to the lodge to make prayer ties. Sitting by the lodge was a large Native American man. John introduced me to Gary, and we shook hands. I sat down to make prayer ties while John visited with him some more. He was big. When he stood up, he was over six feet tall, but his manner seemed gentle. I found myself looking into dark, deep eyes that seemed to pierce through me. I could not help but sense there was something very special about this man.

This time the Lakota from the reservation took the position inside the lodge on the South side of the door, so he could pour the water. I watched carefully as the sweat began. He opened the first round with a prayer in the Lakota language. He then translated his prayer and told us he had prayed for our "health and help" and said he had asked the Grandfathers that our prayers be granted.

He then went on to say, "Each time you enter the sweat lodge, you have the opportunity to leave something negative from your life behind you. You leave it in the lodge."

He laughingly said, "It's like peeling an onion, taking off one layer at a time. Upon leaving the lodge, it will be your choice as to whether you leave your negativity there or pick it up again as soon as you step out the door. It is even possible to let go of something in the

lodge and not be aware of it.”

He explained that when we come into the lodge, it is comparable to entering Mother Earth’s womb and, upon leaving, you are being reborn. I loved this idea. I had already realized that each time I let go of something, a death occurs and a rebirth follows. Entering and leaving the sweat seemed like such a tangible way to release. I could just let the warm mist wash off a layer of negativity and carry it away from me.

In the second round, we took turns praying. I prayed aloud when my turn came, but later I silently prayed for a way to find out more answers through a vision quest.

During the third round, the medicine man said the spirits wanted to gift the people with information. He began to speak to us individually. When he came to me, he said, “Your prayer that you did not speak will be answered within four days.”

I sat there amazed. Could he see into us this well? The following day, I visited outside the lodge with this man named Gary, whom I termed the medicine man. He was explaining why we pray for ourselves in the four ways we are...body, mind, heart, and soul.

He also gave a simple explanation of the medicine wheel. He talked about the directions and how each one stands for something in our lives. The West represents the physical, the North represents the mental, the East, the emotional, and the South, the spiritual. He said, “It is up to you to find out where you are on your medicine wheel and to learn about your lessons from each direction.”

I knew I had so much more to learn, but this was a beginning. During our conversation, I asked Gary, “How does someone go about asking for a vision quest and how will the person know when it is time?”

He then explained, “The traditional way is to fill a pipe and present it to the person you want to help you with your quest. The person receiving the pipe will then accept or reject the request.”

He looked at me for a minute and said, “It is time if you want to do one.”

I didn’t hesitate. That evening I borrowed John’s pipe and he instructed me on how to fill it with my prayers about a vision quest. He said, “Susanne, carry the pipe gently to the person to whom you are presenting the pipe. Stand in front of the person and then turn around clockwise once. Facing the person once again, you will offer the pipe four times. On the fourth time, the pipe will either be accepted or rejected.”

I then presented it to Gary in the way he had explained. I felt a sigh of relief as Gary accepted it, smoked it, and handed it back to me asking, "How many days and nights?"

I quickly answered, "Three days and three nights."

As he looked into the distance, he said, "It will be good."

I knew I would fast, pray, and listen for answers. With his acceptance of the pipe, my silent prayer was answered. I knew for certain that I would do a vision quest.

By the time the weekend was over, two of my new friends, Anita and Kathy, had also made a commitment to vision quest at the same time as I. Gary gave each of us a list of what we needed to acquire for our vision quests. The list seemed overwhelming to me. No two lists were identical. As Gary went on and on, giving me my list, I wondered, "Where would everything on this list come from?"

I decided not to panic in front of this Lakota medicine man who had been so kind and had accepted the responsibility of doing this for me. As I sat there contemplating the list, I decided to share with Gary and the others a story of how my interest in a vision quest began. A few thoughts went through my head about whether I should tell this or not, and then I realized that Gary already knew I really knew nothing about what I was doing. So I apprehensively said, "Would you all like to hear a story about a vision quest I participated in about a year ago?"

They all looked stunned, even John. Then I went on to share with them my experience. "About a year ago I saw a friend of mine named Cat at a party. We had not seen each other since a spiritual seminar we both attended several months before. This seemed to be one of those times when there is a bubble around two people. Hundreds of others surrounded us, but no one else seemed to matter. Our discussion about the teachings taking place in our lives mattered most. Suddenly, she turned to me and said, 'I am to do a vision quest, and I believe you are to go with me when I do it. Will you?'

'Yes.' I heard myself respond without even a hesitancy. Then I thought, 'Why did I respond so quickly? I don't even know what a vision quest is!'

A few days later, I telephoned Cat at her brokerage firm office. I asked, 'Cat, when and where are we going on this vision quest? I'm working on my schedule, so I thought I'd better contact you and see what we are doing before I begin to make appointments for work.'

'Let's plan it for a month from now.'

'Where are we going?'

'I believe I am supposed to do this in Sedona, Arizona.'

'Cat, do you know much about a vision quest?'

'No, not much. What about you, Susanne?'

'I obviously know less than you. I know nothing about a vision quest.'

'Well, we will have to find out, won't we?'

'I guess so. I know I will support you in finding out what it is you feel you are to do. Why Sedona, Cat?'

'I've heard it is a spiritual place. I know very little about it, but it is supposed to be in a pretty area.'

I knew nothing about Sedona, either. A few days later, Cat telephoned me with dates and flight arrangements which I marked in my planner. The date arrived rapidly. We flew to Phoenix. Our baggage arrived and we headed out to the curb to pick up a shuttle to take us to our rental car. To our amazement, we neither one could remember the complete name of the rental car agency. There were so many similar ones. Cat's secretary had made the arrangements. The name of the rental car company was not on anything we received from the travel agency.

I went to the telephone to call one agency we thought might have our rental car. Just as I picked up the phone, the shuttle of that car agency pulled up to the edge of the curb. I ran to grab our baggage and get on the shuttle. After riding on the shuttle for a few minutes, I realized that I had left my billfold open by the pay phone. We told the driver of the shuttle. He completed his entire route and finally returned us to the telephone. He said my billfold would most likely not be there, because the pay phone I used was the only one outside the baggage claim area.

I sat and prayed until we got back to our point of origin. I walked over to the phone and there was my billfold. Cat and I were amazed, grateful, and in awe. Her vision quest was already going well. We were definitely receiving help.

We picked up our rental car and left for Sedona, arriving later than anticipated. It took longer than planned to get the car, and the wandering drive through the mountains brought even further delay. When we arrived in Sedona, we discovered that our room had been given to someone else.

We went to a small twenty-four hour grocery and asked for

suggestions. By then, it was almost midnight. The clerk suggested we telephone other hotels to see if they had extra rooms. They were full. He finally picked up the phone, dialed a number and handed the telephone to Cat. She inquired, 'Do you possibly have a room available for tonight?...Only one?...We'll take it. How do we get there?'

She hung up the telephone. I asked, 'Cat, how much will it cost?'

'I didn't ask. Surely it will be affordable.'

We thanked the man at the store for making the call. Then we followed the directions to the hotel. We were stunned as we pulled up to a luxurious hotel that reminded me of a Ritz-Carlton. There was a huge fountain in front. I looked at Cat and she looked back at me. We laughed. We were tired, and it was better to laugh than cry, because we knew how expensive this might be.

We stepped through the doors and walked with assuredness to the counter. God would have to put the words in our mouths and take charge. We knew it. The man came from the office. 'May I help you?'

We told him that we were the ones who phoned. The price he first quoted was shocking. After telling him our financial situation and appealing to his sensitive side, he looked at us and hesitantly said, 'Just a minute.'

He turned and left the room. With this, we thought there still might be hope. He returned with a key in his hand and offered us a new price. We accepted his new offer, profusely thanked him, and gave him reassurance by reminding him we were leaving early in the morning. When we opened the door to our room, we found that the last room available was a fantastic suite. Twice now we were shown that someone above was taking care of us extraordinarily well on this quest.

After walking around that beautiful hotel on the first morning, we went to see our original hotel and regular room. It was in a good location and the view from our normal motel room was actually better than from our luxury room. After checking in, we went downtown to treat ourselves to a wonderful breakfast and then made a few stops for maps of the area. I bought some snacks for myself, but Cat did not want any.

Next we traveled outside town to a huge rock called Bell Rock and climbed up on it. There we found a large medicine wheel built by

others who had obviously visited this rock before us. I took my doritos and coke and left Cat by herself. I said, 'I'll leave you here, and I will go over there. I'll stay in your sight, but you might need to spend time alone to do this.'

I took a seat about twenty feet away. I finished my coke and chips and was getting thirsty. The area felt great. I looked over the scenery and observed other tourists. They climbed the rock and looked at the medicine wheel. They stayed their distance, never approaching Cat or me. After a short while, I called out to Cat, 'Is anything happening? Is anything unusual happening yet? Have you seen anything?'

We were both so naive. Just as in all life, we were each doing our best in the situation. She replied, 'Not yet. Are you ready to go? Let's go to another place and see if it works better.'

As we left Bell Rock, Cat reached down and picked up a big heart rock. She handed it to me saying, 'Here's a heart-shaped rock. It is for you. Once you have a heart rock, you never have to give yourself away again. You can have love, but not lose you.'

I looked at it carefully. It was a red heart rock. I clutched that heart rock with delight. Cat's vision quest began my collection of heart rocks.

The following day, we had a grand breakfast before she went to pray on another rock. This time she dropped me by the motel room, so I could get in some writing time. I was in the process of releasing a relationship that I had been in about a year. I knew now to bring the pain from the inside to the outside. I wanted to use every skill I knew to shed the pain of letting go as rapidly as possible, so I could move forward to a healthier relationship in the future. As I wrote, I discovered similar patterns in all my past relationships, although this last relationship was much better than the one before it.

Cat left for a few hours. When she returned, we went to a quaint restaurant for a cup of coffee and the sharing of insights. We then went shopping in Sedona before going to an excellent restaurant that we had saved for our last night.

The next morning we drove the rental car back to the airport in Phoenix and headed home, discussing what each of us had received and learned on our trip. We both received insights. From all you have told us, Gary, it sounds to me as if that vision quest was nothing like what we are about to experience now."

Everyone laughed at my story. I sensed from their laughing

that they understood something I was missing. Gary said, "Susanne, we are going to hang chips and coles around you for this vision quest."

I do believe I caught a twinkle coming from those deep, intense eyes. We saw Gary's fun side. I had only seen the serious side before. I laughingly retorted, "Surely you wouldn't! I'm going to ask Cat to support me on my vision quest, since I enjoyed supporting her on hers. I want her to be one of the main three supporters you said we will need. I know that in time she will do another vision quest in this way."

Gary said, "We'll see."

By the time Gary left for South Dakota a few days later, we all knew that a vision quest was much more work and preparation than we'd ever dreamed. Shortly after he left, we began the walk towards our quest.

We had to find or make everything on our list. We were to gather two hundred rocks each and provide enough wood for sweating during the purification period and for the entire weekend of the quest. We were also to make preparations for a place on the land for Gary and Elizabeth to stay, making certain they were comfortable and had plenty of food for the vision quest which is called a hanbleceya in Lakota. This was the physical preparation. We would also be preparing for the hanbleceya in an emotional, mental, and spiritual way.

I began to discover a truth about commitment. I found that from the time one commits or even states she is going to do a vision quest, it all begins. The lessons come. It is an opportunity to learn more about one's self, one's relationships, one's life.

Little did I know how good this opportunity would be for me in my growth and my understanding of all life, not just my own. As I moved forward preparing for this hanbleceya, a higher understanding overtook me. It was like a "knowing." Presenting a pipe to Gary and making the commitment to prepare and complete this vision quest gave me a new understanding about the twelve apostles. I knew this was a continuation of my letting go of my life and releasing my self-will. I was letting go of old beliefs given to me by others. I was finding out what I believed. This is similar to what the apostles did. They laid down their old beliefs and walked forward without looking back. They suspended their egos and believed, trusting the process just as Jesus did. They gave up self-will. They surrendered to find truth. Now I was having the opportunity to do the same thing on a much smaller scale. It seemed illogical, but I knew I absolutely had to do this! I wanted to do this!

Gary telephoned to give us further instruction. “Four days before the vision quest, the purification period begins. Do not touch water in any form during that time. You can drink tea made from sage or sweet grass. At midnight on the fourth day of purification, you will begin a fast that will continue until the quest is over.”

As I thought about the purification and fasting for a vision quest, I recalled another situation that had taken place in my life several years earlier. I had met a man at Crested Butte who asked me if I would like to ride with him on the ski lift. Almost as quickly as we sat down, he asked, “Are you a Christian?”

I said, “Yes,” wondering what was next. Then I asked, “Why?”
“You have so much pain in your face.”

I had smiled at him as we stood in line, so how did he know I was in so much pain? I asked him. “How did you know?”

“I saw it in your eyes. I looked past the smile. I recognize the pain, because I looked like you several years ago.”

He then went on and shared more with me. “If you will fast one day a week for four months, you will receive answers that you need in your life.”

We followed this discussion with him sharing Bible scriptures that gave me more information about fasting. It was an interesting conversation to think about. This seemed to be one of my first answers to that prayer I said on my knees when I asked for answers and guidance in my life. I agreed to be willing to follow God’s guidance for discovering answers that would bring joy and happiness into my life and into others’ lives. When I returned home, I began fasting on Wednesdays.

I could not help but wonder if that experience of fasting had somehow lead to the time of fasting and prayer that was before me now. Did my going with Cat to support her quest have something to do with this vision quest? What about the Native American who appeared and told me I had to attend some ceremonies of Native Americans? Each experience seemed to build on the previous one. Did these experiences begin to prepare me for a true vision quest?

When I said that intense prayer three or so years ago, I was heard. Seeds were planted. For a while, it looked as if nothing was happening. The seeds must have just surfaced when I began fasting. When I chose to go on that vision quest, some spiritual helper must have known what I was ready for at that time. Now I was ready for more growth. I thought I was feeling pretty good about everything when

I walked into that first sweat lodge. Apparently I needed to prepare my field some more for the growth necessary to help here on this earth in a better way.

I was amazed, for I could suddenly see how my life was fitting together, how each field changed with preparation of myself. I could feel the movement and the timing. I wanted to reach out and embrace this instant of knowing.

This spiritual path was allowing me to combine its sacred teachings, the twelve-step program, and all past knowledge for a new understanding of life. The twelve-step program and my sponsor provided the initial instrument to the insights and patterns of my life, while the information I was only beginning to understand about the medicine wheel and this way strengthened my foundation, giving me an even higher path to walk. I was seeing what I had created with new eyes, as the sweat lodge gently opened me to the more difficult issues I needed to face. I was being prepared to release whatever would be necessary in order to completely heal the hurts of my past.

Kathy, Anita, and I barely knew each other as we entered into our preparation. We had only met at my very first sweat three months before. Now we gathered rocks together, supported each other, and helped each other stay balanced as we moved closer to the time we were to go on "the hill." By the time of that first vision quest in October, 1989, we had formed a bond for life that could not be broken.

As we prepared for the quest, situations presented themselves. Tests occurred in each of our individual lives to gift us with what we needed, so that we could move forward in life in a better way. We prepared in the best way we knew how. Changes occurred rapidly. During this time, learning was accelerated so each person who presented a pipe to quest might have much greater growth than usual. Healing also seemed to be taking place.

While I was preparing, John invited me to his house on a regular basis. There was one room in his house where I seemed unbelievably comfortable. It became my place to release and heal, a place where I was finally able to grieve. In one corner was an old Victorian fireplace. The walls of the room were painted a soothing, deep charcoal gray blue. I called it the blue room, an appropriate name.

I began spending more time on the weekends at John's home. It was easier that way since his children were living with him. They gave me the guest bedroom downstairs and sometimes Savannah, his

daughter, stayed with me in that room.

John's house, which was so much like my grandmother's home, became a place where tears seemed to flow for no reason. I would simply begin to talk and the tears would come. I had no control over them. It was embarrassing at times, even though John attempted to make me feel comfortable about it. I finally realized I was having emotional closures. I had worked on my issues both physically and mentally in the past. I was now beginning to realize that I had not allowed myself to emotionally work through the losses of my past years.

I allowed myself to grieve over many happenings in my life, including situations that occurred after my husband's illness and death. I allowed myself to hurt over past decisions I had made for my children and myself. I looked at how I had hurriedly left New Mexico when I married again. I had not allowed myself much time to say good-bye appropriately to anyone, especially in a place where I loved so many people.

I felt guilty about the decisions I had made that caused major upheavals in my children's lives. I had not shared Dawn's senior year with her. I moved Jet to three schools in less than one semester. Why had I made such decisions?

I let go of even more anger that I was apparently holding within me. I had to let go of the remaining guilt I felt over my divorce. According to the church doctrine I had been taught, divorce was an unforgivable sin. The only acceptable way to obtain a divorce was to be able to prove adultery. I could not just say it, but I must be able to prove it as a fact. I knew in my heart this had been true in my case, but it did not erase the words I had heard so many times from the pulpit and from my parents when I was growing up.

I had supported many people as they went through their pains of divorce. I continued to encourage and support them after their divorces, but sometimes did not understand the decisions they made or their actions. Now I personally knew something about what they were dealing with in life.

I became aware of significant dreams while preparing for my hanbleceya and the dreams touched problems in my life that I needed to solve. Then I had an unusual dream or was it a dream? I did not know what to call it.

THE GIFT OF A FEATHER

A few months after presenting the pipe, I became so sleepy one afternoon that I could not even function. Rarely do I lie down during the day, but this day I had no choice. I slept for awhile. When I opened my eyes, I was in my bedroom and a beautiful woman was standing by my bed. Her smile was radiant. She smiled down at me on the bed and said, "You can't wake up yet. You have to go deeper. This is important. Close your eyes and go back to sleep."

I closed my eyes again. At that point, I sensed there were other people in the room. I opened my eyes and watched as a man laid an enormous feather across the foot of my bed. It almost covered the width of my queen size bed. This feather was about four feet in length and radiantly beautiful. It was divided into sections, beginning with green, turning into a beautiful blue which then turned into a reddish purple and finally into yellow. A yellow gold ran through the entire feather and tipped its' entire edge. I felt awake, but knew I must not be. I had to be dreaming. I went back into sleep and woke again. The feather stayed in my thoughts continuously. The feather was fantastic. What did it mean? Was it all a dream, or did I truly open my eyes and then go back into sleep?

I could not release the feather and its beauty from my mind. Three days later my son, Jet, dropped by. I told him about what happened. He left and returned with a book on birds. I began to search for a bird with large, colored wings of these colors. I found nothing like it. Perhaps it was a mythical bird. Jet and I discussed the possibility and when he said the word, I knew. "The phoenix....the phoenix who dies and rises again from its own ashes."

I went to the garage and dug through several boxes until I found the encyclopedia. I looked up the phoenix. The description was like the feather. It supposedly had wings larger than an eagle, almost as large as a small airplane. It could fly higher than any bird.

The encyclopedia explained further that "at the end of each life

cycle, the phoenix burned itself on a funeral pyre. Another phoenix then rose from the ashes with renewed youth and beauty. The young phoenix, after rising from the ashes, carried the remains of the previous phoenix to the altar of the Sun God. The long life of the phoenix, as well as its dramatic rebirth, made it a symbol of immortality and spirituality.”

Though I had a difficult time believing this was a vision, my gut confirmed what my mind rejected. I finally decided to bring this feather into some sort of physical form. I painted the feather shown to me on a cloth and placed it at the foot of my bed in hopes that more answers might come.

What did this mean for me? Weeks later, I learned there is an old Indian prophesy that the phoenix is a sign to a person that this great bird will help the person bring self-esteem back to the people. In addition to this, I also learned the phoenix represents all cross-cultural understanding, helping us release prejudice. It brings us to a deep acceptance that we all have red blood and we are all related. We are all one.

In my past I had presented seminars for multi-cultural communities to help remove prejudice and replace it with new understanding. Perhaps now I was going to have the opportunity to learn about another culture and somehow help release century-old prejudices. I knew what I would learn in this way eventually might help others. I also knew I would have to listen, learn, and be guided to what and how this vision might manifest itself.

I focused on those last words in the encyclopedia. “The young phoenix, after rising from the ashes, carries the remains of the previous phoenix to the altar of the Sun God.”

Did this have anything to do with the mysterious stranger who said it would be important for me to go to a Sun Dance? Was it only a coincidence that the twelve step group I had attended for years called itself the Phoenix group?

More changes began to occur, more closings. I had struggled for the previous three years to keep my house and make the house payments after my divorce. The house payments alone were almost \$1,000.00. Still I kept hanging onto it. I could not let it go. I had been taught that as long as I owned a house and the land it sat upon, I had some sort of security.

Every month was a struggle to stay afloat. I kept attempting to

help Dawn and Jet with difficult situations. I helped them with money along the way, because I felt guilty about the many times I had said “No” when it would have perhaps been wiser to say “Yes” while married to Virgil. I had money then. Now I did not. Still I gave money I couldn't spare. I wanted to be the parent I was not able to be after entering my second marriage.

Finally, I had to set some financial boundaries. I talked to Dawn and Jet and explained that we each had to stand on our own completely. I could not even help when emergencies took place. This was difficult for me. They had already gone through the previous Christmas with no gifts under the tree. Now I was cutting off financial help completely.

As finances worsened, I obsessed about how much money I could have had if only I would have sold the house three years earlier and had quit making those huge house payments. I kept listening to others who continually encouraged me to hang on until things got better. I listened and kept hanging on to my home. My ego got in the way of good judgment. Though the house had been on the market for months, there were few seekers and no takers. We bought the home when the market was strong, and I was attempting to sell it when the economy was weak. I could not see how I could make one more payment. As I prepared for my vision quest, I made the decision to not make the next payment and just turn everything over to God. I let it go completely, putting it in the God box.

Then two days before I began the four days of purification for the vision quest, a couple offered to buy my home for \$100.00 above what I owed on the note. I knew not to be any greedier than that. Although I was losing a great amount of money by selling it for this price, I understood God sent them. I was, at last, completely ready to let go of the house. Perhaps they had not come earlier, because I was not capable of accepting the loss of my home.

I began to understand that owning a home does not give one security. That is an illusion. Somehow I never realized I did not own any of my homes in my life. The reality was the bank generally owned them.

I had sold our 4200 square foot home in New Mexico. My second husband and I purchased this smaller home with approximately 2000 square feet in Oklahoma. I found myself moving into a 900 square foot apartment. I always believed transients live in apartments. Not me. Since I chose an apartment tiny in comparison to my house, I

would have to release even more.

I held a huge garage sale. It was almost like an estate sale. Not only was everything in the garage and in the yard for sale, but people also walked through the house and bought most of my large, expensive, and very good furniture. It went for so little compared to what I paid for it. I even gave away many items at the end of the two-day sale to some people who said they wanted them, but had no money to spend.

The sale proceeds were to go toward bills incurred during and since my last marriage. Friends helped me move into my new home, the apartment I chose. I met my neighbors. They certainly weren't transients. They were the type of people I would love to have as friends.

John Blake and my other friends helped me with my self-esteem as I passed through this drastic change. They helped me see that I was perfectly fine. I was just as loved in a small apartment as I was in a grand house. I had just as many friends. I could do the same things in an apartment as I had done in a house. It might cut down on overnight guests, but that was fine with me. Dawn and Jet's reaction was fun.

Even though they had moved out into their own places in preparation for my move, they came to see my apartment and one teasingly said, "Mom, we get the hint. We noticed you have only one bedroom for your office and one bedroom for your bed. With only one bed, we cannot move back home."

We all laughed. It would now be up to each of us individually. They were in their early twenties, young adults. The time had come for all of us to be self-sufficient. We agreed that we could do it.

Letting go of a house and moving into the apartment was like stepping over one more big self-inflicted boundary. I was letting go of all the physical attachments I had acquired. I knew this letting go was a part of becoming me. Though it sometimes hurt, I was being shown non-truths to find truth. I was releasing the past in preparation for a new life, and I somehow knew that I would be fine. It would simply take time. I knew more closings were to come as I walked this road. New truths would be slowly given to me, my truths. With these new truths and new understandings, perhaps I would be able to help other people heal physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, just as others were helping me now. Perhaps I was going to die, a little at a time, until I was prepared to take my own ashes to the Sun God of the Phoenix.

Beneath the pain associated with each closing was a joy at the center of me. I knew I was being guided and helped along the way. I was amazed how everything I had judged in my past just kept appearing right in front of me.

Eighty per cent of me tried not to judge others. The other twenty per cent sometimes jumped right in and took over. I had heard myself saying about a friend who filed for divorce something like, "If they would work a little harder, they could make their marriage work." Then I found myself filing for divorce.

When people could not pay their bills, I had said, "If they would just work a little harder, they could do it," or "If they would learn to live within their means, they could make ends meet." Then I could not meet my house payments and bills.

Again I did something I believed I would never do in my life. I accepted a date with someone whom I believed to be single, only to find out later that he was married. Yet I continued seeing him. He would phone and I would weaken. God put this right in my face to show me how a person can become involved in a relationship with a person that is married and have no intention of it happening. It also helped me understand once again how a person continues in a relationship when deep within she knows it is better to discontinue seeing someone. It finally ended. Though I knew it was wrong, it helped me understand how these things happen to others. Now the time had finally come to forgive myself.

I practiced acceptance. I could always accept others making mistakes. I could accept others having problems. I could not accept me doing what I did and making the decisions I made. I was hard on myself and judged my own actions accordingly.

I looked deep into myself, seeing my issues with much greater clarity. I knew I would always be pure (ha!) and I swore I would never have an affair (right) and I would always have AAA Credit standing (the the debts presented to me with the divorce certainly changed that).

I released my home to its new occupants. To my surprise, I loved my apartment. My credit vanished. To my surprise, I lived on cash. I did not know this was possible these days. The self-limiting boundaries I believed I would never face in my life were thrown at me, so I might understand the real world. I again saw that I was being stripped. This stripping away of the old had to take place to allow space for the new to enter.

I continued to peel off another layer of the onion to completely let go of my guilt...guilt about not being able to keep others alive, guilt about not being able to make a marriage work, guilt about not being able to keep the house. As I accepted myself more, I moved closer to the core of the real me.

As each emotional and physical condition was stripped away, I seemed to feel lighter and lighter. I was not shackled with nearly as much "stuff" inside or outside me. I was forced and pushed to release the heavier parts of my life. An inner security was building that had nothing to do with external events.

As I spiritually prepared for my first vision quest, I found peace and joy in making the prayer ties. I loved praying for the many people who had shared my life in the past and present, and even those I was yet to meet. I loved praying for the earth. This commitment became the most important commitment in my life. It took precedence over everything. I knew all commitments I made with the pipe in this way would take this precedence and many people would not understand.

I heard my own words in my head as I walked toward this quest. At my seminars on change, I had said repeatedly, "With every change we choose to make in life, especially the healthy changes, something will happen to try to hold us back and keep us the same. Statements will be made and events will happen which will interfere with our commitment to the change. Our ego tries to hold us back. It is more comfortable to stay the same. We have to make the decision, commit to that decision, and give the change we wish to make number one priority."

Every time a doubt about what I was doing crept into my mind, I would remind myself, "Trust the Process. You will be guided as to what to do and what not to do in this way."

John would confirm this, stating, "You will also learn about this way by observing all that takes place. You might make mistakes, but if you do everything with a good heart and in a sincere way, it will be accepted."

As I moved forward, I was certain that there would be more old beliefs to release, more closings to grieve, and more healing to receive. In other words, there were more weeds to clean out of my field. Some of the roots went deep. This would prepare me for a life of greater joy and happiness. I was receiving the answer to the prayer I said in February of 1986 when I essentially turned myself over to God.

I knew everything I was doing looked illogical to some of my friends, to my family, and to many others. At the same time, I knew for certain that I had been led to this path and it was going to be a part of my learning. I also knew this Lakota man named Gary, whom I had known for only a short time, was to be one of my greatest teachers.

I knew that through John, my spiritual partner, I would have the chance to learn more about my relationships with men. This was the first time I had ever developed a spiritual relationship with a man first, before getting on with the more customary reasons men and women connect.

I exhibited irrational behavior at times as I walked closer to the vision quest. Situations arose to bring to the surface that which was buried deep inside. This provided me with new understanding and healing. One Saturday afternoon, John and I were driving to a sweat when he saw a bird on the side of the road. He stopped the car and slowly backed down the road until we were alongside the bird. He got out and picked it up. When he returned to the car, he handed it to me.

The bird was still warm and it was in perfect condition. We did not know what had taken the life of this beautiful sparrow hawk. As I looked at the bird, I was overcome with emotion. What was happening inside me seemed illogical, even to me. I was overwhelmed with compassion. I thought I felt its spirit leaving. In fact, I felt as if I were somehow attached to this bird and its spirit. I said a silent prayer. I believed I was going to gulp out loud as I cried. I felt very foolish and awkward.

John went on talking about something else. When he looked over and saw me, he was surprised. The collar of my shirt was wet from silent tears. The little bird continued to pull feelings from deep inside me. As I looked at the bird, its wings were perfect in their design of color. Each feather was placed upon it so perfectly to form design and patterns.

John said, "Susanne, what is going on with you?"

"I am not sure." I had opened up the wing of this bird and was in absolute awe at its beauty. "John, look how perfectly the wing is designed. Isn't it amazing how God can create a bird in this way?"

"Yes, and just think, Susanne, if he can make a bird that perfect, he surely can make us that perfect."

"John, If God made this bird so beautiful, planned how it looked, its life, etc., then God puts at least as much effort into our bodies, our

lives.”

My tears increased as thoughts poured into my mind. “This bird who lost its life is giving me a wonderful gift. I sit here holding the bird, realizing how much everything in my life has given me before it, too, passed on...the beliefs, the events, the family, the relatives, the friends, and on and on.”

I thought back and realized how my life was perfectly planned and orchestrated just like this little bird in my hand. As I internalized this truth, something changed inside me. When I returned home, I picked up my Bible and read Matthew 10 about a sparrow falling from the sky and our value. Part of it said, “So don’t be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.”

Trees were also becoming more important to me. Even the leaves were more meaningful. I seemed to see everything in a new way. Yes, much of my life had been difficult, but some of it was very good. Every part was perfect for me. It was what I needed in order to learn, with every release taking place at just the right time for understanding and growth. As each tumultuous time came, I remembered my grandmother’s favorite saying, “The sun always comes out after the storm passes.”

As the clouds move on, the sun shines. It is always there, even when the clouds are covering it. Sometimes we do not believe this is possible, because the clouds in our life seem so large and heavy. The sun, however, does still shine. Through the difficult times, I had to look at a cloud and hold onto the saying, “This, too, shall pass!” for I knew the sun was still shining into my life. I simply could not feel its warmth, nor see the brightness of it.

I understood I was leaving an old way of life as I attended more sweats. I learned from each one of them. There was both pain and joy as lessons in my life accelerated to give me answers.

Though it may not have been as dramatic, it felt very much like the walk Jesus made as he carried his cross towards his death and his resurrection. He knew there was an eternal life of joy and happiness on the other side. When he came back after the resurrection, he walked among the people closest to him and they did not even recognize him. Why? Because he had changed. This is also what they say happens with every vision quest of fasting, praying, and returning to the people. A new person returns. This experience seemed to be a tangible way to gain a small insight into the stories of the Bible.

I was so grateful for having been given the opportunity to participate in these ceremonies. As I began to follow this path, I started laying aside my life for a better one, giving up some past roles for healthier ones. No matter how illogical it seemed to others, it seemed so simple to me. Three years before this path had opened, I had made the decision on my knees to carefully listen for answers and to follow all that God showed and opened to me. The secret of prayer is to listen when Spirit speaks.

I stayed focused on the other side of this transformation, knowing all that is mine to do and have would be presented to me. I planned to stand up and greet it. I wanted to have both Heaven and Earth here upon this Earth. The doors that were not mine would be closed and the doors that were mine would be opened. It sounded so simple and yet it was not easy.

FIRST VISION QUEST

As I stepped onto this path, I was quite naive. I simply trusted that understanding would come to me. I learned by following instructions and listening for answers when sitting around the fire and inside the lodge.

Kathy and I began gathering the hundreds of rocks we needed for the vision quest. It took several days, because we were trying so hard to place good energy and good prayers into everything we did for this quest. We wanted to bring about strong answers for all of us who were fasting and praying at the same time.

As we had been told, we first made an offering of tobacco for the rock nation and prayed. We gave thanks for the rock nation helping us. We asked that the rocks desiring to go with us please join us. These rocks would be used in sweats while we were on the hill praying. We said a prayer with each rock we picked up as we carefully carried it to the back of Kathy's Blazer. When the bottom layer was filled, we gently placed the last rocks on top of the first ones. When we delivered the rocks to the land, we removed them in a gentle way. Each rock would become a vital part of our quest, and we wanted these stones to know how much we appreciated their contribution to what we would be receiving.

Finally, Gary and Elizabeth arrived from South Dakota. Purification for the vision quest was about to begin. I made my sage tea on Sunday night and then took a long, last shower. At midnight I stopped touching water until after the end of the quest in seven days.

I had acquired everything on my list, including a pipe which John gifted me. My preparation was complete. I felt I was ready. It was mid-Monday morning when Elizabeth telephoned. She asked if Kathy and I could come sweat and visit with Gary. Although I had not expected the call, I eagerly agreed to go.

On the drive through the country, I thought about all that had

happened in the three and a half years since I began to work on myself. I knew I was taking a leap of faith, because I had no idea what would happen from this moment forward. I only knew that my life had been orchestrated perfectly for Gary to appear when he did and for this quest to be taking place.

During that first sweat, Gary said, "Susanne and Kathy, it would be good for you two to come early and stay on this land where you are going to be doing your quest. As you go through purification, situations will occur to make you angry and to throw you off balance. It is very important that you walk up that hill balanced. You will have the same opportunities to learn placed in front of you here, but the lessons will come in a more gentle way."

I understood. If we walked to our places on the hill balanced, the quest would most likely go much better than if we walked to that sacred space angry and off balance. Kathy and I had to work, so we were not certain we could spend this time before the quest camping.

Tuesday morning came, our second day of purification, and we found ourselves making our decision. Absolutely nothing was going right for me. Then Kathy showed up on my doorstep and asked, "How is your day going?"

"Not so good. Now I understand why we might need to go out early."

Kathy replied, "I'm ready."

After a few telephone calls and a few explanations, I received some help with my work. I was ready to go.

We really seemed lost in what we were doing. We stopped and got some bread and a few other items to eat. We each had our jugs of sage tea and everything on our individual lists we would need to complete the quest. Even as campers, we were novices.

I felt a sense of relief when we finally got to the land. Gary and Elizabeth were happy to see us. We built a fire and helped with the preparations for a sweat. We were learning. Gary visited with us as we followed his instructions. He was very gentle. We waited for others to arrive. They came, and we began. When Gary crawled into the lodge, he became a hollow tube as teachings flowed through him. I was amazed at his wisdom.

He was young and I knew he, too, had his lessons to move through in life. I had no idea what they were, but I knew since he was so young, there was still much more for him to work through on his own

wheel of life. I was certain of one thing. God brought this young man into my life for a reason.

The others left after the sweat, and Kathy, Gary, Elizabeth, and I began to settle in for the night. Gary suggested, "It would be good for you two to rise with the morning star to pray."

I had no idea how I would manage that, since I normally slept my best in the morning. Amazingly, we awoke at the right time. We rose to pray. I was grateful it was the third day of purification. It was almost time. Gary said he needed some pipestone. I knew John had some and I offered to go to Pauls Valley to get it. Gary said, "That would be good."

I drove to Pauls Valley. It was early, and John was still at home when I arrived. I told him what I needed and then asked, "Will I see you at the purification sweat this evening?"

As he closed the newspaper in front of him on the table, he surprised me by saying, "No, I have been invited to a reception in Norman."

I stood there stunned. This was the man who had told me how important it was to support someone going on the hill and had given me instructions about how to support others. My instincts told me that he was going with a woman, so I asked. "With whom?"

"A friend."

I persisted. "What friend?"

Then I listened as he continued to explain, "A friend I have attended some meetings with invited me to this reception. She really wants me to attend, and I do not think I will be through in time to get to the sweat."

My instinct was right. I knew we had no commitment to each other at this point, but why did he have to go on this night? I realized now more about the lessons being stronger if we were not on the land. I suddenly remembered that the Grandfathers work through other people for me to understand more about myself. John's actions were unlike him, so I knew this was somehow about an issue in my life.

I left quickly and returned to the land where I felt safe. When I returned, Gary sent me to find the area where I would spend time fasting and praying. I walked and walked. Finally, I found a spot surrounded by the most beautiful black and yellow spiders. They were identical to the one by my front door that had been making its huge web for approximately four weeks.

More people began to arrive and prepare their campsites. When we took breaks throughout the day, I had the opportunity to learn more from Gary and Elizabeth about their lifestyle.

When they were not out here working, they lived on the reservation with Gary's family. When they traveled off the reservation, they stayed in people's homes. They were invited into communities to help people. Their life was difficult since they lived solely on donations.

I watched Gary as we prepared. He still seemed shy, but he joked with us occasionally. Some attending the purification sweats were hesitant about interacting with him. Some even stated that he intimidated them. I felt quite comfortable around him, for I could see his kindness.

Don, Sally's husband, was working with the fire. He said, "Susanne, Sally said to tell Kathy and Anita she really wanted to be here when they went up and would try to make it."

That sounded as odd as John's statement that morning about the reception. Sally barely knew Anita and Kathy. I had asked Sally to be one of my supporters. She was initially my Al-Anon sponsor and now was one of my closest friends. I looked at Don and said, "Don, will Sally be here when I go up tomorrow night?"

Don said, "No, I don't think so."

I turned and walked away, thinking about this situation that was presenting itself to me. "I know this is happening for me to understand something about myself. I'm sad about it, but I also know that everything is being orchestrated just right for me. Maybe John isn't to be here when I go up. Maybe Sally isn't to be here. I know that the ones who are supposed to be here will be here. I am not orchestrating this. God is."

I tried to shake off my sadness by focusing on what was in front of me to do rather than on what was happening around me. I walked to the car to put my clothes on for the sweat. We all crawled into the lodge, and the sweat began. When the door opened the second time, I heard a voice outside and I knew it was John's. I felt delight. Was it he or was I just hoping it was his voice? He then crawled into the lodge. Yes, he came after all. He must not have stayed at the reception long. I smiled and said a prayer of thanks silently.

The food after the sweat tasted delicious. I knew I was not to eat after this last midnight of purification. Gary leaned over and teased

me, "Susanne, you better eat well. This is the last meal for awhile. Eat up. I don't want you to be hungry when I bring those cokes and chips and hang them on a tree near you." We all laughed.

I wasn't very hungry, but ate what I could wondering how I would feel the next day working and drinking only sage tea. Again, we slept well and rose with the morning star.

Thursday, the day of my vision quest, finally arrived. Several of those helping made me a small shelter of willow branches in the small area I chose.

While others worked on my shelter, I went to cut six fruit trees and a small cedar tree for my vision quest. When John and I earlier discussed my cutting down the trees, those tears that appear from no where came once again. The time had arrived. Before using my ax, I prayed in the same manner as Kathy and I had done for the stones. I made an offering and gave a prayer of thanks for the tree nation, for those trees who were giving their lives in order for me to receive information about my life through this vision quest.

I could not believe how weak I became as the day progressed. Gary gave me instructions on what to do with the seven special stones I had selected and brought to the quest. I had kept them separate from the others. After following his instructions, I asked what he wanted me to do next. He told me how to place the first seven stones in the fire. I followed his directions and hoped I was not making any mistakes. He told me each set of instructions only once.

I then placed everything I needed to take with me by the sweat lodge. I prepared the trees by stripping the bark from the trunks. I made my prayer flags and asked for guidance on how to tie them to the trees. Each tree, ready to go, leaned against the lodge. Finally someone said, "It's almost time. The rocks are ready."

As those words were spoken, I saw John's van pulling onto the land. As he drew closer, I could see that he brought Sally with him. I was so happy to see both of them. John watched me as he pulled to a stop. His timing was perfect. We were all just preparing to change for the sweat. Everything was ready. Before we went into the sweat, he asked me for a hug, reminding me, "I want a hug now, because after the sweat no one can touch you. You will be wakan and to be wakan is to be holy and untouchable until you have finished here."

I gratefully said, "Thanks and thank you for being here."

I knew he must have left work early to arrive in time. I hugged

him a second time and moved into the lodge. I sat in the East, holding the pipe John had given me. John sat on one side of me and Sally sat on the other side. I looked around. The lodge was full. There were four of us preparing for hanbleceya and the others were supporting. I was the first one to go up on that Thursday night. I was grateful for every person here.

Gary crawled in and took the pipe from me. This was the opening of my pipe and the beginning of the real thing, the vision quest. I watched as he touched each stone entering the lodge with two pipes, mine and his. After the first seven were in, he handed the pipe back to me and explained, "Hold onto this pipe until you return. You are not to allow it to touch the ground at any time. During your time on the hill, sit facing West and always keep the stem of your pipe pointed to the West."

After sweating, several women helped me dress in all new clothes. I never laid down my pipe while dressing. When I was certain my clothes were all on and I was comfortable, I stepped outside the sweat lodge, signaling to the others that I was ready to begin. I remembered that I was no longer to speak or to touch anyone. I held my pipe as Elizabeth draped my blanket around me. It was to be my only cover until I returned.

It was the first weekend in October, and the weather had been perfect during the purification. The night was cool, and the blanket felt good around my shoulders. I stood there as my supporters gathered my trees and prayer ties plus the bucket, knife, ax, sweet grass braid, and sage offerings.

It was dark. Gary motioned for me to begin walking to the place I had picked to pray. Behind me was Gary, and the others followed him in a single line. Everyone was silent. I had a sense of the feeling Jesus must have had when he walked towards his crucifixion dragging his cross. I felt certain some of my friends who were not there, but knew what I was doing, were mocking me for doing this. Some relatives who understood a little about this sacred path worried about my going without food and water for three days.

When I reached my spot, my supporters, beginning in the West, placed a tree with a flag in each direction, forming a rectangle around me. Supporters positioned two more fruit trees and my cedar tree with flags in front of me. They carefully strung my prayer ties around the trees, fencing me into a small area about six feet by four feet. It was a

smaller area than I had cleared. I felt safe.

I stood silently and looked ahead as everyone prayed for me. Gary motioned for them to turn and walk away. They turned their backs to me and left, walking down the hill and back to camp without speaking. I sat down with my pipe and looked at it closely. John had gifted me this pipe, and Gary had filled it for me. I was to hold it. Would I accidentally lay it down? Could I make it for three days and nights with no water or food?

Supporters would be eating and drinking for me. I wondered how well this worked. Supposedly, when I became hungry, they would eat and I would feel it. When I became thirsty, they would drink for me. Someone said earlier there was an angel in the Bible that existed on air alone. That gave me hope.

I was weak and happy to lie on the ground. There was a red rock shaped somewhat like a buffalo in my area. I laid my head on it. All of a sudden, I heard something under the ground. I had never heard a rumble like this within the earth. Was it a warning? I looked up at the moon and saw wisps of clouds beginning to cover it. Then I saw lightning in the distance. I hurriedly got up and put the tarp that was left for me over the little shelter, attempting to tie it to the willow frame with one hand since I could not lay down my pipe. I finally secured the tarp, but it was about a foot off the ground around the bottom and did not cover much of the structure made of willow branches. Then the thunder came and the rain.

It rained hard, moving from South to North for quite awhile. Finally it stopped. It began again, raining hard from North to South. I was cold with only one blanket, and it was now sopping wet.

I sat there cold and wet. Finally I tried to curl up and sleep, but that seemed impossible. Instead, I opened my eyes. In the grass I saw a little light. A few months earlier, Sally and I had a discussion about the deva kingdom beings.

We were sitting at her kitchen table, as we did on many nights, discussing several subjects when I asked her about her trip to New Mexico. Her response surprised me. She looked at me out of the corner of her eye and smiled as if she were reliving the experience. "Susanne, it was wonderful. I stopped at the foot of a mountain and just soaked in the gentleness of it all. I am certain that mountain was a home for the deva kingdom."

"Sally, a what? What is a deva kingdom?" I had never heard

that word. I assumed she was talking about something mythical.

“They are little light beings who live under the earth. Their only light is within them. They had to learn how to radiate their own light to find their path within the earth.”

I loved this story, even though I thought they were make believe. “Sally, have you ever seen any?”

“No, but I feel quite certain they are there.”

Now I was looking at something I had not seen before. Was it mythical or not? Could it be a deva? Interestingly enough, I had been doing affirmations for a long time about my own light shining. Perhaps that little light came to teach me something. Looking at that tiny, brilliant light sitting there in the rain, I talked to it. I thought, “With no one out here, I can say anything I wish to say and not feel silly.”

So I said aloud, “Are you possibly from the deva kingdom? If you are, could you invite some of your friends to come see me? I am here alone, and it would be fun to have a few more friends join us, don’t you think?”

I lay down again for a few minutes and closed my eyes, attempting to sleep. I couldn’t. It was much too cold. I prayed instead of sleeping. The next time I opened my eyes, there were six lights. They moved closer to me. Amazing! Little light beings. Those little beings stayed with me until daylight. I shared with them my secret desires. I told them about an affirmation I had been doing. I also told them I would like to be able to walk into a room and light it up without turning on the light. The rain ended as morning came.

At first light, I saw a spider sitting in the South. I talked to the beautiful spider, thanking it for also joining me. As the sun finally rose, my dress and blanket began to dry. By mid-morning, the sky was clear. Everything looked crisp. I knew I had not been fasting long enough to be hallucinating, but directly in front of me I was seeing many tiny white dots in the sky. They lit up like tiny stars. I sat up straight and looked at those lights. The little ions of light would descend to the earth and then rise up to form symbols in front of me. I had to look fast to recognize the shapes. Once I saw them, the shapes disappeared into the earth again. The dots would then reappear in the sky. They would repeat the process, forming more shapes.

I quickly learned if I asked to see something a second time, I could get the same form twice, but they would not do it a third time. I watched in awe. It was better than any movie I had ever seen. I knew

who the Director must be! It seemed to last quite some time. The lights returned every morning of the vision quest at the same time. Phenomenal! Some shapes I recognized, and some shapes I knew I would learn about in the future. One of the shapes was a pipe. The pipe stem had two rings carved on each end. I would watch for it over the years.

Later in the day, I said a prayer. As I said a prayer with my eyes closed, I saw the image of an Indian outlined by purple and blue. In part of my prayer, I said, "I am willing to take this journey alone. However, it would be wonderful to have a partner with whom I could share and learn about this way, with whom I could play and laugh."

I opened my eyes to see two beautiful spotted eagles right above me. They were low, so low I thought I could have stood and reached up to touch them. They quickly flew over me and made a great circle around the area. They played with each other, darting to and fro, and flew to the South as they left. Was that an answer? Was that a "Yes, you can have someone with whom to share this way and this learning."

I imagined it might be John. However, I felt he might not be ready, since it had been only eight or nine months since his divorce.

In one of the purification sweats, Gary had shared with us that an elk would come to one or possibly two of the five people going on the hill to pray. In the middle of the second cold night, I was under my blanket when I heard a loud pawing at the ground. The snorting sounded as if it were right over me. I realized the elk had come. The pawing and snorting were so loud that I was startled and somewhat frightened. Then I remembered that it would be good for me to stand and greet it. I did so, but I was too late. As I stood, I heard hooves running towards the direction of Kathy's spot, but could not see it. I knew Kathy would recognize it also. I said aloud, hoping it would hear, "Thank you for coming."

The lights from the deva kingdom came again that second night. The second day the lights in the sky entertained me. After they left, I napped. Daytime was so much warmer. Soon it was time for the evening prayer.

The third night, the light beings did not come, and I felt rejected. That was the coldest night of all. I was cold, wet, and restless. By the middle of the night, I was having a difficult time staying within my ties. I doubted what I was doing. The negative self-talk began. "Are you

crazy? Don't you know God will answer your questions at the right time without your doing this? People will think you are nuts."

The inner dialogue continued. I thought about going down to camp, and then I thought about the prayers I had made. I caught myself and consciously worked on changing my thinking, telling myself, "O. K., Susanne, your commitment is almost over and if you can make it only a few more hours, all your prayers will be answered."

I remembered all of my dreams and what I had seen to that point, confirming what I was to do. I focused on what Gary had said in the lodge. "When you come to the point of needing to make a decision about staying in your ties or returning to camp, stand up and hold onto the pipe and pray."

In other words, I was to rise above the pain. I stood up and prayed and prayed. As I did so, thoughts came. I thought about my fourteen year old cousin, Billy, and all he had been through with his motorcycle accident. I had been told that if I stayed within my ties, all prayers would be answered. My crazy thinking stopped as I turned to thoughts of Billy.

"With prayers for Billy in these ties, I do not dare leave. If he can go through what he has gone through, surely I can stay. In fact, this is a piece of cake compared to that. His motorcycle accident placed him in intensive care for months, and this is intensive care for only three days and three nights...only a few more hours. Billy could only move his eyes, blinking once for yes and twice for no. He became so frustrated with us sometimes for not understanding his blinks. His body was crushed, yet his mind was quite clear. His mother put the alphabet on a poster board for him to try to communicate what he could. He blinked for each letter of the words he wanted to share with us. He could sometimes blink faster than we could understand. The few times I had the opportunity to visit with Billy, I talked to him whether he was awake or asleep. I repeated to him that he was going to be able to conquer this. I suggested he not listen to negative statements and that he try to block out anything negative being said. His family was also positive with him. I mentioned to Billy once that it would be good when he could talk again. A therapist overheard me and asked me to step outside. She told me not to say that, because he might never talk again. I listened, but disagreed. I told her miracles would take place, and I felt he would speak again. Now if Billy can become frustrated and keep going on, then I can be frustrated with this cold and stay

here. I am certain he is in more pain than I at this moment. If he can be positive, surely I can be a little more positive here. Get with it, Susanne. Pray harder.”

I continued to stand and pray. After praying as long as possible, I began counting to thirty over and over again. I knew I had to finish this commitment. I wanted to watch every prayer be answered.

After making the decision to stay, I again attempted to pull back one side of my blanket and crawl inside. When I pulled back the left corner with my left hand and slid in, I saw a light on the inside of my blanket about two inches by one inch that was solidly lit up. I said, “Oh, there you are! I thought you weren’t coming tonight! I am so happy you decided to join me.”

I then put my right hand into the blanket and saw more places light up. I looked more closely and realized it was my three fingers that were lit up, my thumb and the second and third nails of my right hand. I took my hand back out from the covers and put it back in again. Again, the three fingers lit up. When I said aloud, “That can’t be,” the lights went out on both sides.

Why had I just rationalized it away? I apologized. I lay in the dark and thought about it. “Just as in life, these tiny lights of the deva kingdom showed me here how important it is to believe in order for it to happen. Our own doubts can turn everything off in our lives just as easily as my light beings turned off here tonight.”

The morning brought a spectacular view. Heavy frost or possibly a light layer of ice covered everything. The mist was heavy. It was beautiful. After the mist receded, my light show began in the sky. During the light show the supporters came to get me, and the lights left. I said a silent good-bye to the lights and to my area that I loved as the supporters took the prayer ties from around me. Then Gary gently said, “Go get in the lodge and do not talk to anyone on the way down.”

Someone followed me, making certain I was fine. They knew I might be weak. It was a short distance to camp, but far enough that no one could see the camp area and the lodge from there.

The others who did their vision quest returned to the lodge. The sweat began and each of us told what happened to us from the time we left the lodge. I smiled on the inside and the outside as I listened to Kathy. She described the same experience I had with the elk. She even described the same sounds. Yes, she had heard it. The elk had come to both of us.

I was last to share. My hanbleceya ended. It was wonderful. I now understood more about what happens from the time one commits or even thinks about doing a vision quest until the pipe is placed on the altar after the last sweat. Many lessons come. I knew that movement around the medicine wheel, the going back, repairing, and healing, was taking place. This opportunity helped me learn more about my relationships, my life, and myself.

As I was preparing to leave, John said, "During the next four days, remember that you are considered wakan or holy. More answers will be coming. Pay attention to your dreams."

I understood that I left a part of me on that hill as I fasted and prayed. A new me was returning. New would replace the old, and I would not understand it all right away. There would be an unfolding during the following year. I had no doubt that I wanted to continue to learn everything the Grandfathers chose to share with me. The opportunity to understand more about these teachings as a part of my path was mine to receive through Gary. All I had to do was remain open to answers. I was eager to see what answers would be coming with the completion of my vision quest.

ANSWERS BECOME MORE CLEAR

John took me home and we visited for a short while before he had to return to Pauls Valley. I took a wonderful shower. Standing under the warm water, I thought about how good I felt after completing my time of fasting and praying. Thoughts entered about how the earth gave me warning of the storm approaching. Perhaps if I learn to listen more closely, the earth will show me other storms that approach me in my everyday life.

Although it was not yet dark, I decided to lie down for a short while. Evidently I was more tired than I thought, because I slept. I dreamed about going to Sun Dance with John to support him.

I awoke the following morning in time for Kathy and I to go back out to the land to see Gary and Elizabeth before they left for Dallas. When we arrived, Gary was just completing a small medicine bundle that could be worn on a thong around the neck. He handed each of us a small leather pouch and explained that each one contained all that was from our hanbleceya.

Then I again showed how naive I was. As I held my leather pouch, I asked, "Gary, what does one do to become a pipe carrier?" He was looking at me with those dark eyes. I felt awkward and continued, "Or, what is my next step to become what one calls a pipe carrier?"

He responded, "Susanne, you have a pipe with which you prayed. You just spent three days and nights praying with it on the hill. You did this for yourself and for the people. Anyone who can keep such a commitment is a pipe carrier."

On the way home, I thought about this way and what I had just done. "This way is not new. It could be well over a thousand years old. How many answers does it have for the world? How many people know nothing about it? What will I learn from this ancient way and why am I being offered this opportunity? Receiving these answers will be most interesting as it all unfolds."

When I arrived home, John's two children were on the answering machine. We were planning a surprise birthday party for John that was to be on the following Sunday afternoon. As we had hoped, John was surprised and it was a successful, happy event.

Monday morning, I began the actual completion of the move into my apartment. I then attempted to go back to work on my nutrition business, even though I felt certain my new direction was to conduct seminars. I was ready.

With only a few boxes left to be unpacked, I answered the telephone on Wednesday evening to hear Elizabeth's voice. "Hi, Susanne. How is the move going? Gary's finished with his work in Dallas, and we thought it would be good to come spend some time with you if that is O.K."

"Do you realize how small my new apartment is, Elizabeth? I only have one bedroom. You would have to sleep on the floor in the living room. If that is O.K. with you, then you are welcome."

"That is O.K. Someone can drive us halfway if you can meet us on I-35 at a turnoff. Can you be there by 7:30?"

"Yes."

After making arrangements to meet them at an exit approximately seventy-five miles South of Norman, I laid the receiver down and wondered about this adventure. By 7:30, I was a little nervous as I waited at the designated meeting place. Within a few minutes, another car pulled in behind mine. Gary stepped out first.

After transferring their belongings...sleeping bag, pillows, etc.... to my car, Gary, Elizabeth, and I began our return trip to Norman. We were quiet and slightly uncomfortable at first. This Lakota man who seemed so wise in the sweat lodges and his wife were coming to be guests in my new apartment. I thought I eliminated guests with the selling of my house and now look who was coming. Finally, we began to visit about small stuff. By the time we arrived in Norman, we were more relaxed with each other.

They slept on the floor in my living room. One day passed into another, and still they stayed. It was a time we all enjoyed. Being in such a small space gave occasion to many discussions on a variety of topics. Many people gravitated to this man for answers and for healing. I was careful not to ask too many questions. I knew I would receive my answers at the right time, and the answers may or may not come through this man. If Gary wanted to share something with me, I felt he would

when he was told by the Grandfathers to do so.

I had the opportunity to truly get to know and to love these two people in an unconditional way. As a result, my apartment became their second home and a place for them to retreat when they were not on the reservation or off helping others. This continued off and on until they moved into their own home several years later.

Throughout that time, John and I were developing our relationship. During those first few months, he would occasionally see someone else besides me. For a while, I was comfortable with it and it was fine.

One Friday about 4:00 p.m., he telephoned. He did not ask me to share in any activities with him over the weekend, saying he had other plans. Before hanging up the phone he asked me, "What are you up to this weekend?"

"I don't know yet."

He was silent. Then he said, "Well, I'd better go now. I've got more work to finish before I leave for the day." Then he hung up.

I knew I probably would not hear from him until the weekend was over. I also knew I would have liked to see him. I wondered what I would do. I decided to just sit down, relax, and see what came up.

In less than thirty minutes, Gary and Elizabeth arrived to spend a few days. An hour later, Kathy came by the apartment. She was on her way to go camping. The four of us visited a short while. Gary and Elizabeth began talking about something they needed in South Dakota. Kathy and I began to ask questions about the reservation. Neither of us had ever been there. Spontaneously, the four of us decided to drive to the reservation. Gary telephoned his father, Spencer, to let him know we were coming to have a cup of coffee with him in the morning.

By 7:30 p.m., we were on the road. We drove straight through from Norman, Oklahoma, to Mission, South Dakota, in just under eleven hours. We passed through Mission, turned down a long gravel road and eventually came to another long road which led to the family's house. I had learned on the way that Gary's brother and sisters' families lived in this small home with Spencer. When we turned into the driveway, it was very early...6:30 a.m. Gary went to the door and found it to be unlocked. He turned and motioned for us to come inside. The house was clean though the furnishings were sparse. I could only see the living room and kitchen.

We sat down and waited. First two small children came out of

a bedroom. They were adorable and sleepy-eyed. One crawled up on my lap. Then a man in his early 50's emerged. He was slender and tall. Gary introduced us to Spencer, and we all sat with him at the kitchen table while Gary fixed the coffee.

In visiting with Spencer, it was apparent that Gary was from a traditional Lakota family, one that speaks Lakota and attempts to retain their ancestral spiritual ways. I looked around. It was in this setting that he learned about the hardship and tenderness of life. Gary now was attempting to teach us about the spiritual ways of life he learned there. He definitely had taken on a tremendous task and Spencer knew it.

Gary and Elizabeth disappeared into the back rooms to find what they wanted to take back with them. One item was Elizabeth's macaw, a rather large bird with beautiful blue and yellow plumage. After visiting for a while, we left to see more of the reservation. Gary guided us over some beautiful land. We moved from the flatter area into rolling hills. At first we saw only a treeless landscape with wide open spaces, but then we came to an area with many trees and a lake.

Most of the homes we saw looked much the same. Most were very simple with some more run down than others. Occasionally we saw one very well tended with flowers around it, then another that looked, for this area, more spacious. With so few jobs and an unemployment rate of at least 80%, what did these people do? How did they survive? Was it their spirituality that kept them going? Only six hours later, we were on our way back to Norman, Oklahoma. It was so fast.

The trip back was tiring. None of us slept on the way to South Dakota. We shared experiences, teased in a good way, and laughed going to the Rosebud and most of the way home, but sleep nagged at all of us approximately three hours from Norman.

We were determined to make it to my apartment. We forced ourselves to continue talking to stay awake. We rotated drivers. When I was driving and Gary was in the passenger seat, we had a chance to really visit. He shared with me some of his most memorable times, such as his entering the sweat lodge for the first time at age eight. By age twelve, Spencer and his Lakota elders honored him by allowing him to pour the water for them. They taught him how to conduct a purification ceremony.

His grandparents taught him also, telling him stories in many different ways. His Catholic mother combined church with this traditional

way. She encouraged Gary to read the Bible and he did so numerous times. Once I asked, "Gary, why did you read it so much?"

"Well, Susanne, there wasn't much else to do in the cold of long South Dakota winters."

When he was eleven, his mother told him she was going to die. Shortly after this, she was diagnosed with cancer and told she had one year to live. Her life, however, was extended four years longer than the original prognosis. She even sun danced one year before she died. He shared some of what it felt like to experience a parent's death at age 16. I learned during this discussion that Gary's mother and Don, my husband and father of my children, died the same week. In fact, it may have been the same day. Gary was the same age as my children.

Finally, we were back in Norman. It was 7:00 a.m. on Sunday. It had been one of those spontaneous, wonderful weekends that would remain in our hearts forever. We all found a place to sleep.

At 10:00 a.m., the telephone rang. I answered, and it was John. "Hi, Susanne, what's been happening? Have you had an interesting weekend?"

I smiled, even though I was barely awake. I couldn't wait to share this experience with John, because I knew he would have loved doing this with us. Then I answered, "Well, I have had a delightful weekend and I have learned quite a bit."

"What?"

"I learned a little bit about the reservation and something about Gary's family. I've been to South Dakota to have a cup of coffee with Spencer."

"You what? I just talked to you Friday afternoon about 4:00. Gary and Elizabeth weren't even there."

"I know. They arrived at 5:00. Kathy dropped by about 6 o'clock. We decided to leave about 7 o'clock and we were gone by 7:30." I chuckled. "It was fun." We continued visiting and then I went back to sleep.

The year passed quickly as time was filled with new events. I worked in the daytime, participating in many healing ceremonies, vision quests, and purification sweats during the evening and on weekends. Sometimes it was every weekend and it took all weekend. I found myself spending more time in prayer than at any other time in my life as I learned more about this ancient way.

During that time, my plans were taking shape to approach

businesses to present seminars. I developed a professional brochure to be used as a front-runner for cold calls or as a leave behind.

John asked me to spend part of the holidays with him. With his three brothers and a sister and their families sharing the holidays at his mother's home, the Blake's have what I call wonderful family get togethers. My healing continued.

Dreams came more often. In January, 1990, I had a vivid dream. In the dream, a person told me to go to the center of my paternal grandmother's property. I questioned if I were to follow the instructions in the dream. It seemed silly. I finally shared the dream with John.

In my mind, I debated for three weeks what to do before driving to Pauls Valley. After circling the block where my grandparents' home had been, I decided the center of the family home would now be inside the nursing home situated on the property. I pulled up to the nursing home and parked, speaking to some people as I entered. I walked through the living room. It looked as if the center would be right by the office. I stood there. A nurse asked, "Can I help you?"

"No." I looked around. The only thing I saw of interest was a poem on the bulletin board across from the office about a man turning into a little boy and having to be taken care of again. How did this apply to me? Daddy seemed O.K. right now. I said a prayer about life.

I left and went to John's office. He was delighted to see me and asked to take me to dinner. I happily accepted. At dinner, he asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Following the guidance of my dream. I don't understand it yet."

A few days later, John telephoned. "Susanne, you should come see me tonight. I have a newspaper here you are going to want to see. On the front page of the paper is a picture of your grandmother's house that was demolished about twenty years ago. There's a complete story about the home. Come take a look."

"John, many people will want a copy of the newspaper with that picture of the house, because no one in the family has a good picture of it. Do you suppose I could get extra copies to take to my aunt's fiftieth wedding anniversary next week? How big is the picture?"

"About 5 x 7."

I went to Pauls Valley and bought enough copies for all the relatives in attendance at the fiftieth anniversary. It made a wonderful gift.

Two weeks later, another dream came in the night. It guided me to the prestigious Waterford Hotel in Oklahoma City. I did not have to debate my decision to go there, even though I felt rather silly just standing in the center of the hotel's main lobby. I stood there and said a very quick prayer asking to be shown what the spirits wanted me to know.

Then an idea came to me. I went to the surrounding buildings and made a list of all businesses housed within The Waterford Office Complex next to the hotel. Was I to call all of them? Maybe not. This idea was most likely my own sign of impatience entering. I decided to wait and see if an answer came without me forcing the answer. Three days later, the answer arrived in the mail. I received a letter from a cousin who had never written me a letter in his life. It contained the names of three businesses listed on the marquis at the Waterford. I knew one of these businesses would be the first one for which I would present my series of seminars. I was right. My return to the speaking began in the grand ballroom of the Waterford Hotel for employees of a large corporation.

With my nutrition business, work, and preparation of new seminars taking up much of my time and sweats, vision quests, and healing ceremonies occupying the rest, time continued passing quickly. Fun with John and his two children was interspersed along the way. We were doing more together all the time. John was including me on many outings with his children.

As I continued on the path, the door to that first ceremony I learned of from the mysterious Native American began to open wider. Spring came and with it came the time to prepare for Sun Dance. I had been planning to support John since he shared with me that he would be dancing for his first time. I began to ask questions and learned I needed a shawl and traditional dresses to wear in the arbor while supporting during the dance. I began to gather and prepare the proper clothes.

Gary, Elizabeth, and Kathy left for South Dakota six weeks ahead of time to prepare the grounds and assist in other final arrangements for the Sun Dance. The arbor needed much work. A proper request for drummers and singers had to be made.

Approximately four weeks before John and I were to leave for the Sun Dance, my cousin, Judy, had a brain aneurysm burst. She was in intensive care. The family was told every second she stayed

alive through the brain spasms was a miracle. Her doctors could not even consider operating until her brain spasms stopped. We waited... not knowing if she could even make it through surgery if she became strong enough to undergo it..

I watched Phil, her husband, and Margaret, her mother, as each second ticked away. I listened to Phil as he told Judy that he did not care what she could do or not do later in life. He said that if he could just look into her eyes and see her soul, he would love her and be able to have fun with her the rest of his life. I watched Margaret as she spent time with her only daughter.

One day as I sat there with Judy, I felt as if she and God were discussing her life and she was considering crossing over to the other side. No one could get a response from her that day. I began to talk aloud to God. If anyone had come into the room, they would have thought I was crazy. I said, "I think death and rebirth are beautiful; I have given up Don, but I am not ready to do this with Judy. I understand that You and all of Judy's spirit helpers know better than I what is best for her and I will be willing to accept Your decision. If You do allow her to stay, please make her life better than ever. She has had much stress in her life prior to this aneurysm. It would be wonderful if You would give her health and help in all the four ways that she is, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually."

I went on to tell Them, "I do not want her to stay here if she is going to be a vegetable. I thank You and will leave You to Your decision now."

When I could, I telephoned John and told him what was happening and that I felt Judy and God were making decisions. We had a pipe ceremony that night. Sixteen people drove many miles to come and pray for Judy. We began about 9:30 and ended about midnight. While we were praying, a terrific storm came up outside. Lightning, golf ball sized hail, and power came with it.

When I returned to Judy's intensive care room the next morning, her eyes were open and she smiled as I entered the room. I went to the side of her bed and told her, "Well, you look much better this morning. You look beautiful."

She reached up and pulled me down to her and gave me a big hug. I knew. I had no fear from that time on, even during her surgery. The surgeon walked out after surgery and told us that everything went much smoother than expected. I wasn't surprised.

It was through Judy that our whole family had the opportunity for something new, prayer together. We had at least two miracles within a short time. Billy was improving daily from his motorcycle accident. Judy was recovering. I was sure that just beyond our notice other miracles were unfolding.

The doctors moved Judy from intensive care before I left on my trip. That was a big step. I went to see her one more time before leaving. Judy understood some about this path. She had always loved anything and everything relating to the Native American way. I said, "Judy, I have to leave. It is time for us to go to the Sun Dance in South Dakota." She nodded, and I continued, "I want to share something with you before I go. John has pledged to dance and sacrifice for your healing."

She could not reply for she had lost her ability to make words. Judy knew more about what I said than I did at the time. Silent tears of appreciation brimmed under her eyelids as she gave me a smile. She understood. John's offer touched her heart, and she knew I must go with him.

Phil shared what the doctors had told him. Her healing would be a long process. She would be in the same room for a while and then be moved to a room where she would begin therapy within the hospital. Eventually she would be moved to a rehabilitation facility where she would receive round-the-clock care and all the therapy she would need. It would be months before she would be able to go home.

Like a child, she was going to have to learn how to do everything over again. She was going to have to relearn the alphabet, relearn how to speak, walk, and everything else!

With that information, I left for home to pack for Sun Dance.

SUPPORTING JOHN AT SUN DANCE

As we drove to South Dakota, I knew that life would never be the same. Life would be different for each person attending the ceremony and each one healed there. My mind drifted to some of the events that took place in the weeks before the Sun Dance. I had been told to watch carefully as the Sun Dance approached. Even the preparation is a part of the dance, whether you are a supporter or a dancer.

Anita and Robert traveled in their car while John and I followed close behind in his van. Along the way, we stopped to pray. As we each prayed, I listened. John prayed to be shown how to be more patient. I smiled. I knew his prayer was being listened to and he would be given the opportunity to learn patience at some point on the trip. I had learned from my experiences to be careful what I pray for, because I will surely get it. Of course, I had learned this the hard way.

We finally entered South Dakota just after sundown. As we drove down the long dirt road to Spencer's house, we saw a fire in the distance. We knew everyone must be sweating. As we drew closer, we discovered people were just going into the lodge, but the sweat had not begun. A man called to us, extending an invitation to us to hurry and join them in the sweat. Robert, Anita, and John jumped out and found their clothes, changing quickly. I was still looking for my sweat dress.

I hurried, but could not find my clothes under the huge load in the back of John's van. Finally! I caught a glimpse of the cloth bag with my dress in it. The pressure was building in me to hurry. I did not want to make any mistakes on the reservation, nor did I want to hold up a sweat.

Everyone else was inside the lodge. They kept waiting for me. I was grateful for the delay, but I was in a frenzy. With the dress out of the bag, I began to change by the van. The wind was blowing very strong.

Lights were on in the nearby house, and I worried about someone seeing me from a window. I didn't know if everyone was in the lodge, and I decided not to chance it. Trying to be modest, I wrapped my towel around me while I attempted to slip the dress over my head. I had done this many times in other places, but not in this South Dakota wind! The wind grabbed my towel and my dress. Both cartwheeled across the yard. I debated about retrieving them and decided I must.

Just then, Robert stepped out of the lodge to see if I was O.K. He grinned and said, "Susanne, we're waiting."

Standing in my birth suit, I yelled, "Get back in the sweat, I'll be there."

I grabbed my towel before it could blow another inch and snatched my dress. I held on tightly as I pulled it over my head. I took my towel into the lodge with me, and everyone attempted to keep a straight face.

The lodge was full of people I had never met. In a place where I knew modesty was of utmost importance, I had just made a grand entrance. Gary was pouring water. It was a good sweat. Before we left the lodge, Gary said, "Purification begins at midnight. Once purification begins, it is best if the dancers do not leave the Sun Dance grounds. Sun Dancers are not to touch water. The supporters will make certain that sage tea is available for the Sun Dancers to drink."

When we crawled out, Robert told everyone what had happened. He became tickled. Everyone else became tickled with him. I was both tickled and embarrassed. It felt wonderful to be able to give a hug to Gary, Elizabeth, and Kathy again. Much had happened since they left, and it seemed an eternity had gone by instead of six weeks. It was also good to see Spencer again and meet more of the family.

We were too tired to even put up our tent. We just dumped everything out on the ground and slept on the floor of the van. In the morning, we prepared the camp. That would be our home for the next few weeks.

As I worked, I watched tipis being raised, looking majestic against the sky, separate tipis for the men and women dancers. A few families erected their personal tipis. I had never seen a tipi go up until then. It was fascinating to see how the first three poles were placed and then followed by the others. The tipis reminded me of our past and stirred emotions inside me, bringing awe and wonder.

The camp continued to grow as others arrived. Many of us had worked to raise money that was sent ahead to buy the large amounts of food and other supplies necessary for feeding the people. We also brought food to eat during purification. Others, who wanted to support but could not be there in person, sent money with us to buy additional supplies after our arrival.

I had no idea what was in store for me as a supporter. Since the dancers were instructed not to touch water or sharp objects, the supporters did all they could to help the dancers when they needed assistance during purification. Although I was there to support John, I heard from many directions, "Susanne, can you cut this?"

"Susanne, can you get me a cup of sage tea?"

"Susanne, can you come help in the kitchen?"

"Susanne, can you go to town and pick up the meat?"

"Susanne, can you find the colored cloth?"

It was non-ending. I reminded myself that part of purifying is for the dancers who are unable to do something for themselves to be able to ask others for help. But, boy, the work was from morning until night with little or no time to rest. At times, I felt frustrated about what request I was to respond to first. Then I simply remembered, "Do your best and that is good enough."

I was thrilled on the second day of purification when Gary asked, "Susanne, would you make prayer ties to go completely around the circle...just inside the arbor?"

I looked at the Sun Dance area as he spoke. It looked to be about eighty feet across with a brush covered arbor going all the way around about ten feet in depth. I wondered for a split second if I could make enough prayer ties to go all the way around before the dance began? Then I let all worry go and happily responded, "Yes, I'd love to make the prayer ties."

Mornings and evenings were cool, but midday was very hot. We rose early in the morning during purification, making breakfast for everyone there. I used John's van to transport large quantities of supplies. I was asked daily to leave the camp to do errands. Anita, who was also supporting, helped by making the trips with me into the closest town. We acquired many necessary items and filled the shopping list for the upcoming days of dancing when we were to feed "all the people."

We worked as a team. Allen, another supporter, usually stayed

at the camp serving sage tea to dancers and coffee and tea to others as necessary. Each time Anita and I returned, I went straight to the women's tipi to continue making prayer ties while Anita helped Allen.

No adults came into the tipi during the day. It was quiet and easier to focus on prayer there. Dace and Rae Dawn, Gary's nephew and niece, came in to visit me. They were four and seven at the time. They entered the tipi and sat quietly. Eventually, I asked, "Do you want to help?"

This grabbed them. They scooted over close to me. Dace said, "Susanne, how do we do it?" I taught each of them how to make prayer ties. Rae asked, "How do we pray?"

I explained how easy it was to pray for their mother, their aunts and uncles, their grandfather, Spencer, the Sun Dance, and the dancers. We all made our prayer ties and prayed for the Sun Dance. We took turns saying our prayers aloud and placing the completed pouches on the string. I loved those hours with Dace and Rae. They stayed with me most of the time I was in the tipi. Several times their mother came to get them. They would leave and eventually return. As Dace left one time, he said, "Susanne, my grandpa is going to be excited I can make prayer ties now."

So there I was, sitting on reservation soil, teaching these children being raised in the traditional way how to make prayer ties. Their uncle taught me and I had the opportunity to share with them. I feel any time children put their energy into something, it is good. They bring the innocence and purity of the child to whatever they do. I loved it. I thought of my children, Dawn and Jet, at that age. I sent them love and good energy as I finally finished the ties.

On the last day of purification, we took down the Sun Dance tree from the previous year and prayed for that Tree of Life. In the past year, it had gone from infancy, through its youth, to adulthood, and then turned into an elder with the passing of the seasons.

It was then time to cut a new tree for the Sun Dance. We all loaded ourselves into cars and followed the lead truck. We came to the spot where a cottonwood tree, the new "Tree of Life," was standing tall. It had been selected a year in advance and visited with prayers throughout the year as it awaited our coming. Each person prayed for the tree. This tree would give its life so that the people might live, so prayers would be answered, and the earth helped. With the prayers completed, a chosen virgin made the first cut on the tree with an ax.

Each Sun Dancer then took a turn with the ax. After those who were to dance finished, Gary allowed the supporters to add their energy and take a swing at the tree. Every person who was there took part.

The Sun Dancers caught the tree as it fell. No part of it was allowed to touch the ground. Everyone then carried the tree carefully back to the grounds. Once we reached the grounds, the drum beat began. We carried this huge tree to the center of the arbor and gently placed it on the ground. No one was to step over this tree who had given its life for that would dishonor it. The Sun Dance leaders placed a bundle of choke cherry branches right below the fork of the tree. Shapes of a buffalo, a person, and a circle were cut from rawhide and hung in the branches.

One by one, the Sun Dancers who planned to sacrifice by physically connecting to the tree tied their ropes to its strong branches. Everyone who had made prayer flags tied them to the top branches. We all felt a sense of exhilaration and awe as we raised the tree. Gary motioned to John and me to take the bucket of red dirt he had asked us to bring from Oklahoma to the center and place it around the base of the tree. When finished, I stepped back to look. Sun Dancers and supporters wrapped hundreds of prayer ties around the trunk of the tree, one long strand at a time. The tree looked magnificent.

It seemed that the Grandfathers planned a gift for us at the end of the second, third, and fourth days of purification. Something wonderful followed the evening sweat. On the second night, we saw a double rainbow in the distance as we came out of the lodge. On the third and fourth nights, the Northern lights were waiting for us. I had never seen those beautiful lights and felt I was witnessing a miracle.

Finally, the first day of the dancing arrived. The energy and excitement could be tasted. It was dawn, the beginning of a new day. The drums began. The solemn dancers walked single file around the outside of the arbor and entered the circle from the East. Each carried a sacred pipe. The men wore only long red skirts. The women wore dresses with shawls wrapped around them. Most were barefoot. All had on crowns of sage which reminded me of the crown of thorns worn by Christ. They also wore wrist and ankle bands which were constant reminders of where the spikes were driven. They moved clockwise to the West and the dancing began for the day.

Many people came to watch. They sat in the arbor and prayed for healing and the dancers. Some made prayer ties. During the breaks,

the ties were gathered, taken to the tree, and tied on its trunk.

Supporting was hard work. On that first morning, we rose before dawn to cook breakfast for the singers and drummers. Allen, Anita, and I made a big mistake the first day of dancing. We did not know we were to have breakfast ready before sunrise so the singers could eat before they began to sing. We planned only to have coffee early and then cook breakfast so it would be ready to serve to the singers at the first break of the dance. The singers were quite unhappy with us that breakfast was not served before they began. Victor, one of the singers, indicated to us how unhappy they were. When the break came, we were ready with a good breakfast for them to enjoy. They said they were no longer interested in eating.

We apologized for our mistake. We said it would not happen again. The only thing we knew to do was to continue and do our best. We poured coffee all day and served them lemons to help soothe their singing voices. The incident drove home how little we knew about what we were doing. I had to remember everything would go better if we remained balanced.

Shortly after the incident with the singers, Anita and I were sent to find gum from pine trees. The Sun Dancers needed this gum to pitch the eagle bone whistles used during the dance. This was both a test and an adventure. We left camp without knowing where or how to find pine gum.

We did not know the reservation. After much deliberation and careful observance of the land, we finally found some pine trees, but could find nothing that seemed to be gum. We traveled to several different areas where pine trees were growing and finally found a supply of the gum. The tree looked to us as if it had been wounded or nicked. Leaking from each small wound was a gummy substance. It glistened like tears. We gathered some of it and were happy to find we had brought the proper substance back to camp.

The next task assigned to me was to collect more money. We needed more supplies if we were to be able to continue feeding everyone. When I left home, I thought I was leaving the problem of money behind me. Amazing! Here I was hundreds of miles from home and the Grandfathers had placed me in the position of raising money daily from new supporters to make ends meet for food. I was continuing my money lesson event here.

Between tasks, we were able to support by dancing in the arbor

behind the dancers. We could not step into the circle. As a sign of respect, most of the women wore shawls while sitting or dancing in the arbor. I stood behind John and danced, sending energy to him, whenever possible.

One day while dancing under the arbor, I looked at the top of the tree. I had listened as the dancers were instructed to focus on the highest leaf at the top of the tree as they prayed and danced. I decided to do the same. The sounds of the eagle bone whistles were clear and beautiful. There were thirty-two choke cherry branches in the bundle at the fork of the tree. Did these represent the sixteen earth lessons and the sixteen truths of life on this earth?

The "Tree of Life" represented each person. It also represented to me Christ giving his life. I wanted to be like the tree. I loved being there in that arbor looking at the tree, and I was beginning to understand the way it teaches. I knew I was to sacrifice and be a supporter. I just kept focusing and praying for all people and the many healings taking place as a result of the Sun Dance. I prayed for the people of the reservation, other reservations, for my children, my family, my blood relatives, our extended family, supporters who sent their prayers with me, others who asked me to make specific prayers, and for all people who walk on the earth. I knew all the others were doing the same, and the energy felt incredibly good.

With the dancing over for the day, it was time for dinner, clean-up, and perhaps some laughter. The second night it rained a gully washer! Everything in our tent got wet. I was lying there cold, wet, and miserable wondering what to do about it all when I heard Victor's voice in another tent. He said loudly to someone, "I'm ready for coffee. Where's the coffee?"

I thought, "Thank goodness! It's time to get up. I'm freezing."

I was ready. I jumped out of my cold bed. I leaned over to Anita, "Anita, get up. It's time to cook."

Then I went to Allen's tent. I stood outside and gently said, "Allen, wake up. It's time for you, Anita, and me to get up and cook."

We began breakfast. With the rain, it was difficult to get everything started, but we did. I walked over to the fire to get warm. One of the two young men watching the fire looked at me and asked, "What are you doing up?"

"We're getting breakfast ready."

"Isn't it a little early for breakfast?"

“No. I heard Victor wanted coffee, and I knew it was time to get up and cook.”

They looked at each other, and then one said to me, “It’s only midnight.”

“Are you sure?”

The rain had drenched many sleeping bags, and I heard people moving around in their tents, tipis, and campers. Before I went back to our camp where we were cooking, I asked several others to confirm the time. I was wrong. OOPS! I hurried back.

“Allen and Anita, I have something to tell you. We need to turn the grills off and put everything away.”

“Why?”

“It’s only midnight. I am so sorry. We can go back to bed.”

Thank goodness they laughed! Instead of returning to our wet tents, we all headed for our cars to sleep a few more hours.

In the morning, I could not wait to see Victor. As the singers stood in line for their breakfast, I said, “Victor, do you know what happened last night in the middle of the storm?” Before giving him a chance to reply, I continued. “I heard you wanted coffee and thought we were already late in fixing breakfast. I jumped up and woke Allen and Anita. We scurried around and began to prepare breakfast. Then I went to the fire to warm myself and found out it was only midnight. I had to come back, apologize to Allen and Anita, and help put everything away before we could all go back to sleep.”

Victor grinned from ear to ear. “I had no idea anyone heard me last night.”

Then I told him, “You sounded gruff yesterday. We sure didn’t want to make another mistake.”

When I shared that, the singers who were listening to our conversation also smiled. The incident seemed to break the ice, bringing more warmth and acceptance among all. The singers were from the reservation and were Native American. Anita, Allen, and I were white. It felt as if the singers slowly gained more respect for us with the passing of each day.

Again, I found time to go to the arbor. I focused on the top of the tree. The more I looked above the cherry tree branches and the fork in the tree, the more this area represented the spiritual lives of the people. The prayer flags became the Grandfathers of each direction who help us and possibly those on the other side who sometimes assist

us with our lives. Everything below the fork represented our physical lives on this earth.

The rain continued throughout the day. I tried to rationalize a reason for the rain. I knew that some of the dancers had begun dancing without going through purification. Gary and Spencer had told us that if dancers touched water while in purification, it could bring the rain. I was cold and wet, and I knew the dancers must be even more wet and cold than I. I just kept blaming things, and even some specific people, for the rain as I grew more frustrated. I put on a coat and was still cold, so I knew the dancers must now be freezing. The men were bare except for their red cloth skirts. The women, in their simple cotton dresses, were soaked.

Not only did we cook breakfast, but supporters also prepared and served lunch and dinner buffet style to all the people who were praying and supporting in the arbor. It was difficult to do that under such cold and wet conditions.

During the afternoon of that cold day, I watched a miracle take place. Very quietly Gary and his Dad went out to the tree during a break and prayed with the pipe. As they prayed, the clouds above split and the sun began to shine. The dancers were given a little relief from the cold and the rain. I had witnessed "a parting of the clouds" through prayer!

On the third day, I learned a great lesson. While I was looking at the top of the tree, I heard the words, "You slipped yesterday, Susanne. You blamed everyone else for the rain. How many times do you do this daily in your life? How many times do you blame others, rather than look at the real reason why something takes place. Why is there so much rain here? There are going to be many spiritual births this year and, with birth, water breaks." The voice then said, "It is time for you to do another vision quest."

I began to watch Gary. A light encircled him and his gentleness was awesome. It was as if he were transparent. Kindness showed in his eyes. The way he cared about people, all people, was apparent. I watched as he worked with all races in that mysterious circle. I made the decision to, upon my return home, gift him the phoenix feather I had painted.

John was physically connected to the tree by a rope on this day. He and a young man from the Rosebud reservation were both connected during the same round. I began praying for it all to be just

fine. A supporter can go into the arbor to support a dancer when the dancer connects to the tree. As I went into the arbor to stand behind John to pray and support, I understood. A chill ran up my spine as I watched. Regardless of skin color, we are all related. Words again came to me. "It isn't a coincidence that John and Ted are doing this at the same time. Both are connected to the same tree. They both love this sacred path, even though Ted is Lakota and John is not."

After the dancing was over for the day, Ted saw me in the arbor making prayer ties. He walked over to me and shyly asked, "How do you like the Sun Dance?"

"I love it, Ted. What do you think about you and John being connected to the tree at the same time?"

He threw the question back to me. "What do you think, Susanne?"

"I believe nothing happens by chance and that it was no coincidence that you and John were connected to the tree at the same time. Much will come from this in the future...something important. Perhaps a healing between the Native American and the White man is possible and is beginning."

This young, good-looking Native American male smiled kindly. "Maybe so." He and John exchanged addresses to stay in touch.

Another storm came in the middle of the third night, and the tree twisted completely around. In the morning, the bundle that had faced West was facing East. The tree seemed to be telling us that something important would be happening in the East. We did not know what exactly, but this tree was sacrificing itself to help each of us with what was coming, protecting us and perhaps many others.

The Sun Dance lasted four days. I quickly thought about what I understood from observing. Just as the tree turned from baby to elder according to the seasons, each day of dancing seemed to represent one quarter of the year to come. Something would begin taking place in the East during the third quarter of the year following the Sun Dance. This would be the following January, February, or March. (The third quarter of the year following the Sun Dance we had American Troops in Saudi Arabia. As we all now know, we were well protected during that time.)

The last day was quite sunny. As I stood watching the tree, I silently thanked the many people who had supported me during my lifetime. I prayed for each of them individually, whether they were living

or had already crossed over to the other side.

Many people were connected to the tree on the last day. I had watched the connection and release take place all through the Sun Dance. Each release represented a letting go from the past to embrace a new way of life. It also brought to my mind the thought of Jesus giving His flesh so we might live. The offering of flesh and the suffering seemed like such a small sacrifice for the many healings requested through prayer ties. Compared to Jesus' sacrifice, the sacrifice of the dancers and supporters seemed small for the healing of those who drove and walked to this Sun Dance to participate in the healing round. Many came there so they might have an opportunity for a better way of living.

When the Sun Dance was over on the fourth day, we served the last feast. Afterwards, we cleaned up our camp and packed to go. Everyone felt great. The Sun Dance had been a wonderful experience!

For four days after the Sun Dance, dancers are "wakan," or holy. They have been in a very sacred space for four days, so more answers come to them as their energy slowly returns to what some term "normal." They step back into the world, touching water, bathing, eating, doing everything one does in life. It is recommended that the dancers sweat at the end of the fourth day to help them completely break from the tree.

Knowing all of this, Robert, Anita, John, and I began the fourteen-hour drive home, with Robert and Anita following us. We enjoyed traveling together going to the Sun Dance and thought we would do the same on our return trip. The plan was good, since John's van began having trouble within thirty miles after leaving Mission, South Dakota. It just did not want to go very far at a time. We stopped in Nebraska to visit two car dealerships and then two more in Kansas.

Everyone attempted to fix John's van. We spent hours visiting with each other and with those working in the dealerships. Everyone was patient, including John. Was this part of John's lesson in patience, so that he could gain the opportunity to become more patient? John then explained to us the same thing had happened the previous year. I wondered if he prayed for patience then, too.

It seemed we were being shown to slow down and not rush home from the Sun Dance. This was a time to listen and to be quiet, a time to contemplate what had been learned and seen, a time to adjust to the changes within ourselves that were taking place as a result of that remarkable experience. Finally, we arrived home. It took four

days to make a one day trip.

As soon as I hauled my luggage into my apartment and said good-bye to John, I went straight to the phone and telephoned Phil and Judy's house. I expected no one would be at home and the answering machine to answer, but I wanted to let them know we were back. I also could not wait to find out how and where Judy might be.

Instead of getting the answer machine, I heard Phil's voice. "Phil? Is that you?"

"Yes, are you home? We've been worried about you. We thought those Indians captured you and kept you. You had better come right over here. We just walked in the house ourselves."

"Who is we and where is Judy now?"

"We is us...I just brought Judy home. She is right here and she wants to see you and hear all about everything."

Needless to say, I went straight to Judy and Phil's house to see for myself. What happened to her being hospitalized for months? The many prayers from Sun Dance, from churches, and from a variety of individuals obviously worked. Judy's eyes danced as I shared with her and Phil the life-changing experience of Sun Dance. We marveled at the power of prayer.

CONTEMPLATING ANSWERS

Gary, Elizabeth, and Kathy returned to Kathy's home following the Sun Dance. I knew they might bring with them some interesting stories. I could not wait to share with them my feelings about my first Sun Dance as a supporter and to find out what they felt. They left for South Dakota long before the Sun Dance and we had not gotten to visit much while we were there. It was going to be good to play "catch-up."

They telephoned when they arrived at Kathy's, and I went to see them. I took Gary the phoenix feather I had visioned, painted, and placed at the foot of my bed, because he was helping many people gain a greater cross-cultural understanding.

During the conversation, I mentioned to Gary that I was ready to do another vision quest. He jumped on my words, saying, "I can do it this weekend."

Well, I was ready, but not that ready! I responded, "I don't have a blanket." Kathy solved that problem. She went to the closet and pulled out a brand new pendleton that was still in a box and set it in my lap. I took the blanket and went home to think.

I returned the next day and presented my pipe to Gary. He accepted. Then we discussed the time. Rather than doing my vision quest immediately, we decided to wait until August. I would then have some time to walk through necessary lessons and to think as I prepared.

Each time I make a commitment to move towards something that is for my growth, it seems as if everything possible happens to interfere. I discovered the greater the potential is for growth, the stronger the interference to hold someone back and to keep a person the same. The ego likes us to stay the same. It fears change.

One day Gary and I entered into a discussion about commitment and all that takes place to keep us from changing. Suddenly, he stood up and walked to the door, opened it, went out, and closed it behind him.

I heard, "Susanne, where am I?"

“On the other side of the door.”

He then opened the door a crack and looked into only a portion of the room. “Now what can I see?”

“A portion of the room. Actually, only a small portion of the room. The rest of it remains hidden to you.”

“Right. Now watch.

He stepped through the doorway and into the room. After looking around, he walked to the chair and sat down again. “What did you just learn?”

I said, “Answers about the room were completely revealed when you committed to moving through the doorway to find out what was on the other side.”

I smiled at his demonstration and understood that when we only partially commit to something, we have limited vision. To receive answers in life, it is important to make a complete commitment.

I knew we were talking now about my commitment. Was he telling me the next vision quest was to help me through a doorway or was he telling me I would learn more about commitment? I knew I was stepping through a doorway, committing completely to my purpose. Through complete commitment, I would be given the answers I so much desired.

Gary interrupted my thoughts when he asked, “Susanne, what did you learn from the tree at the Sun Dance?”

I did not hesitate. “As I commit to my vision quests, to supporting many others’ vision quests, and to supporting a Sun Dance, I more fully understand life. I know it is of utmost importance for me to carry out my commitment to the conclusion of each ceremony. As I supported at Sun Dance, I gained a greater appreciation for all the support I have had in my life.

Through this way, I see the importance of support and how answers are received from above to help everyone in attendance. Some who support receive healing as well as answers. What I am discovering is that if we have the fortitude to stay on our paths, we all receive many gifts.

I am learning that the greatest gift one person can give to another person is support in walking his individual spiritual path. The path chosen by the one we support may not be the one we would choose for him, and we cannot walk it for him. However, we can support him on his path with unconditional love and prayer.

I am becoming more aware of people in life who are 'true' supporters of others. I am understanding the commitment of a supporter. A 'true' supporter makes a commitment to help, but does not fight against a person and the path she has chosen. The supporter is interested and cares about the person he is supporting, but this does not mean he must do it for him. A supporter listens for answers and moves from a center of love in making decisions during a commitment to support.

Although I have already received unbelievable miracles and gifts of support during previous difficult times in my life, this path presents to me a gift of support that feels layers deeper. I've learned what it is like to be supported when it is not a life or death matter, but when the support is just for the pure joy of it.

My supporters on this path understand commitment. When they commit to support, they follow through to completion. If someone makes a commitment to support a person's vision quest, Sun Dance, or commits to participate in a healing ceremony, that person keeps his or her commitment no matter what the weather or what enticement.

After my first vision quest, John told me of people I had never even met who stayed up all night tending the sacred fire and praying for me. It rained several of those nights and temperatures dropped low enough for frost covered mornings. Those people made their sacrifice to help me complete my quest with no expectations of reimbursement or reward of any kind. Our combination of efforts created a spiritual bond.

I have had the opportunity to support others in the same way. Each time I commit to support someone, I am surprised by the way everything just seems to come together. When we gather for someone to go on the hill for a vision quest, each person has the opportunity to practice giving and receiving. Every person learns how to love and be loved in an atmosphere that brings about the freedom to do so unconditionally. I've come to understand what it is like to really support for a purpose...not because I have to...not because someone is sick...not because I am on a committee... but only because I want to do so. This has helped me gain a clearer understanding of what it is to 'serve' others. It truly is more blessed to give than to receive.

I love that people travel hundreds of miles just for the opportunity to support someone else with no expectations of what they might receive in return. Supporting is intense, and it offers each person a great experience. All are coming together for a higher purpose than self, so

ego is left at the gate as one enters the ceremonial grounds. Since most ceremonies are held outside, there are no dress codes and we all seem the same. Men, women, and children work together, play together, and pray together.

No one tells anyone else how to do anything. This fascinates me. When someone asks for a suggestion, it is simply a suggestion that is given in return. It is great if someone comes up with a better way to do something. I also see how ceremonies are much less difficult with good supporters maintaining the sacred fire at night, gathering rocks when necessary, and preparing meals, regardless of weather.”

I continued, “I wonder sometimes if we are gaining weight as we symbolically eat and drink for the questor or the Sun Dancer who is unable to do so, but my scales haven’t changed. The encouragement, trust, acceptance, loyalty, and understanding received by each participant causes growth. This growth helps release fears and even helps a person to see the faults of self in a gentle way. A peace blankets the participants as we work together. Perhaps this peace can spread out to the world.

Every person attending receives the opportunity to gain answers about present situations causing problems in life. New and unexpected answers are provided to participants about all that is taking place. Each answer is miraculously designed specifically for each person.

A new, life-changing energy moves into those who attend these ceremonies. They leave in a much better space. They leave knowing they have found a group who supports and accepts them. They perhaps have even found a substitute family. With many people separated in today’s world by geography and distance, as well as by the way we think, support and acceptance are sometimes difficult to find.

With time these people become family in every sense of what a family can be. We become an extended family. Still I know this family is temporary, just as all is temporary.

The world could move toward healing if we could all learn how to set aside our personal egos and work towards a united purpose, supporting each other in the way we have learned.”

Gary continued questioning me in a gentle way. “What else did you learn from the Sun Dance?”

“With the completion of a commitment to participate in a ceremony comes success, and this success is to be honored. After

each completion comes a time for participants to stand still and allow everything to fall into place again. This often feels like a time of disorder. In reality, it is a time for reorganization. It is also a time to re-energize, for once we finish a commitment, it takes a little time for the new to move into our lives.

Initially, the people I met on this road were only supporting each other during ceremonies. Now I am watching this support expand into everyday life. We form a strong bond as we give to each other without expectation of anything in return. We become related by purpose and love.

As I watched the sun dancers, I learned to just surrender to the situation when I support someone else. I surrendered in the same manner as on my vision quest. Surrendering is sometimes difficult. Once I remember the words 'Thy will be done and not mine,' it becomes easier.

I did not surrender very well when I began working with a counselor. I often left his office angry. I did not understand the process and resisted some of his suggestions and guidance. I was not ready to let go of anything.

I first practiced surrendering when I began working with my sponsor in the twelve-step Al-Anon program. I forced myself to listen to her. I knew she had been in the program longer than I, and I also thought I was very sick to be in my situation. I knew I could not see what I was doing as clearly as she could. I repeatedly practiced surrender. When she told me to do something, I did it as quickly as possible without questioning.

With time, I learned to let go, relax, and wait for the results. I finally grew to a level where it was no longer necessary for me to know what was going to happen in my life for me to feel safe. When I entered my first sweat lodge, I surrendered to the fact that I knew nothing about this way. I surrendered and allowed myself to be open and receive. I learned to flow and remain open for answers. When I decided to do that first vision quest, I placed myself in your hands, because I knew the Grandfathers would be working through you from the minute I presented you my pipe. I surrendered to the experience.

When situations present themselves to me as I walk toward this vision quest, I will remember all I have been shown at Sun Dance. As I let go of more, it may be difficult. The situations may involve people I love or property I still feel I own, though I cannot imagine what that

might be. I will strive to understand the hurt and pain of each person involved. Sometimes I may slip. My task is to remember every person is playing a role in each situation. I am to learn how to love each person as is and trust that each person is exactly where he or she needs to be at present. Their actions are no reflection on me. It is my problem or lesson to move through, even though it may also be a problem for the other person in the lesson to move through and understand. I know I will eventually get to the other side of these lessons. This may be very difficult if a situation occurs which I know may be life threatening for someone. However, I also know now that I must allow others to do things their own way when they make their choices as adults.

I've learned that it's better to keep still and turn the situation over to the Grandfathers, the Grandmothers, and God, trusting that good will come and the light will return. I've learned that I cannot change anyone, but myself and how I respond. When I love, I love deeply."

Our discussion ended and a new one began which focused on a lighter, more immediate topic. It was about food. Elizabeth and Kathy had ordered Chinese food and it had arrived.

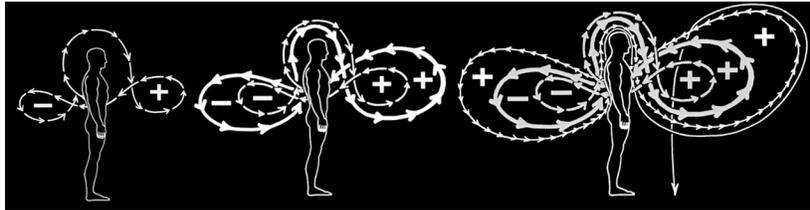
A few evenings later, we again visited. Gary picked up a pad and pencil and began drawing as he said, "Look, Susanne. This is you. Energy moves this way. Understand this. It moves out in front of you and then comes to you. Then it goes behind you. This is all in your past."

I watched as he drew. I began to think more about the drawing. The drawing looked like a figure eight, with a third small loop at the center where we each stand in life.

Gary and I had several more discussions about the way energy moves in front of us, comes to us, and then moves behind us. A comment would simply come up within a conversation that would create a teaching from him. We expanded the energy talk to lessons received by each of us. I understood his explanations. It made sense.

Lessons we have in life come with us to this earth at birth. They are attached to the lower part of our spine. These lessons come from the back, move over the head, move out in front of us and present themselves to us. The lesson then moves through us and goes behind us into our past. If the lesson is a negative one, we can look at it and learn from it. It then turns into a positive. Until we can do this, the lesson will present itself repeatedly at different ages in life until we

finally become willing to look at the situation and learn from it. With a positive behind us and a positive in front of us, the lesson does not need to present itself to us again. The next time it comes around, it goes into the earth rather than coming to us, because we no longer have to move through it. It is completed.



I thought about these discussions and drawings. I understand that when a person presents a pipe for a vision quest, every statement has meaning for the questor from that time forward. The lessons we must go through on this earth remind me of my homework, with this earth being the great university. Once we learn the lesson sent with us, our mother earth guides us as we walk upon her to a new level, a higher level. She presents to us a new field of life.

I wondered if resisting the lessons caused lower back problems. This seemed quite logical, because the longer we refuse to “let go,” the more crippled we become. I placed the symbols and drawings on my bathroom mirror to study until my vision quest, hoping a better understanding of how we move through lessons might prepare for the opening of more doors.

SECOND VISION QUEST

On Thursday, August 17, 1990, at 12:01 a.m., I began purifying. My sage tea was ready, and I stopped touching water. At noon on Friday I left to pick up Gary and Elizabeth at the Will Rogers Airport in Oklahoma City. As I drove up to the Southwest Airlines reservation area, I saw them waiting on the curb with their boxes. They had no luggage, so they used boxes. The boxes worked quite well, too. They were both grinning. What a sight! We were all happy to see each other.

After we were in the car and settled, Elizabeth said, "Susanne, Gary's purifying with you, so we will need to make some more sage tea when we get to the land."

As I agreed to make more tea, I wondered about Gary purifying with me. I had never seen him do this before, but I knew he must be doing it for a reason. Others arrived and sweats began. In a sweat on Saturday at noon, Gary cried. He said that he was crying for me as another man had once cried for him before he went on the hill. John came for the sweat, but had to return home and be a "cheerleader mom" for his daughter that evening. He said he would be back afterwards.

We sweat again later that night. Anita surprised me and showed up. Robert had been unable to come and she rarely drove out of Oklahoma City alone. Sally was also able to be there.

I felt so thankful as these people I loved surrounded and supported me. I had felt somewhat alone on my first quest. This one seemed so different. With an overwhelming sense of gratefulness, I walked toward my second vision quest in a better way. I understood a little more about what I was doing and how to prepare.

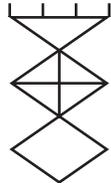
I watched as Sally, my twelve-step sponsor who had helped me find so many answers, received personal answers during one of the purification sweats. I watched as others received insights before I even went on the hill. That is a part of every vision quest I love.

Supporters receive answers to issues in their own lives.

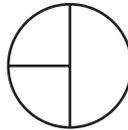
Before the sweat Sunday afternoon, Gary drew some symbols on the ground. He often did this to demonstrate a teaching. I had always used a pencil and paper while explaining things to others. Drawing pictures helps me visually share my thoughts, so I loved it when he used this method of teaching. I could better understand what he was saying. That day he drew a symbol that I felt was about energy and one for each of the four directions. He gave no explanation as he drew. These are the symbols he drew on the ground.



Above & Below



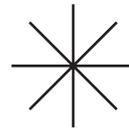
West



North

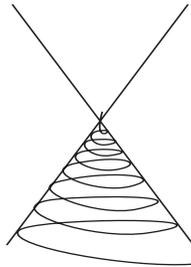


East



South

Then he drew one more symbol just before beginning the sweat.



During the ceremony, he said "As we begin to walk this road, there are four directions. As we move around them, from West, to North, to East, and then to South, we begin to spiral upward. Advancement is a process of understanding and then surrendering. When one finally reaches the center point, a person gains the opportunity to cross through and receive wisdom and learning from those on the other side of the fork."

Gary continued, "Susanne might return to the lodge with a creation story for us."

As self-doubt moved in, my thoughts began. "I might what? What is this all about? What if I receive no creation story? Will I feel foolish?"

Then I remembered Gary was in the hands of the Grandfathers and they were speaking through him. I was also in those hands, the hands of the Grandfathers, the hands of God, so I made a conscious decision not to worry further about this. I let it go, surrendering to whatever might happen.

My fasting would begin at midnight, so I enjoyed my last meal before going on the hill. As I finished, Gary said, "Susanne, I will be fasting with you and I will be staying in the lodge praying while you are on the hill."

We each had a cup of sage tea before going to bed. I continued to wonder about what Gary was doing, but said nothing.

Monday came. I would be on the hill before the end of the day. Allen, Kathy, and I found and prepared my trees. During the day, I began to have a severe headache. By afternoon, I felt as if the left side of my head were going to burst. I became nauseous. In fact, I wondered if I could make it to my spot, but I did not say anything.

After the last purification sweat, I led the way to my chosen spot where I would be spending the next three nights. We stopped four times, praying to each direction. Finally, I was in the space I had chosen and my prayer ties were around me. I was safe. I knew I could do this if everyone would just leave and allow me to lie down and be sick. I tried to focus on the prayers they were saying as they placed me in my area. That helped some, but I still felt so sick. After everyone finished praying for me, they turned and left. Gary stayed behind. He said, "Susanne, focus on the fork in that tree in front of you. During the first day, think about your past and all that brought you here. The second day, think about your present. The third day, think about your future."

He then motioned, moving his hand from his mouth to the earth and back to him as he shared, "Remember, as we speak, our prayers go into the earth to be answered and come back to us." He turned and left.

I spread sage around the area within my ties and lay down on the ground. It was a hot, dry August evening. The mosquitoes came out of the darkness from everywhere. I wrapped up in my blanket and looked out now and then. Eventually I dozed. When I awoke, the East was illuminated! A beautiful light spread over the east hills. It was a shower of light, a bright, luminous wall of light. What was it? I watched for a long time until I finally dozed for what seemed like a few minutes. When I opened my eyes again, it was still there. Bright as ever! This

reminded me of the bright star, the unusual light in the East the three Wise Men saw and followed.

I was still nauseous and had the same headache. It seemed I should stay awake, but I felt awful. I watched the light and prayed as long as possible, but eventually I fell asleep.

The next time I awoke, I saw only the morning star in the sky. I realized my headache was gone and I felt wonderful. It was time to pray with the morning star. I love her, because she comes right before first light. She serves as a bridge, showing me how we each move in life from the darkness to the light. I asked for help to transfer from dark to light any areas of my life where that might be necessary.

The morning was beautiful. A brownish, red spider was sitting on my South flag, the white one. Iktome, the spider, sits in the South. "Thank you, Iktome, for joining me again. I know you will be helping me this next year."

I spent time thinking about my past and all that brought me there. In the distance, I saw supporters coming to smudge my area with sage smoke. No one spoke. The smell of burning sage and cedar perked me up. After they left, I slept and dreamed. In my dream, I heard a voice speak clearly as a structure was shown to me. This was the voice of a Grandfather.

"Your structures today are weak. They used to be built strong like this. It will take more time, but the structures in the past were more solid. The foundations must be stronger. It is now time to begin building strong foundations and structures again."

The structure I was shown looked like a temple. I woke and thought about the voice. I felt the voice was speaking to me about myself and also about each of us on earth, individually and collectively.

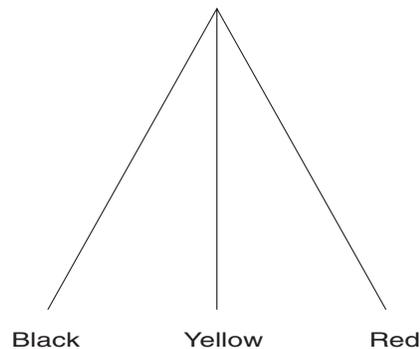
I focused on the prayer flags and the red felt I had placed on the cedar tree in front of me. I contemplated my dream. Had I allowed some choices in my past to weaken my structure?

Yes.

A butterfly flew near my space. It came from the West, landing on a prayer tie. It then flew over and landed on my skirt and stayed there. Another butterfly followed it and landed on the same prayer tie. It stayed on the tie longer, slowly opening and closing its wings. Eventually, it, too, came to rest on my lap close to the first one. Both stayed there for some time. They were identical. The colors on the wings were black, red, and yellow. I tried to remember everything I had

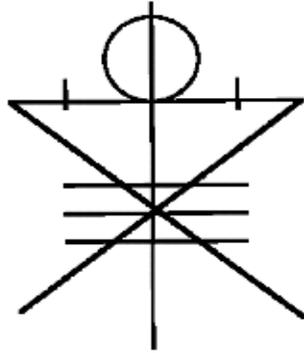
been told about these colors prior to and during ceremonies. The first thing that came to mind was what I had been told about the human brain and these three colors.

A drawing came at the same time:



The left side is black or blue, the right side, red. A yellow line separates the two colors. We can be ruled by the left brain, being dominated by logic and order (masculine); we can be ruled by the right brain and be more creative and feeling (feminine); or we can be balanced and have the benefit of using both sides at the same time. A person can be right-brained, left-brained, or balanced,

Another drawing had been shown to me, and it was explained that the three vertical lines indicated where energy enters our bodies. It comes through the center of the head and each shoulder, crossing at the center of the body. The vertical line moving down the middle of the body was the same as that line of energy going through the center of the Tree of Life. It represented a balance of the positive and negative aspects of ourselves. How would that drawing relate to my past? Perhaps the negative in my past had weakened my structure, and now I would become more balanced like the tree as I continued to follow this path.



The second night came. The darkness brought the mosquitoes back in full force. They attacked without mercy. I said aloud to those eating on me, "This is part of my sacrifice. Enjoy."

The mosquitoes continued to cover every exposed part of my body. I wondered if they were going to eat me alive. I had no choice, but to cover myself completely with my blanket even though the night air was so hot. I missed seeing the stars when I covered myself. I eventually fell asleep.

I prayed with the morning star, knowing I would see first light soon. With first light, I welcomed the second day. As the birds came, the mosquitoes left. Birds arrived, sang good morning, and played all around me. Finally, with the mosquitoes gone, I could focus on my surroundings again. Two white birds flew over, diving and playing with each other. I was more observant now of the trees. I noticed which way the wind blew. It was important to remember every detail during this vision quest for each detail would provide me with information for my future.

The fork of the tree in front of me caught my attention. As I concentrated on it, I contemplated the sixteen lessons on this earth and the sixteen truths that we each must learn.

I knew there was a lesson in each direction. In an instant, I realized each direction had four directions of its own. The full circle totaled sixteen lessons.

It was then I understood I was only at the beginning. These

truths I was seeking weren't going to come from just a few vision quests. The search for truth was going to be a continuous learning process that would take years. Gary had always emphasized this road wasn't easy. I guess he noticed my wince as I heard these words once. He gave me hope by saying that as we walk around the medicine wheel, the lessons do get easier.

I reflected back on the changes in my life since I stepped onto this road. It had not been easy, and yet at the same time, it had been very rewarding. I was making progress, slow as it seemed. As I released beliefs and belongings I no longer needed, they were replaced with what I did need.

What seemed remarkable was that since I had committed myself to walk this path, my physical needs were being met with much less effort on my part. I smiled as I recalled the verses of the Bible in Luke 12 when Jesus told the apostles their worldly needs would be filled if they would "Seek first the Kingdom of God."

I thought to myself, "What better way to spend the rest of my life, committed to God, listening for my guidance rather than forcing my own will." Could I really do it? I could certainly commit to listening and trying. I chuckled aloud. There I was, sitting in the sun, covered with mosquito bites, feeling wonderful.

I decided it was time to follow instructions, so I began to focus on the present that day, feeling the love of the vision quest. Everything had come together with more love than I had ever before felt. Gary was purifying and fasting with me. Kathy had given me my blanket. The people close to me were participating. Not very many people were able to stay past Sunday since I chose to do this during the week, but I had a special relationship with every person who remained.

Then another butterfly entered and landed on a prayer tie. I wondered which prayer was contained in that tie. I thought it was a section I had tied while asking about my divine purpose. The butterfly then landed on my hand holding the sacred pipe and eventually flew from tie to tie in the different directions. It seemed to be choosing its positions carefully.

As I sat there observing the butterfly, I heard a soft voice. Was it another Grandfather speaking? More ideas flowed into my mind. I had always felt it was possible to create "Heaven on Earth." I believed that Heaven was beginning for me there. If I could do it, I could help others do it. I thought about each prayer flag the butterflies had gently

touched. I would love to duplicate their gentleness while working with others.

The butterflies also reminded me of the gentleness of the spirit of White Buffalo Calf Woman who brought the beautiful pipe to the Lakota people and of the gentleness of Christ as he brought the “way” to many of us. They were both wayshowers. Their teachings have been changed by persons who could not understand them. Christ taught unity, not separateness which is now taught in so many churches. White Buffalo Calf Woman brought the oneness through the four colors and directions.

“Every idea or lesson comes from the West (black), moving from the subconscious to the preconscious and then to the conscious field. The energy of the Wakinyan, the thunder being in the West, takes the seed and holds it in the dark. Then the energy of the West moves it to the North. In the North, the elders, those who some call the masters, make a decision as to what and how the idea or lesson shall be given to us. They must make such decisions as ‘Will these ideas or lessons be sent mentally or physically? Will it enter as a thought? Will it be presented through an illness, situation, or another person? The decision is then moved to the East for its birth and infancy. It then goes to the South for its youth where it can be easily seen in this world.”

I began to understand more about the symbols previously drawn on the ground. As I sat there looking at the cedar tree in front of me, I realized the red felt placed on the cedar tree during my first hanbleceya represented to me the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This time the red felt represented to me the Grandfathers, Grandmothers, Spotted Eagle, and Wakan Tanka, The Great Spirit or God. It represented the masculine and feminine of everything and relationship. It incorporated all, everything from the highest to the lowest in the universe and all that is in between and around the directions.

The sweat lodge is representative of the Center of the Universe. Since my first vision quest, I had been seeing things differently. It became quite apparent I had really changed. The Grandfathers and Grandmother holding hands were everything created by God.

As I held my pipe, I again focused on my present situation. I felt grateful for everything that happened to me in my lifetime that brought me to that moment.

The sun continued to move across the sky. The heat was stifling and my mouth was parched. It had been over thirty-six hours since I

had any fluids, and I considered sucking a leaf for relief, but I decided not to do so. I tried to stop thinking about my thirst and became absorbed in watching the butterflies. Eventually I dozed and began to have a series of dreams.

In my first dream, John walked up to my space. He reached out for my hand. I stepped out of my prayer ties and went with him. We traveled to a wedding in a small town. Little Margaret and Julia, two older cousins, were with us. When we arrived, no one else was present. The scene was beautiful. I suddenly realized the wedding was being held in my temple. We walked up the steps and entered. When we stepped through the door, we saw the wedding preparations. Then I noticed a side room. I took John's hand and we went into that room together. It was simple, elegant, and beautiful. The only furniture in the room was a long, heavy wooden table and eight chairs. The table held beautiful goblets to go with the place settings. I knew I was in a dream or a vision and had invited John into my most private room within my temple. Then I felt a tug. I turned to John and said, "I have to go back to my prayer ties." I left John, Julia, and Margaret and returned. When I awoke, I was happy to discover I had not left my spot.

As the afternoon sun beat down on me, I had another dream. In this one, Ross, who was there supporting me, had come down from his living quarters in the mountains and opened a business similar to a bar, except no liquor was served. It appeared to be a different kind of bar. It was a bar that had been rebuilt, designed this time specially for families. There were two levels to the facility. On the lower level was a central, round floor for dancing or playing games. A swimming pool could be seen outside. I walked through the entire place. Everyone seemed to be having a good time.

I then stepped outside the front door and sat on a bench. A little girl walked out the door and joined me. She looked very sad. I looked at her carefully and asked "What is wrong?"

She explained, "I don't get to be with my mother very much. There are problems at home and I worry."

I looked at her sadness and said, "I understand, but do you know you will be O.K.?"

I could relate to her feelings. She did not answer, but listened as I shared with her a little about my history. After she left, I went back inside to look for Ross. Elderly people were sitting around tables on the top floor visiting. Mothers and their children were on the lower floor

interacting. Children were playing on both floors, visiting with the elderly ones. There seemed to be no conscious separation because of the age difference. Everyone seemed connected. It was a place of sharing and communicating.

When I found Ross, I said, "Ross, may I please have a drink of water?"

"Certainly, Susanne."

I followed him. He ignored me and busied himself, seeing to the needs of others. Finally, I said, "Ross, I have to have a drink of water right this minute. I have been without water for more than four days and I absolutely need a drink of water!"

He looked at me and immediately went to get the water. I drank it and awoke. I pondered the meaning of the two dreams, wondering if the first one meant I could now allow John into a more intimate, special relationship with me. I also wondered if John represented my masculine side becoming more intimate and blending with my feminine side. Perhaps both were true. Our relationship to ourselves manifests outwardly in our relationship with others...on earth as it is in Heaven.

The dream about Ross reminded me that my masculine (active) had often put others first and failed to properly take care of me. Was my relationship mirroring this also? Did I draw into my world those too busy or unable to hear my needs? Had I done this from birth? As the little girl, was I to do something more about my past?

As I thought, forms appeared in the clouds. First a face smiled down at me; then a heart appeared which came as no surprise, since I collect rocks shaped like hearts. More clouds came shaped as an eagle, a phoenix, a young Native American male, and a perfect side view of an angel. It all tied together, love and prayer. Love (the heart and the Native American male) and power (angel and eagle) created to heal through prayer (the phoenix).

Night came and was beautiful, but again I fought the mosquitoes. Finally, I gave myself to them, venturing outside my blanket several times to pray with the stars. In the night, I saw and talked in a dream with another little girl. She told me she was feeling happy and free.

When I awoke, I remembered it was time to focus on the future. Would I become more happy and free after I worked on some situations of my past? I spent most of the night more hopeful.

As I lay in the dark, I heard a rustling noise coming closer. I sat up and looked. Initially my heart pounded. I took several deep breaths

and calmed myself. I finally saw it. It stuck its nose between my prayer ties. I asked, "Hello, Mr. Armadillo, do you have something you would like to tell me?"

When it saw me, it turned around quickly and headed away from me. I watched its tail as it left. An armadillo! What would that mean in my life this year?

I listened to a rooster crowing. A turkey began gobbling. It was still dark when I saw the morning star for the third time. Finally, the day began. There was mist in the valley. It came right up to my prayer ties. The mist had visited on both vision quests. As it moved away, I talked to it and it came clear back to my space. I did this twice. As it slowly left the second time, I sat silently. I felt joy and that peace that surpasses all understanding.

This was an especially beautiful time of the day. The mosquitoes were finally receding and the flies had not yet come to torment me. A flock of beautiful yellow birds flew over, moving from Northwest to Southeast. A new beginning? North to South does represent the high road to me, and I wondered if I was completely on that path now.

I sat on my buffalo rock. I had brought it home from my first vision quest and I wanted it to accompany me on this one. As I sat there, I looked at the flags, appreciating all of the colors. I better understood the way everything comes into being, the way everything moves around the medicine wheel. As I sat there, I heard singing. I watched and saw Gary in the distance. He approached, and I saw the others with him. They were finally coming to get me. I was thrilled I had completed my three days and nights. I had fulfilled my commitment.

I felt closer to Wakan Tanka and all the spirits presented in every form. When I returned and was in the sweat lodge, Gary said, "The Grandfathers said for this woman to address them as 'Father,' because she is now that close to them."

I was happy to hear that we had moved closer to each other in that vision quest. Perhaps by my moving closer to them, they would be able to guide me more. Is that what happens to each of us in real life? If we open to someone, does that allow the other person to open to us more? Do our own walls, our own situations from our past, create the behaviors of others until we learn our lessons?

I shared every detail of the quest in the final sweat. After the feast which I could barely eat, John took me home. First, however, we decided to stop at a restaurant where some others wanted to go visit

for a while longer. On the way, I told John that I was sorry that I didn't bring back a creation story for the group. As we pulled up to the restaurant, he laughed and said, "You obviously received your creation story, but you cannot see it yet. Think, Susanne, you told us what takes place as something moves from the West to the North to the East and to the South. You gave us a creation story and did not even know it."

I was surprised by his response and felt a little better, but still didn't understand fully. We left the discussion as we entered the restaurant. I was finally able to eat and drink. You can imagine how we all looked, especially me with mosquito bites covering my face. Even my eyelids had mosquito bites on them. We smelled like the remains of my vision quest, but we didn't care. We all felt relief and peace and wonder. All of us had completed our commitments.

The wakan period when I would be in a holy state came again. I knew I might remember more information about the quest and more answers might emerge. The following day, more answers came. It was during this time that I received more information about the dream that included Ross.

I had never been able to understand why I had so much trouble becoming comfortable with Ross. I could hug everyone else, but not him. The answer came out of the blue one afternoon. It was something I had not ever realized before. My problem with Ross had to do with my deceased husband, Don.

Don was a controller in his own way. He was manipulative and self-centered. Ladies flocked to him. Suddenly, I learned I chose someone to marry who was much like my father. I had never truly internalized this until now.

I had been able to see it with my ex-husband, and now I could see similar patterns with my first husband. The qualities were blown out of proportion with my second husband so I might finally figure some things out about myself. How were both spouses so different and yet so alike? They pushed me to achieve more and more, so I might help pay for the expenses to meet their goals. What they gave to me and to our home were the leftovers, leftover energy that had not been given to something or someone else. I was definitely not a priority. Most of the time, I came last. How did all of this relate to Ross?

In the dream, I couldn't get Ross to even give me a drink of water at first. My thirst and my need for the water were dismissed. He had to take care of everyone else first.

This clearly showed me that from the very beginning, I had chosen men in my life who did this with me. Both husbands made major decisions for me without discussion. I had watched my father do the same with my mother and then with me. I was left feeling devalued.

Ross entered my life and this vision quest to show me something about myself, so I could pinpoint this continuing pattern. By seeing it, I could begin to work on it. Every time I had been with Ross, I was able to see something that was irritating, something that still hurt me. I could not figure out the unsettling feeling within me. So, in that instant, I received a great answer.

I also knew from the second little girl who appeared in my dreams that eventually she was going to be very happy. I was in the process of being healed which meant that as an adult, I did not have to accept those things I had accepted as a child. I could value myself and find out what I was willing to accept and what I was not willing to accept. I could treat myself much more kindly in the future. I would know true happiness.

I was eager to see Ross and to share my revelation with him. He really does live in the mountains, and months passed before I saw him. When I did, I rushed over and gave him a big hug. I told him about my dream and how the Grandfathers had worked through him to give me a lesson to solve. I was truly grateful. Today, Ross and I play and laugh when we see each other. We speak without speaking. We both understand. He was a great gift and played a big part in my healing.

The butterfly landing on the Eagle Feather told me that Spotted Eagle Feather Man was with me. He showed himself to me again in the cloud formation and came as a golden eagle. I remembered back to a ceremony where a Grandfather had told me that Spotted Eagle Feather Man was always with me. It was he whose face I must have seen on my first vision quest. He had come now in several ceremonies.

He was described as being slender and tall. He has a beautiful smile, the kind that is on the toothpaste ads. In that ceremony, he said, "There are also others helping you and they will show themselves to you on your next hanbleceya. At that time, a Grandfather will speak to you. After that, you will always remember his voice and know that it is he when he talks to you. Pray and listen for the sound of the eagle, for it will take prayer up to the Grandfathers and will come back

to you with the message.”

At another lodge ceremony, I received more information about Spotted Eagle Feather Man. “He not only helps you, but he also helps members of your family. He goes and checks on them and returns with answers when you ask.”

He has done this several times and the information has always been correct. I thought about the many scriptures in the Bible concerning the Eagle.

With such answers coming, I began to reflect on other visitors to my vision quest space. I remembered the yellow bee who had sat on my pipe stem one afternoon. What was he telling me? He landed directly on the opening of the pipe three times. He flew from the stem to my second finger holding the pipe. I felt he was trying to tell me something about the Holy Breath of the Spirit, but what? Communication! Breathe the smoke in, exhale. Watch it. It is a very tangible way to see the “Breath of Life.” When one inhales the smoke through this tiny opening and then breathes it out, it spreads out to fill the universe. Whatever I bring into me, no matter how small, projects out and affects all around me. Energy in, energy out. Prayers and words sent to God and to all those helping us within the universe are the same. Small prayers sent out bring large effects.

I thought about the spider, Iktome, who again had visited me and sat on the prayer flag in the South. Iktome, too, has fun and joy and goodness to share. He shows me truths and untruths. I knew he would be providing me with more reality in the coming year by stripping away more illusions. I also knew it might be painful.

The butterfly that landed in the East on the yellow flag had shown me that there were new beginnings coming. Preparations for them were already taking place. Every person at the vision quest would be affected. I felt the change would somehow include helping others to understand and have greater acceptance of these beautiful spiritual ways.

I journaled all the answers that seemed to be flowing through me. The first afternoon following the vision quest, Gary and Elizabeth came to my apartment. Gary shared with me that through his fasting and prayers, I would be receiving special gifts from the Grandfathers, the Tunkashilas.

As he shared what had taken place, I sat quietly and listened with a deep feeling of humbleness and love. I did not know what to say,

so I simply said, "Thank you."

I asked, "Why, Gary?"

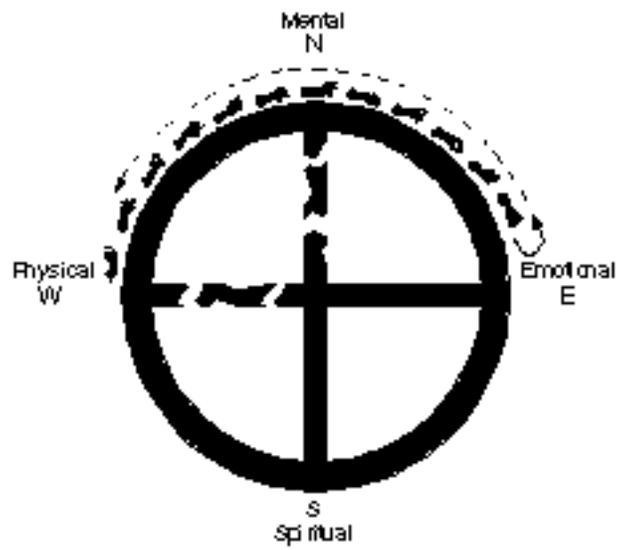
"Because you came and didn't want anything. You weren't coming to get something."

I looked at him and slowly responded, "I will do my best with whatever I receive." I really did not know what to say. I knew these gifts were from the Grandfathers, but I did not understand what for or why? They were the only ones that knew. I simply knew I could only do my best each day, just as we all attempt to do each day. It would not be my decision as to when or how the gifts would be opened. He and I would watch many things unfold together and separately. We both knew it.

All vision quests show us the future. I knew there would be closings during the next year, so the births might take place. I also felt that I was now able to accept more love than I had ever allowed before. I hoped all of my relationships would have more love. The relationship I would have with my children, my relatives, my spiritual family, and my partner.

Just as I had been shown, the new year following the second quest began to unfold, closings along with the new beginnings. I expected surprises, gifts, and events to create a balance of negative and positive.

I had to go back to correct more of my past in order to rebuild and strengthen the lines of my wheel of life.



DISCOVERING PATTERNS

The day after I returned from the quest, a representative from Recovery Resources, Inc., of California unexpectedly telephoned and asked me to speak on the relationship of the masculine and feminine. They were looking for a local speaker. I excitedly accepted their invitation to speak. A telephone call to John Blake from an acquaintance of his gave me the opportunity.

The day arrived. The speaker before me had the participants make a list of problems we had in life today. Then we wrote down the parent with whom we felt we had been most enmeshed. I wrote down my mother's name. Then we made a genealogy chart and took a look at the side of the family that had the same problems as we did. I found that I was actually more enmeshed with my father than with my mother.

Suddenly, I understood much more about the little girl who showed up in my vision quest. I realized my relationships and the pain I felt as an adult were related to my childhood. When that young girl appeared in my dream on the vision quest, she told me her troubles. I listened. I had to go back and heal this in the medicine wheel of my own life.

By drawing the simple genealogy chart of relationships and problems in my family, I was able to better understand more about myself and the situations in all parts of my present life. I deeply loved my parents. However, both my mother and father brought their own childhood problems into our family. They both functioned in the best possible way they could with the information and experiences given to them in their lifetime.

I realize this is my perception of what happened, and no one else's. First, I began to see how enmeshed I was with my father and how I drew similar men to me. I learned how and why I react as I do to the masculine entities in my life.

I wrote out the problems of both sides of the family and learned a great deal by doing so. My mother developed severe diabetes when

she was pregnant with me. Every time someone asked her when she became diabetic, she replied, "During my pregnancy with Susie." I always felt guilty.

My father constantly said to me as he left for work, "Susie, watch your mother. You know what to do. If you need to, get her some orange juice or candy." I did know generally what to do, because my mother had many insulin reactions. The reactions began most times by her becoming stubborn. If she did not get juice or coke quickly, she became more stubborn and wouldn't do anything anybody wanted her to do.

My father also said repeatedly, "Susie, watch carefully. We don't want to lose her. This is very serious. If she doesn't get what she needs, she might go into a coma and die."

I knew. I had to know. If I did not catch the signs, she could die. I loved my mother. I learned to stay on guard and be alert at all times when I was with her. I still vividly remember an incident that happened when I was only four. My mother and I lay down together on her bed to take a nap one afternoon. When I awoke, I turned over and said, "Mamma, let's get up."

There was no response. I nudged her. "Mamma, let's get up."

Still, she did not respond. "Mamma, mamma, it's time to wake up."

I shook her. She would not awaken. Fear came over me. Was she in a coma? Again I tried to shake her, but I still could not wake her.

My father had instructed me to call him if something went wrong. Unable to wake my mother, I feared she was dead and it was all my fault. I went to the phone to look for my father's work number. I could not find it. Rather than keep looking, I ran to the neighbors' homes and knocked on doors until I got an answer. I knocked on several doors before I found someone. It was a woman that I did not know. I said, "I need help."

The neighbor came with me and telephoned for an ambulance. Then we found my Dad's number and she telephoned him. The ambulance came and took Mamma to the hospital. The neighbor stayed with me until my father arrived. Then she returned home.

My father came home frustrated and then he became angry with me. Money was scarce and always a major concern. Instead of praising me for getting help, he jerked me up and spanked me for not

following his directions to call him first.

Another incident occurred shortly after my mother's hospitalization. My dad and I went to Pauls Valley. My grandmother had been staying with us because Mamma had been sick. With Mamma better, my grandmother was returning home. We decided we were all going to meet my grandfather in Pauls Valley for a weekend of fun. It was about a two hour ride.

Mamma rode with my grandmother in her car, so she wouldn't be riding alone. I rode with my Dad. He had some errands before we began the drive. At a bridge, he stopped the car and asked if I wanted to see the water. We walked down by the edge. This was a new adventure for me. It was unusual for my father to do something like that. As we walked back up the hill and walked out on the bridge, Daddy sat me up on the bridge railing. Then he thought he was being amusing and hung me by my ankles out over the water. This is a vivid memory. I had on a ruffy dress and the skirt fell down over my face. My underpants were showing. I said, "Stop, Daddy. You can see my underpants."

He stopped and stood me upright on the road at his side. I hesitantly said, "I thought you were going to drop me. You scared me."

"Susie, I wouldn't drop you." We got back into the car and proceeded on to Pauls Valley.

When we arrived there, I told my mother and grandparents, "Daddy held me upside down over the long bridge on the way here."

They stared at him. I could tell by the way they looked that they disapproved. He saw their looks also. I am certain he knew they were going to get mad if he admitted the truth. Tension entered the room. I did not like tension at all.

He said, "It is not true, she dreamed it."

They all looked relieved, and I stayed quiet. They believed him. They did not believe me. I felt confused. No one talked about it after that. Several times along the road of life, my dad told someone else, "Susie had the most ridiculous dream..." He then would go on and tell them about it. I now know, dream or no dream, something important took place that affected the way I relate to other males.

My father simply did not know how to play with small children. What he thought was playful, funny, or amusing was not playful or funny to me. The way he played felt inappropriate and hurtful. My father knew I was ticklish and he would tickle me until I was in pain or cried.

He never seemed to understand how to do it just a little and then quit while it was fun. He often pushed too far.

When my mother became pregnant again, we were excited. However, this pregnancy took her to the hospital for months before my sister's birth. With my mother ill and my sister fragile with physical complications after her birth, my role with my father seemed to change from child to confidante. I was already mother's helper. Daddy then wanted me to be more of a partner. He began talking about when I could go to work with him. This continued throughout his life. He was critical of me and yet he continually pushed me and encouraged me to accomplish more.

As I used the genealogy chart and traced my problems back to major incidents, I began to realize my father emotionally abused me. He did not intend it or realize the affect it would have on my life and my future relationships.

I continued to look at my relationship with my father for more understanding of myself. By my tenth birthday, my Dad was taking me to his office on weekends. After we got there, he did not spend time with me and we did not work together. In fact, many times he would leave me at the office to answer the phone and then seemed to forget me.

Often he would telephone and ask what I wanted for lunch and then forget to bring it to me. I seemed to be an afterthought. I counted the days until I would turn sixteen and could work for someone else.

Even when I was in my thirties and living in New Mexico, my father continually telephoned and talked to me about going into business with him. I told him how happy I was building a mental health center and receiving many awards for doing so. My father ignored any success I felt and continued with this perpetual discussion of our working together, bribing me by saying I could have his business in the future if I would do so.

Finally, after Don's death, my remarriage, and our move to Oklahoma, I eventually did begin to work with him again. However, I attempted to set boundaries so as not to become the child again. He thought the only way I could be happy in life was by working with him. Of course, it was he who would be happy, not me. I realize now he needed to control what I was doing. I am certain he believed all of this would be good for me.

Looking at the genealogy chart, I could easily see how my father became the adult he was. He, too, had to take on heavy responsibilities early in his life. He told me many stories of going to work at a very young age. His father drank too much and sometimes spent his entire check before he could get the money home to the family. His mother hid money for survival. My father worked and gave her money to help support seven other siblings. He told me that she encouraged him, but was also critical of him. My father's brother was chronically ill. His illness most likely caused chaos in my father's family. My father's life seemed to give him little time to play. My grandmother's patterns were unknowingly handed down to my father, and his patterns were passed to me.

Because there were so many problems for our family, my feelings were discounted. Whenever my mother was in the hospital, I had to stay with different relatives or friends, being moved from one to another. My parents told me I had to be good or they would not want me to stay. This was the beginning of my becoming a "people pleaser."

As a result, I grew up to be an over achiever with a very critical inner voice. It appeared that I had great self esteem when, in reality, my critical inner voice was eating away at me. No matter how much I succeeded, my father always told me that if I would try harder, I could do better. And I did try harder.

I chose men similar to my father who made decisions according to what they wanted. They not only didn't ask for my opinion, they also didn't feel they needed to inform me of their decisions until they were ready. I am not talking about minor decisions, but major ones such as buying a car, running for U. S. Congress, dating other women, etc. Many times they expected me to do what they wanted regardless of my feelings. All the men in my life pushed me to work harder and accomplish more. I knew how to give, but I did not know how to receive. I did not feel worthy of receiving. I did not know how to take down my internal walls to receive. I chose men who kept me dangling...just like Dad dangled me over the bridge. They were all emotionally unavailable and had difficulty giving to me. They were great at giving to others.

When I acquired money, I could not keep it, probably because inside I felt I was not worthy of it. At different times in my life, I had a great deal of money, but no matter how much I had, it was soon gone. Tracing experiences back through my lifetime helped me to understand why I simply allowed money to fly through my hands.

This reconstruction of my childhood experiences helped me understand my past. I could then re-enact some situations that would enable me to become a healthier adult. I continued my quest for understanding.

There was a great deal of chaos in our family. When my mother was well, I remember that she kept secrets from my father about money expenditures. She had few boundaries. With her as my example, I learned to set few boundaries, if any.

Secrets within the family, inability to set boundaries, my father continually wanting me to be a partner, and chaos...all of this indicated to me that our family was unhealthy. As I realized this, I became much more aware of patterns in my life. What I learned didn't please me.

I saw learned patterns within myself that I passed on to my children. You see, I only had my parents as examples. This is the problem many of us have. We only know to do as our parents have done. As a result, patterns are repeated and passed down through the generations.

I could not keep money. I tried to teach my children how to have fun, even though I didn't know how to let myself play. My inability to set boundaries often resulted in a life of chaos for all of us. Although I had no understanding of emotional abuse, I intuitively knew not to make my son my partner when his father died. However, I was very critical of him. I was more accepting and easy going with my daughter, just as my mother had been with me.

I loved both of my children immensely. Yet, there was a difference between the way I treated them. I finally realized the answer had to do with my relationship with my father which, in turn, affected my relationship with my son. I had created every intimate relationship with all important men in my life in accordance with the relationship I had with my father. When I discovered that, I sat down with my son and showed him the chart I had drawn. I explained how my early childhood had affected me, and I apologized to him for my not knowing how to relate to men in my family, and that had included him. It was my hope that from this we could stop our negative family patterns. My reactions to emergency situations or difficult times in my life have been the result of my dealings with my mother. I have a very strange way of dealing with crisis. Some may interpret it as "not caring" about others when, in actuality, I care very deeply.

Throughout my youth, I dealt with my mother when she had an

insulin reaction and became stubborn. I detached and felt calm on the inside as I did what was necessary. Of course, this was learned behavior. If I had allowed myself to feel feelings during those times of crisis, I could not have functioned appropriately.

First I attempted to be kind, asking her to drink her orange juice or eat her candy bar. When this did not work, and generally it did not, I became just as strong-willed as she. That usually worked. Afterwards, when I was alone, I fell apart.

As an adult, I react inappropriately in crisis situations. A calmness comes over me when I am scared. Then I respond with a shaming statement. Once Don and I were on the ski patrol. Don was hurt while skiing when I was on duty in the First Aid station. The ski patrol brought down someone in the sled. I went outside to uncover the person. It was my husband. My first response was not, "Are you O.K.?"

He obviously wasn't or he wouldn't have been in that sled. I asked instead, "Did you hurt your ski pants we just bought?" He was not too injured, because he was speaking to me and his eyes were open.

My son, Jet, telephoned me from the hospital one night. He said, "Mom, I'm at the hospital. I just totaled the car."

My response was not, "How are you? Are you all right?" Instead I said, "Well, there goes your insurance right out the window."

Dawn, my daughter, telephoned and told me, "Mother, I had a wreck." I did not respond with concern. Instead I said, "Didn't you know better than to go out tonight?"

Always a shaming statement to protect me, to help me not feel when I am really upset. I finally understood my inappropriate reactions.

I remembered the explanation given in the lodge one night. "When a person steps onto this road, there is an opportunity to do things over in a different way. This happens when the person has gone completely around the entire medicine wheel, for then the path then becomes smooth. You gain the opportunity to do everything you have ever done in your life over again in a much better, much healthier way."

To me this meant that as I moved forward on the medicine wheel, I could change even more old patterns and remove from my life what no longer worked for me. I could release all that was negative in my past as I turned it to a positive in my present. I would be able to see the positive side of what each of my parents had given to me. There is

always a positive and a negative to everything. I could look at my life, study, and understand why things happened the way they did, without resentment.

As I release the negativity and all that no longer works, I become me. I move closer to the real me. I become free, and if I can complete the entire wheel, my energy will draw to me what is rightfully mine. I will be given the ability to claim it.

Though I had done so much work on myself in my past, it seemed there was still more to do. John telephoned and asked me if I wanted to attend an Inner Child Workshop with him shortly after that. The invitation came as an amazingly appropriate gift for me and the timing was perfect. I jumped at it. I needed to work more on my past to improve my present.

THE HIGH ROAD

With the second vision quest, I knew I had finally committed and stepped onto the high road. Changing to this road had been simple, but not easy. Answers were coming and being understood. I knew when the Grandfathers were speaking to me.

I studied the medicine wheel of my life and everything that had brought me to that point. As I did, I could not help thinking about people who never move out of the West on the medicine wheel. Some simply go around and around the first part of the wheel, the physical part, their whole lives. They are the ones who never get beyond the body. They live their lives fulfilling only their desires and physical needs.

I understand that it is difficult to move past the first two parts of the wheel and stay there. The work is definitely worth it for then a higher road opens.

What is the high road? It is a path leading away from the obsession and drive to meet only physical needs and desires and leading toward a more spiritual way. It is like a road going up a mountain. The road has drop offs and obstructing boulders to move aside to be able to continue climbing. When we arrive at the top, we have the opportunity to walk the high road, what some call the red road.

Traveling along this road, one learns how to walk in balance between the masculine and feminine, the left and right sides of the brain, the logical and the intuitive. On this road, one receives the opportunity to see the negative and positive of life from a higher level.

All spiritual paths are good. Many people are on the high road, but are not aware of it. They may just have entered it and not realized what is happening yet. Perhaps experiences are taking place to prepare them for their walk. They may be giving up the physical and mental obsessions for a very different, more joyous way of life. They have no idea they are on a path that will give them the opportunity to become free, completely free.

When someone moves to the high road, changes inevitably

start taking place. Closings demand they move forward, guiding them to their life purpose and a new way of life.

I felt more closings coming, and I knew I was being guided up the road to more situations that would help smooth my entire field of life. I knew I would have help along the way as I searched for the proper nutrients to be used on my field. The soil in my field had to acquire balance for more growth to occur. The foundation for the temple would then gain strength as I continued to look back on my past.

When I married, I believed that having a spouse would bring me security. Then, when we struggled financially to allow him to finish school, we both believed his degree would bring us security. Then, we thought a good job would bring security. We bought a home for added security, but with it came payments. We strived for the ability to take out loans and have credit cards. With credit, we thought we would be secure when we traveled and not have to fear being without money in case of an accident.

What really happened? The security of marriage brought children. I built my life around the man in the family, the husband and the father. Sure, we each had our lives, but he made all the major decisions. When he chose to move, we moved. When he chose to become involved with politics, we did. When he became involved in community theater, we cheered him on. We worked everything around his schedule, as we all attempted to have individual lives that were gratifying and fulfilling. During it all, he attempted to encourage us and be involved with us. That was difficult, however, since he spent ninety per cent of his time on his involvements. Then the husband and the father died, leaving three of us with false security in a big home with lots of insurance money. His leaving left a major "empty" space.

I attended church. I had religion and, yet, I still did not feel secure. I had many friends and relatives, and still felt alone. A hole, an emptiness inside, had grown from small to large with the death of my spouse.

I attempted to fill that emptiness by selling the big house, moving, and marrying again. I thought I could regain that family feeling and that "sense of security" through another spouse. We bought another house. The hole became larger. I divorced and remained in the house. Then I sold the house. I finally understood. I discovered it was not a spouse or a partner, land, a good job, or a house I needed to fill the emptiness.

I began reading. I started writing and repeating affirmations to work on my self-esteem. I wrote in my journal. I worked with a sponsor, completing the twelve steps. I learned who “I” was. I had no idea that I was already preparing to step onto the high road. As I moved towards it, I understood more about my patterns and myself. Through a series of events, I was able to see what more I needed to do to move forward. Feeling better about my life and myself, I entered my first sweat. Through vision quests and dreams, I was shown I had to do more work to move further into my core to learn more about my lessons here.

The hurts deep within came forth and began to slowly heal as I attempted to do all I could to become a strong adult instead of the hurt child. Thanks to this way, I am less attached to everything. I am amazed at the changes and my new way of being.

I have fewer desires and needs than ever before. For instance, I used to drive by a home that was prettier than mine and I wanted one like it someday. When I see a beautiful home today, I admire it and hope the people within it are happy, but I’m happy that I’m not the one responsible for it.

I have many friends and relatives who live in beautiful homes. I love to visit them and enjoy life with them. I have many other friends who have very little. I also love to visit them and enjoy life with them. It is the relationship with them that is more important to me than anything else in the world.

As my relationship to all changes and improves, my actions in life changes. In the past, I spent money to fill the emptiness. Now I am more careful with money. In all areas of my life, my self-worth is slowly and steadily increasing. Conversely, my problems seem to be decreasing.

When I become angry, I look at the situation and try to figure out why I am reacting. When I react, it is from something in my childhood. I know it is not good to stuff feelings, because that is what I used to do. After tracing the feeling back as far as I can, I study that experience. After studying and understanding it, I then share my gift of awareness directly with the person or people with whom I was angry. I expect no change in them. I heal the past by taking care of myself in the present. The faster I work on it, the better. I have discovered when I put off tracing the same feeling back to find the problem, unkind remarks pop out of my mouth.

As an adult, I have learned to ask myself questions, including,

“How did I handle this as a child? What can I do differently today to take better care of myself? What power do I have today as a strong adult that I did not have as a child? How can I regain me in this situation?”

As I continue to heal, I relate differently to the men in my life. I expect more from myself and from them. I both give and receive. I am learning what is and isn't acceptable to me. The greatest difference is that I now can give an opinion and express my feelings without fear of losing a relationship. I believe that what is mine will be, and what isn't will not be. Security continues to build within. I have learned it is not outside of me.

As I walk on this road, I am learning a deeper level of commitment to myself and to others. Until just a few years ago, I often allowed others to make my decisions. I thought commitment was doing my best to fulfill their plan for me. I realized that was a half-hearted commitment.

I learned that doing a vision quest or a Sun Dance requires complete commitment, not only by me, but by the many people who support. Fortunately, when anyone makes a commitment to do this, everyone involved receives answers and healing. Commitment is important for the growth and health of all people.

I disliked conflict and tension. In my past when I felt unbalanced, I would obsess and attempt to control. Today I am different and react differently. I now walk through the storms in my life more balanced. As a result of following this path and working a program, I try to face into the storms and deal with problems through techniques and answers I am learning. I know God will increase the light at the right time.

I also know that I will be put in the right place where and when I am needed. When I present seminars, the people who need what I have to give will be sitting in the room. It is not my timing. It is God's timing. Patience is a part of surrender.

Many of my old beliefs have been stripped from me. It is as if I saw everything backwards. As veils lift, I see a different reality. With each new reality, I gain more truth. Where I was weak, I am becoming stronger. I am continually internalizing the understanding of an inner security.

I always considered myself a truth seeker. Yet I discovered myself not telling whole truths and even deceiving myself and others at times without realizing it. Today I strive to tell the truth no matter how

difficult and unacceptable it might be to a person. I know I get back what I put out to the universe. To receive complete truth and trust from another, I have to learn to be truthful with myself and trust myself enough to state my truth.

I learned to accept the unacceptable about others and myself. Surrounded by the love and acceptance I found walking in this way, I've learned to love me more. Learning to love myself has been my most difficult task. Now I am able to move this love from within and project it outward.

I understand now why I had to surrender my life in order to find it. My beliefs changed. As my beliefs changed, my roles changed. My role as mother changed when my children no longer could come to me for money. We all three had to learn to stand on our own. It seemed as if angels stepped in and helped each of us when it was necessary. Without money, I could only support them through prayer, encouragement, understanding, compassion, and love. They could only support me in the same manner. We have all benefited by experiencing growth and building our individual strong foundations.

I am learning I can't heal my parents' pain. When my father chose not to agree with me on many issues, I was as gentle as possible, allowing him to disagree, and loving him where he was, but remaining true to myself.

Finally I have done a pretty good job of releasing my role of people pleaser. I learned to say no and still feel loved. The need to compete with others disappeared. (In 1984, Shaklee, U.S., Inc., honored me for having the fastest growing organization in the nation.) Instead of trying to be number one in business, I began to compete solely with myself. Instead of trying to figure out how I can be number one, I have peace within and feel joyous for others for what they have achieved. I no longer have to prove to myself that I can do more of everything in a better way.

I allow myself to make mistakes and know it is O.K.. I no longer have to do it right. I stopped spending so much time doing what everyone else wanted and took control of how I would spend my time. I look at what I value and arrange my life accordingly. I am becoming a more balanced me.

I value time for prayer. I have prayed more hours on this road than at any previous time in my life. When I pray, I return to my center. I listen to my words. What do I value? What is my truth? I ask myself

these questions. Am I staying firm in my commitment to myself? In a dream, a voice told me that I could walk through an ocean and the waters would part. I've found that if I do stand firm, the "waters" do separate and go around me. It is important that I learn to trust the process. Many mornings I wake up and say aloud, "I trust that You are guiding and taking care of me."

A prayer opens all before us, illuminating our pathways and the pathways of others for whom we pray. It is through this way that I have been able to focus on prayer at a level that I have never before attained.

I pray aloud. It is fine to communicate quietly and in thought, but whenever possible, I give voice to my prayers. With the breath of life coming out as we speak, it goes into the universe and then is heard in a stronger way. In truth, every thought we have and every word we say is a prayer. What we say, even in jest, will eventually happen in some form as if it were a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, when we do take the time to pray, the prayer gives what we say more strength. More light shines upon it.

The high road I walk is important because it is experiential. I learn by listening, observing, experiencing, and by finding my own answers.

CONNECTING TO THE EARTH

I became more connected to the earth during the year following that second vision quest. As the leaves fell from the trees, two major changes were taking place in my life. My father was having trouble with his thoughts and with his sight. He was in and out of the hospital. My cash flow failed to cover the many bills with which I was burdened after the divorce. Even though months before I had lost my need to spend excess money for my house and had moved into an apartment, I still could not cover the bills. I seemed to be losing the AAA credit standing I had held onto for so many years.

The struggle within me over my inability to pay led me to look at bankruptcy. I hired John to be my lawyer, for bankruptcy would be my ultimate humiliation. Between work and Daddy's health problems, I was forced to drag up records and look at every financial mistake I had made. The process was excruciatingly painful.

Winter brought ice and cold. I felt the same ice and cold within me. January finally arrived. As the war began in Saudi Arabia, my own personal war began. Closings were taking place in my life.

As the Persian Gulf became more heated, Daddy became heated. He left his home, and refused to return. I kept him at my apartment for a few days. Once when I was presenting a stress seminar, I telephoned home at the break and asked, "What are you doing while I am gone, Daddy?"

"Going through everything in your apartment."

I quickly finished my stress seminar and headed home. Later that week we traveled to my sister's home in Palm Springs. He thought he was 100 instead of 80 and refused any suggestions we had for him. We watched our father who took such great pride in his appearance now put on two pairs of pants and several shirts at the same time.

I fought my own battles daily. The day the United States committed to a war, I committed my father to a private institution for mental tests. With his confusion, I knew I had lost my father as I had

known him.

His commitment and all that led up to that final act was painful. The child of my earlier years stepped forward and I moved through the entire process in a calm way, working with my father's stubbornness for weeks before I attempted to take him to a nursing home. He refused, running away and locking himself and his secretary in his office.

Once the stress of finally committing him to a private institution ended, I returned home. The following morning, my fiftieth birthday, I had absolutely no energy. I attempted to take a shower and had to lie back down on the bed with my hair wet. My sister telephoned from California to wish me happy birthday and to see how I was doing. We had been communicating off and on the previous day while I was attempting to make the decision concerning our father. She said, "Happy birthday. Are you O.K. today? How are you doing?"

"Awful. I feel horrible about Daddy and what I have done, even though there was no alternative."

"What can I do to help you?"

Jokingly, I said, "I need a rose, just one rose to begin this birthday." She wired me seventy-two roses. It was such a ridiculous thing to do that I couldn't help but smile. It got me out of bed and put me back on my feet. Cat showed up and helped me dress. John and his daughter, Savannah, picked me up to take me to dinner. I believed it was just to be the three of us. Instead, there was a surprise birthday party for me given by John, Kathy, and Cat!

I watched the war carefully. I felt my answers about my father were connected to what was happening on this earth. With every new development in Saudi Arabia, I saw how connected my life was to that war. I felt only after the war was over would I be able to move Daddy from the mental health facility to a nursing home without a battle from him. It was a highly frustrating and very sad time.

A few days later Elizabeth telephoned. I was talking to her when Gary said in the background, "Tell Susanne to go read Matthew 10 for her answer." I did so, and I received a multitude of answers.

The sun was beginning to peak a tiny bit through the clouds in my life. Gifts continued coming to balance the pain. A friend unexpectedly gifted me with a brand new much needed computer and printer that he couldn't use in his business. Another friend surprised me with a brand new winter coat.

Two weeks after I institutionalized my father, I walked into

bankruptcy court. I was ready. I had decided how I could do this in a way that I could live with my decision. Through bankruptcy, I released the debts from my second marriage. Both the institutionalization of my father and the bankruptcy were unbelievably difficult and unacceptable to me. They pressed hard against the borders of my belief system.

I knew that for me to find a new way of life these closings must come, and I must move through all of this to reach doors on the other side. The more I was able to understand my personal closings, the more I was able to understand and help others with their closings.

The gift of the computer allowed me to print brochures and workbooks for seminars. I scheduled more seminars. It felt good to be working again. I received another wonderful gift through the mail. Kathy had moved to Colorado. She mailed me a brand new dress that I wore for presenting many seminars. My sister sent me an airline ticket to visit again in California. God was using other people as instruments to help me, balancing the negative that had taken place.

THE MEDICINE WHEEL WITHIN

As difficult as the last half of 1990 and the first half of 1991 seemed, there were times when I felt ecstatic about the universal teachings and the new understandings I was receiving. Everything about life was becoming more clear to me. I began to internalize the answers about the medicine wheel, my lessons, and purpose.

One evening Gary called me over to him before a sweat. He drew the figure of a person in the dirt and said, "This is an individual coming here to earth. At birth, an infant has an opening in its head."

I knew there was a fontanel or soft spot on a baby's head. "There is a solid spiritual line or connection between the creator and this opening in each of us. As time goes by, the opening closes, so we may walk our walk here on earth. It is up to us to rediscover our spirituality or, in other words, find our way back to God and our purposes for being here."

Next he drew a medicine wheel. I could see the strong, straight lines move from the center out to form the four parts of the wheel with each line taking form as we move through each stage of life. Energy travels from the center along each of the lines. Experiences and all input are held within the wheel and attach to our DNA.

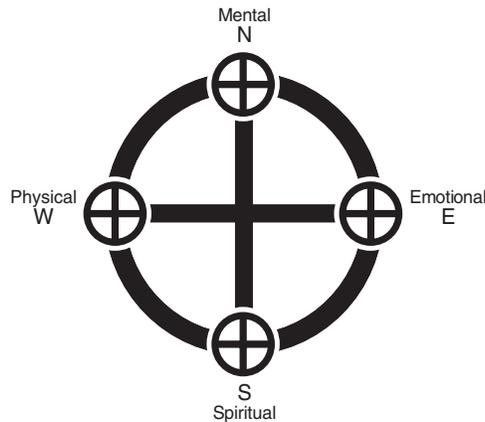
Each person's medicine wheel is different. Each person has his or her own life experiences and influences that makes the person unique and individual. Each person's path belongs only to the individual taking it. The medicine wheel within represents the past, a path and direction, as well as life's plan to rediscover spirituality.

The medicine wheel is balanced between masculine and feminine. The West and North quarters make up the half that is considered masculine, while the East and South quarters make up the half that is feminine. The four directions signify the four virtues we each desire to achieve.

The West represents the virtue of bravery. This bravery is the ability to "face into the storm" in the battles each person faces in his or

her life. It exemplifies facing into our lessons and our greatest fears. In the North, we gain wisdom. The North is where those wise ones sit making decisions about how to orchestrate life here on earth. They send us messages when we open to them. The East is the seat of fortitude. Fortitude teaches us patience and endurance through the different experiences in our lives as we wait for an answer or a birth. The South bears generosity. This is the direction from which we all come and to which we all go. Generosity includes both giving and acceptance. It brings love and joy into our lives.

Each of the four directions is one of the four ways we are. The West represents the body or the physical side; the North, the mind or the mental; the East, the heart or the emotional; the South, the soul or the spiritual. Within each of the four sections of the medicine wheel, there is a smaller medicine wheel with the four directions represented again. Therefore, there are sixteen equal parts to move through. This represents the sixteen lessons which bring the sixteen truths as we travel around the wheel. These lessons are personal and are written even before birth.



As an infant, you were totally dependent on others. You depended on the people around you to fulfill needs, and your needs were mostly physical. As your physical needs were satisfied, your insistence to have a need met declined and you were ready to go on to a higher level of needs. If you felt safe, you developed good self esteem.

If negative situations occurred and positive situations neutralized them, you stayed balanced. When negatives outweighed the positives, problems arose.

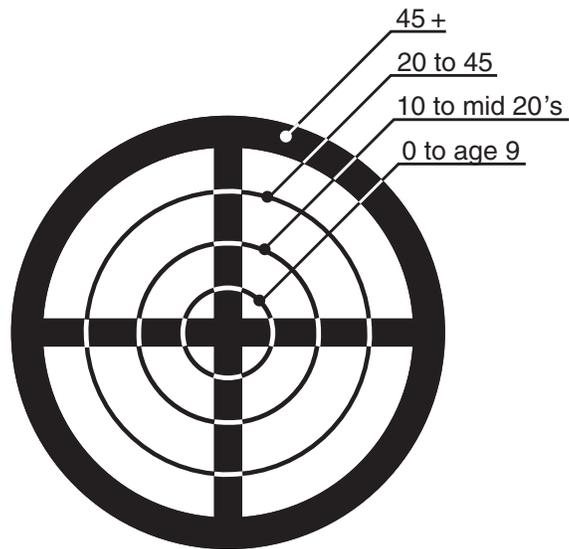
Too many times this balance of positive and negative does not happen for a baby. Negatives begin to greatly outnumber the positives. The lines in the medicine wheel first weaken and then sometimes break completely. When a break occurs, the energy that would normally travel from the center of the wheel outwards in a steady flow becomes unsteady. Confusion within occurs as energy from one area of the wheel moves through the break and bleeds into another area.

The spiritual line can be weakened, but it will never be broken. It always remains in place.

I listened carefully to more information given about positive and negative energies. "When you come here, you are a perfect circle. An energy is pulled down through you, an energy that comes from the birth experience. It feels like a negative experience, because it requires the force of energy to send you into this world rather than a gentle, soft one. This quickly changes from a negative into a positive experience if you are accepted into this world in a good way. This is the beginning of life on earth. You will generally walk through the negative to the positive in your life experiences to help you understand what you are here to learn."

I became fascinated as I thought about our development in such a pure and simple way. There are four parts of the medicine wheel within, and there are also four stages. Unmet needs in the first two stages cause breaks in the lines of our medicine wheels. Breaks in the wheel cause energy that flows from the center to weaken or be lost rather than be used to gain balance in life. The energy can become diffused and the directions will overlap. Leaks created in earlier stages continue to affect thinking even into adulthood. The leaks bring lessons which become larger and larger as we grow older until we finally understand what is happening. The whole body is often affected and confusion felt until the answer is received.

When a person has unmet needs from previous stages, the energy may be stuck back in that stage, leaving us with less energy for the present. An individual can reach his or her full God-given potential by assuming responsibility for all parts of his or her medicine wheel.



The holes or damage can be repaired and the energy can be changed. We can learn how to go back to our center, and come back out again in a positive way, healing and correcting the problems of the past.

The medicine wheel, its tasks and levels, and the energy flow are difficult to understand and perceive. Many understand the structure, but understanding the energy inside is more difficult. Once the movement of energy within the wheel is comprehended, a person can begin to apply this understanding to life. It becomes more real and more meaningful.

We were once perfect circles with strong lines. Our positive and negative energies were in balance or canceled each other. Too much conflict as a child caused a line to be greatly weakened or broken. These weak or broken lines are susceptible to collapse and can leave us vulnerable to a breakdown of the immune or nervous system. Many times this will lead to an illness. It is, therefore, good to go back and repair the lines.

Studying the medicine wheel helps us understand which illnesses people have a potential for acquiring. Weaknesses can be seen. This knowledge may assist an individual in overcoming illness.

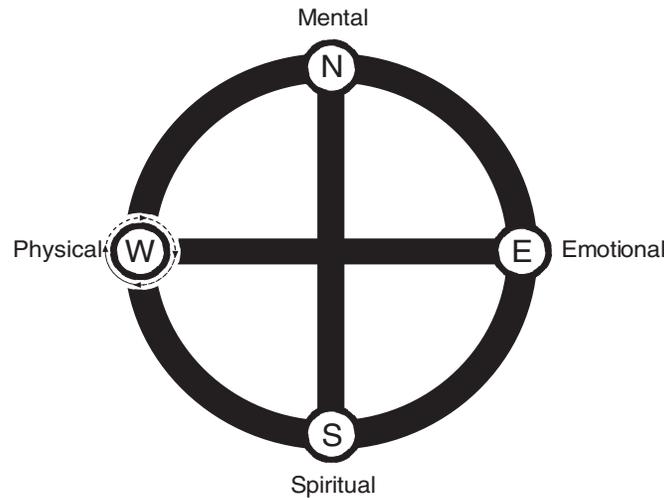
To change the energy for every negative in my life, I had to create a positive to balance each negative. If my perception about a past situation changes from negative to positive and I have healed my past, I can then walk around my medicine wheel in a good way and stay balanced. When my needs are fulfilled, I will be able to go to the center of my medicine wheel and return prepared to move on to the next section of the wheel more balanced.

As we grow from birth, we may receive verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse with very few positive experiences to balance the negative energy. We travel around the medicine wheel without being able to access our centers. Broken lines and holes cause energy leaks in our individual medicine wheels. Our potentials are blocked by inner conflict, doubts, and psychological trauma. Negative on top of negative occurs. The subconscious recalls the traumatic episodes of the past and influences present behavior. When an individual receives negative energies without the positive to balance it, the person grows into an adult with the unfulfilled needs of a child.

Perhaps this is why some people stay in the West (physical) of their medicine wheel and live only for physical gratification their entire lives. They hold on to or find happiness only in external possessions or physical gratifications.

They go round and round and round the same wheel their entire lives, never proceeding any further. It is devastating when an adult stays in the West, since this negative approach to life is passed on to their children and affects future generations.

I knew that I could not cut across my medicine wheel. I could not move from the West to the East without completing the medicine wheel tasks in the North, the Mental. I had to complete and strengthen the broken lines in my wheel. I kept remembering Gary's words. "Once all areas of the wheel are complete, the wheel becomes smooth. There will no longer be broken lines in the medicine wheel and lessons will not have to be repeated. Then the rewards will come. All that is yours will come to you. You will have the opportunity to do everything in your past you desire to do again in a better way. You will have a new life, a more peaceful and fulfilled life."



It all became clear what I was doing. Dreams and situations were occurring to take me back to past experiences that created a negative in my life, so I might take care of the parts of my medicine wheel that were broken and gain my teaching and my truth for a lesson I brought to earth.

Anyone can repair his or her wheel and move completely around it. The thunder being that lives in the West will bring the energy, the electricity that is necessary for progression and movement around the wheel of life. Every person that continually walks a path and eventually reaches the Northeast will be offered the opportunity to step onto that high road that some call the red road. It is important for the reader to understand that this higher road is considered to be all roads that lead away from a physical focus and moves one to spiritual enlightenment. I have chosen the Native American path. Others may choose a different path. There are many choices. Still others may remain or return to the physical when it becomes difficult to go forward in life.

If a person chooses to walk the high road, the path of spiritual enlightenment, that person will inevitably go back and repair the holes in his or her medicine wheel. This provides the opportunity to bring balance back into life. By returning to the center and into the darkness,

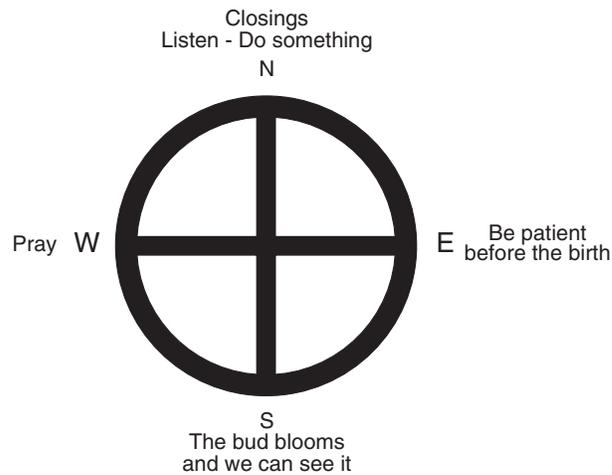
just as a seed returns to the earth before moving once again into the daylight, a person moves to the light and emerges in a better way.

I began to repair my lines first by prayer. Then I found a counselor and, within six weeks, found a twelve-step program. In another six weeks, I began to work the steps with a sponsor. The process of repairing my wheel had begun. Several years later, I added the purification ceremony of the sweat lodge. This helped me to remove the residue by providing me with the courage to continue releasing negative energies and the baggage that was no longer good for me. My broken lines began to strengthen. Positive seemed to replace the negative. Life began to turn around and to be redefined.

I began to purposely change the energy in several areas of my life by doing everything in all four ways I am...physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I used the God Box. I accidentally did this when I prayed about a good relationship before I learned about the medicine wheel and the prayer ties. Now I use prayer ties and my God Box, and I understand what I did in the past, what I do today, and how it works.

First I say a prayer. The prayer begins the energy change in the West, giving Wakan Tanka, God, a clear idea of what I'm seeking, yet leaving the way the prayer is to be answered open ended and unlimited because I know I am not fully aware of my own needs. I listen and wait for the answer as I proceed with everyday life. I move into the North and wait to see what doors might close in my life and what answers might come, bringing wisdom to me before I act. Sometimes I take action to bring about manifestation or birth. For instance, when I wanted to develop a good relationship with a man, first I prayed and then I waited. I wondered what action I might take to manifest a person's presence. Then an idea came to me. I set a place setting for an extra person at my table each time I ate at home alone. While my prayer was in the gestation period, I waited with patience for his arrival. After John's appearance, the birth in the East, the relationship moved to the South, manifestation, when we reconnected and began seeing each other regularly.

I consciously attempt to change my energy physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually through these sacred ways to improve every aspect of my life. Every second I spend working with and healing my energy flow moves me forward on my own medicine wheel.



I gained a greater understanding of how imperative it was that I continue to heal all that had happened in my past. I knew I could completely release debilitating patterns in my life if I simply remained willing to work on childhood issues facing me.

I also knew how important it was not to cling to the child inside, but through healing, become a strong adult. The strong adult would then be able to lead that hurt child in a much better way rather than the child, full of hurt, leading the adult around lashing out here and there or being depressed on this bed or that couch.

Healing provides the energy to move forward on the medicine wheel of life. I knew it was very important and worth the pain and effort to go back and heal past wounds. By continually making this effort, my medicine wheel will eventually become smooth. What is rightfully mine will come more easily to me, and all relationships will greatly improve. My purpose will come to the forefront.

I understood that if a situation from the past presented itself to me, I was to look at it and learn from it, so I could be finished with it and let it go. I must take action when necessary to release ineffective patterns in my life.

As suspected, situations arose that caused me to go back and take a look at my childhood. I decided to use what I had learned. I wanted to go back and repair my medicine wheel, completing the lines

and filling the holes.

I shared with Sally one day, "Although I have quit spending money to fill my hole, I am feeling very alone and worried about having no money."

After discussing my fears for a while, she suggested, "Susanne, trace that same feeling back as far as you can take it."

I did so, finally arriving at the first time I had that feeling. "I felt this alone when my sister was born. I wanted to be a part of what was taking place and couldn't."

"Why did you feel alone?"

She already knew the story, but I repeated it again. "Because of complications with the pregnancy, my mother was in the hospital for almost three months before my little sister was born. Then Mamma spent most of her time at the hospital after her baby was born, because my little sister arrived early and was in an incubator. I missed my mother terribly, because I could not see her. Children were restricted from hospitals in those days. I also could not see my little sister when she arrived.

Sometimes I was allowed to stay at home, but generally friends and relatives moved me from one home to another. I listened many times from the other room to discussions about the lack of money and how much my mother and my sister's hospital care was costing. I heard others as they visited about their gifts for my mother and my sister.

I began to want to share in this gift-giving. I wanted to do something for them, so they would know how much I cared. I was only five years old, but my parents had already taught me not to ask people for money. I did believe that it would be all right to sell something to neighbors, since my father was a salesman. I had watched him door knock and try to get customers. Yes, I must sell something to make the money I needed for gifts, but what could I sell? An idea came to me when I was at my own home one afternoon after kindergarten. I fixed myself a peanut butter sandwich for a snack. I saw a new loaf of bread sitting on the counter and decided I would make and sell sandwiches! I knew that I liked just a plain peanut butter sandwich, but some people preferred a peanut butter and jelly sandwich...so I made both. I then went door to door on our block, telling each neighbor answering the door that my mother was in the hospital and I wanted to buy a gift for her and my new sister. I explained to them that we were having a hard

time with money, because it was very expensive to be in the hospital and we had no insurance to help. I sold the sandwiches for ten cents each. They had their choice, either peanut butter or peanut butter and jelly.

I sold every sandwich I made, and I was very proud. I then walked to the drugstore on the corner from my house. There was only one house between our home and the drug store. A woman helped me, and I bought the gifts, a spoon for my sister and a bowl for my mother to use in feeding her.

After Daddy came home, he missed the bread and asked where it was. When I told him what I had done, he was furious with me for using the bread and for going to our neighbors' homes to ask for money. He told me I had to return the gifts and take all the money back to every neighbor who had bought a sandwich. I could see how mad he was, and I did as I was told.

I realize now his pride was hurt, but I was crushed by his actions. I had been so excited about what I had accomplished."

As I talked, I knew that this and similar instances had formed a problem for me in my medicine wheel. As an adult, I could not keep money. Even when I had a great deal of it, it easily slipped away from me. I had to change this energy.

Sally asked, "Susanne, have you ever been able to keep money since that time?"

I quickly responded, "No."

She continued, "O.K., Susanne, think about recreating this to heal the past."

"I'll think about it." In other words, I can do today as an adult what I could not do as a child. I can change the energy.

I felt sure the situations occurring in my life that were causing me to look at what I had done in my past were carefully orchestrated by the Grandfather of the North and others sitting in the North. The opportunities were presented for me to see myself more clearly.

As I slowly moved towards the East, I decided I could do some recreating in order to mend my medicine wheel. It was time to use this same incident to repair my internal wheel.

John suggested I sell sandwiches again. I thought that I could possibly keep money if I changed my energy by doing so. I had to build my courage, just as I had to when I was a child. I shared with Judy and Phil one evening what I was considering. I watched their faces as I

shared. I knew Judy would understand, because we were cousins and she remembered a great deal about my childhood. I wondered if Phil would think I was crazy. He already knew I was somewhat, but he surprised me and really understood what I was trying to do.

“Do it. You can’t buy the bread. Here, take our bread home and make the sandwiches. Let’s see how this works.” With that encouragement, I took the bread and left.

I then sat in the floor of the living room and made peanut butter sandwiches and even some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The following morning, I intended to visit my friends and sell as many sandwiches as possible to them before contacting virtual strangers.

I telephoned my friend, “Cat, I want to come see you this morning for a few minutes.”

“You can’t. I’m on my way out. Come meet me at our favorite restaurant.”

I hesitated and then agreed. “O.K. See you there in about fifteen minutes.”

When I arrived, she was sitting with a very professional-looking businessman. I was not expecting this situation. I could not turn and leave, because Cat had seen me approaching their table.

“Hi, you remember me telling you about Susanne. She’s the one that is a little more crazy than I and I love her.”

She then turned to me and said, “Hi! What do you need?”

“Well, you gave me the proper introduction. Now we will see what you think. You see, I am attempting to change my energy with money, so I am redoing something I wanted to do as a child. I wanted to buy my mother and sister a present when my sister was born and circumstances prevented it. I sold sandwiches for money. When my father found out, I had to return the money. No matter how much money I have had in my lifetime, it has always slipped through my fingers or I have given it away. I am changing this energy by healing this incident. I am doing today what I could not do as a child. Now would you like to buy a peanut butter sandwich for a dime?”

The gentleman smiled and responded, “I’ll take two. I think peanut butter will be wonderful for lunch.”

Cat said, “I’ll have one.”

A few customers who were eavesdropping asked to buy some. I had sold all of my sandwiches by the time I left the restaurant.

I then delightedly prepared to buy gifts for my mother and

sister. I was as excited as when my little sister was born. I picked out these gifts carefully, and this time I knew I was able to complete my desire to give.

I went to a florist and then drove to Pauls Valley where my mother was buried. I took a rose to my mother's grave and lit a candle for her. I returned to Norman to buy my sister a present. I picked out an "angel" lapel pin for her. There was even enough money left for a card to go with it.

She telephoned from her expensive home in Palm Springs when she received the gift and said she loved it. I could not wait to see how this would work. I did as an adult what I could not do as a child. Slowly the energy with money began to change. With less money than ever, there was always enough to pay every bill, and I knew it would get even better.

I then was able to trace other problems back to my childhood the same way. I needed to heal me to remove several more old patterns. I was not only learning about my internal medicine wheel, but I was fascinated watching others who came to the lodge learn about issues of their past and begin to repair their broken lines.

As I observed them and listened to their stories, I studied what part of the medicine wheel they might be in. Then I listened to what issues appeared in their lives to send them back to complete a broken line. Next I watched lives change as the experiences came. I watched them move to the next part of their medicine wheel.

Shortly after my friend, Nancy, entered the lodge, her life began changing rapidly. We were visiting at a ceremony in Noble when Nancy shared with me, "Once I began sweating, I began to recall incidents I had forgotten. I had feelings that reminded me of situations from the past. I remembered people I had hurt and people who had hurt me. I had dreams I didn't understand. It was like weeks of intensive therapy. I kept going into the lodge and praying even though I was feeling tremendous turmoil. I left the lodge feeling much better. I explained to others I felt like every time I went into the lodge an image of myself washed away and I then had to look at what was left."

She continued, "It didn't make much sense to me until I came to one of the sweats and heard an explanation of the medicine wheel. Then I understood. I was seeking spirituality, and the Grandfathers were helping me find it. I was changing my medicine wheel without being aware of it. Once I knew what was happening, it became easier

to face my past situations, deal with them, and then let them go. I continued to make changes in my life. My negativity dropped away and my personality changed. I became happier and more positive. My whole way of life changed.”

As we shared, I thought of many other people who had come to the sweat lodge sincerely seeking spirituality and of the drastic changes afterward that took place in their lives. Several persons sitting close by were listening to Nancy and me talk. A discussion ensued about people who had come to the lodge a few times and had soon left to go build their own lodges and to teach.

I finally shared my thoughts. “They could see the outer concept of the medicine wheel and believed they had it all. They seemed to try to walk straight across their medicine wheel instead of giving themselves time to gently move around it. Some people do one vision quest and feel as if they have learned enough to teach others about these ways. A few Sun Dance one time and then leave, never doing a vision quest. They build their own lodges and begin teaching.

I have become frustrated with some of these people. Perhaps this is a part of their lesson, a part of their walk. They must learn what they need to learn in their own way, just as I learn in my way. I struggle continually about honoring these very sacred ways. What is wrong for me to do and what is right for me to do? How can I not offend anyone?

I know that among the Native Americans, there is much concern about those that learn only the surface about these ways and then charge others money for the teachings. However, there are some Native Americans who have the understanding that each one of us develops in his own way. It is a process for each of us. This latter answer I have heard some Native Americans give reminds me of the fourth virtue of the medicine wheel, generosity, where one freely gives and receives with unconditional love.

As the discussions continued about the virtues, we all laughed when I said, “Well, once someone steps on this road, it often feels as if things are falling apart when, in fact, everything is falling together. As I keep letting go, I must remember that after wisdom comes endurance. Then generosity follows, thank goodness. I can focus on the fact that after the reorganization of my life is complete and after I make it around the medicine wheel, I will have a much healthier, happier life.”

We laughed, because many of us could relate to what I had said. More seriously, I continued, “The key is to keep my focus on me

and stay balanced as I move around my medicine wheel and remember that I have help. I am not doing this alone. If I do not feel a connection at some time, it is time to search for a way of connecting again and open to it. For me, this may be a sign to go find a traditional sweat lodge and seek this connection.”

I looked around at the people on this land who stayed and continued to learn. John was visiting with a few others by the fire. I caught a sentence or two that he said and knew he was sharing the story about our relationship and the doves.

SIGNS OF A RELATIONSHIP

I remembered what happened the lazy Saturday afternoon when John and I were sitting in my apartment and we received that answer. Our discovery made us wonder how much in our life is predestined and does not happen just by chance!

John began by sharing, "About seventeen years before I met you, I attended a faith healing service with your father at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa. We were standing around outside visiting with others after the service. A white dove came from nowhere, flew to the ground, and landed at my feet. It wasn't a pigeon. It was a dove, and its' feathers indicated it to be in poor health. In my pocket, I had some vitamin supplements which I fed to the dove. It was odd that the dove did not seem frightened at all and ate them out of my hand. The group of people standing around were amazed. One of the men was curious, so he actually wrote Oral Roberts and asked if doves were kept around there for atmosphere. Oral Roberts mailed an answer back to the older gentleman who, after reading it, gave the letter to me. I still have it. It says that doves are not kept around the premises and, if a dove appeared and ate from a young man's hand, it was some kind of sign for that young man about his life."

I thought back to what was happening in my life at the time he fed the dove. Surprised at what I discovered, I shared my memories with him. "John, that was about the time that Don went into the hospital the first time. It was the beginning of trouble that would last for years to come."

He contemplated this and continued, "Remember, Susanne, I was with you when a second dove came to me. It was when you took me to Hawaii for a Shaklee convention soon after we began seeing each other. As I walked on the beach by myself one day, that dove landed nearby. I picked the dove up and it sat on my hand and allowed me to pet it. Its' bill was injured or deformed."

"I remember quite well."

John continued. "So...a dove came to me the first time when I was with your Dad and the second time when I was with you."

I, too, had been given a wonderful experience with two doves and began to share. "John, two white doves came to the window of my home daily for about two months in 1982. Then I moved several blocks away, and they followed me. They appeared at the back windows of my new home for two more months."

"Susanne, that is odd, because that was about the time I began to have a great deal of trouble in my marriage."

Our visit continued about how two people might heal each other and be brought together for that purpose. I was holding both hands out, palms up, indicating each was holding a dove within the palm, when it became quite clear to us.

John spoke. "With the dove representing the Holy Spirit, the two doves may represent a sign of two people healing each other. Did we receive signs of this relationship that we would not discover until years later? Do you suppose our meeting was planned for seventeen years before we actually met each other?"

I simply sat there staring at my hands and responded, "Well, we both know we have been brought together for our individual healings. For how long we will be together, neither of us can know."

Yet it was clear to each of us, at that moment, that we were together for a definite purpose. Was that purpose simply for our own healing or was the purpose much greater?

To this point, it had been a relationship that helped both of us grow and open doors. We understood how nontraditional it had all been. How long it lasted did not really matter. As long as we both continued to grow through the relationship and it remained energy producing, we both agreed to stay in it. It might be for just for that day, or it might be for life.

Through John, I discovered that when I become angry with someone else, it is a reflection of me and my needs. It is not about the other person. It has to do with my past and what must be healed in me. Whenever a disagreement occurs, I attempt to bring my focus back to my reaction rather than focus on John.

John acts as a catalyst for a self-learning experience. If there comes a time when there is more pain within the relationship than satisfaction, I feel I will be able to let go. However, I no longer make fast decisions. I pray, I write, I listen, and I look within for my answers.

TRUTHS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

The answers kept coming. I felt I was finally receiving my answers and gaining new Inner truths. I had learned that when we come into this world, we bring with us our lessons and our truths. We are then subjected to our parents', our peers', the media's, the minister's, and the teacher's beliefs and truths. We forget that each of us is a unique individual sent to this earth with a unique purpose.

For every problem we have, we also have been given the answer. There are many techniques to help us find these answers. We can accelerate the process, but the answer always lies within. The answers are brought to this earth with us. Thus, it is imperative to learn and to understand our individual truths.

Everything is sacred. Every second of life is sacred and leads us to the truth that is ours. My truth is not anyone else's truth. My truth is not my parent's, or my children's, or my family's, or the preacher's truth. I somehow must have always known this deep within, because when I took my children to Church I encouraged them to listen to the minister and to study their lessons. As we drove home, I continually suggested they read the Bible themselves and find out all they could to see if they agreed or disagreed with the Sunday School teacher or the minister. I also suggested they listen to their hearts and find their answers as they did this. Several times I walked into their bedrooms to find them reading the Bible, even as teenagers.

No one ever said that to me. Instead I somehow learned to feel guilty if I thought for myself. It was a long time before I became brave enough to think and listen to that inner voice within me. As I saw life with new eyes, I felt that I had misread the Bible. I had accepted others' interpretations of scripture for my life even when I questioned it.

As I took off my blinders, I saw scriptures in a new way. I no longer skipped over verses I was told not to question in that beautiful and great book. I read it with new eyes, seeing and understanding the

Bible with my heart.

By allowing myself to step over boundaries to find truth, I have been provided with new truth. I have become much less judgmental, more understanding, and more accepting of life and life's situations. I have gained new compassion and try not to control other people and their lives.

We all have read about the great men and women of the Bible finding answers through their dreams, while we many times ignore what we receive through our own dreams. I have found that I can find many truths for myself if I rise early and jot down a note and write down a dream. I learned I had to do it before morning pressures took over my life. When I take the time to do this, I gain many insights. I also heal through dreams.

Individualized symbols show up in dreams. By writing down the dreams, the symbols' meanings are better understood. Words that I never use occasionally appear in my dreams. I sometimes have to go to the dictionary to find the meaning.

Recently, I had a series of dreams that had to do with changing clothes. In my dream, I could not afford to buy new clothes. I would choose what I wanted, but I was never able to take the articles of clothing out of the store. Once a police officer even stopped me at the door. My dreams are changing now. Not only am I able to buy the clothes, but I am also walking out of the store with them. Something is changing inside me, and this will soon move from the inside to the outside world.

I continually attempt to remain open to new truths. When we open, we do receive. Since I opened to the purification ceremonies, many more truths and answers about my life have come to me. I met a successful architect who told me he receives all of his designs in the sweat lodge.

When I receive a truth that I am ninety per cent certain about, I simply ask for confirmation to rid myself of the ten per cent doubt. The confirmation always comes when a truth is right for me. For instance, before falling asleep one night I asked for confirmation about what I was doing and I asked to be shown the right path. In a dream that night, a light began in a distance. As it drew closer and larger, there was a pipe in the center of the light. This dream provided the confirmation for me to continue going forth.

As we begin to discover our own inner truths, we also begin to find our true selves. Parents, spouses, family, and friends may not

understand. To them, we may seem totally illogical. They do not understand our need for change and, more likely, are afraid they might lose us if we do change. They may fear that if we are right in our new truths, it means they are wrong. Our self-discovery process may help them gain the courage to make a change they have resisted.

I realize my truth may not be truth for others, but I must stay steadfast in my search knowing there is so much joy on the other side of each discovery. As I keep stepping over boundaries, finding new truths, and changing old beliefs for new and better ones, I become lighter and happier.

Looking back over my journey, I see others differently now. I look at them with more compassion and understanding, knowing that all of life is progression and they are where they should be, just as I am where I should be.

My answers about time and goals have changed. We live in a time-oriented society. Our lives rotate around the clock. It seems there is never enough time to do all we want and yet in reality we have all the time we need. We set goals. We push and push, attempting to reach our goals within a specific amount of time. What we do not realize is that if we persevere, our goals will be reached, but they will only happen when we have made ourselves ready to accept them.

Native Americans instinctively know about time. They lived for centuries without clocks. They learned from nature. They knew there was a season for all things and moved accordingly. They understood the flow of energy and cycles. They allowed life to unfold.

Yes, it is important for us to get to work on time and meet appointments. However, by learning to allow life to flow in a more natural way, stress is reduced. By setting ego aside and allowing life to unfold naturally, the doors will open. Answers will enter to show us how to achieve what it is we are to do.

I know I cannot just sit and expect things to happen. Yet, it is important to learn to understand and know instinctively when it is time to be quiet and when it is time to make a move forward.

I practice letting go of my controlled use of time. When I go to a purification ceremony or to a vision quest weekend, I leave my watch at home. I attempt to allow everything to unfold naturally. This is one of the unexpected gifts of this spiritual path.

Suppose a sweat is scheduled at 7:00. If the person who is to start the fire arrives late, or the wood is wet and burns slowly, the sweat

does not begin on time. If I plan my schedule and expect to begin at exactly 7:00 and leave afterwards at a certain time, I can become very upset over delays and carry this frustration into the lodge.

When this release of time takes place, it carries over into everyday life. Frustration decreases even as days do not go as expected at work. The work situation is simplified. Family events and other group events go much easier.

Once on a camping trip to the mountains, the only lantern we brought didn't work. In the past, there would have been frustration. Instead of becoming upset, we learned to plan our day around the sun. It felt great. We became a part of nature's plan. We flowed with it rather than stay frustrated and angry the whole time about not having a lantern at night.

In the past, I taught goal setting seminars and forced myself to set goals to have accomplished by specific dates. I came to realize how self-limiting I had been. When I personally set goals today, I now take time limits off. I simply take steps toward the goal, allowing everything to take place in God's time, not mine. I meet some goals much more rapidly than in the past and some take me longer. I simply know I am getting there as I listen closely for guidance about where I am going and what I am to do. Now when I teach a goal-setting seminar, I help others learn how to achieve goals in a healthier way by showing them how to internally and externally prepare to achieve it. With limits removed, every second becomes precious. Every second of life is sacred and every life has seasons of change.

As seasons came and went, they brought change to my life. I began to see parallels that happened as I compared events in my life to the seasonal cycles of the year.

Seasons show us there is a time to plant and a time for being patient as we prepare to grow. Then there is a time of growth and a time when we are recognized for what we have become. Finally, there is a time for blooming and a time to reap what we have sown.

I began to watch nature more than ever! I watched the birds and animals play in the rain. I noticed how they adapt to the cold weather. I tried to copy them by adapting as easily to what happens in my life. I paid attention to what takes place when the leaves fall. As I looked back at my life, I realized many closings had taken place as the leaves fell from the trees, including the one with my father this year. It felt wintry cold outside as the trees grew bare. I felt that same wintry

cold within as I placed him in the mental health facility I never dreamed he would have to enter. I watched for the beauty that also comes with the winter's cold. I remembered the beauty of the snow falling and covering everything, making a winter wonderland.

I also remembered new growth in the cold. In the middle of a very cold winter, John and I went for a walk in the country. During the walk, I noticed new green growth extending out about two inches from where the cedar tree branch stopped growing the previous year. It was January! This new growth was not noticeable unless I looked closely. The New Year truly does bring with it new life.

With the Spring comes storms, thunder, lightning, and rain. It cleanses the earth and prepares her for the new birth that is soon to take place. Life is forever changing, preparing us for dormant times, times of new birth, rapid growth and then a time to shine. By watching events all year, I could see the cycle of my life harmonizing with the seasons. It was shown to me through the Persian Gulf war coming to an end, through Daddy moving from a mental health facility to a nursing home, with my career and my spiritual life.

As I prepared for work one morning, I looked in the mirror and listened as more answers flowed into me through that familiar voice of a Grandfather. "What takes place within you is also created outside you. To change patterns and situations or to learn lessons, one must change only self. When self is changed, the energy changes."

The voice continued, "What happens here on earth is happening in Heaven. What happens in Heaven then happens on earth."

I understood. Everything we need is provided once we begin to walk our paths. By following our spiritual paths, we will understand what we are to do while here on this earth and why events are taking place as they are. In other words, we can tap in and receive answers while here. No matter how complacent we may have been in the past, we can all change patterns in this life.

I stayed on my path through the year and answers became more clear as I truly internalized that there is no separation. I finally understood, felt it, and accepted it. This is what I have learned. There are four parts to each person: body, mind, heart, and soul. The energy of the inner soul is equal to and is the same energy found in a star. Our soul drops down from the Milky Way and moves around the earth clockwise. It enters only a short while before birth. First there is the body, then the mind, then the heart, and finally the soul.

As we leave this earth, we have both an ending and a beginning, a death and a rebirth. Life continues on for our spirit when we leave our body here. We are greeted by at least two spiritual helpers who appear to help us cross over to the other side. Generally, these helpers are people we knew and loved in our lifetime on earth. One guide takes the new spirit to the center of the Milky Way and the other helps that spirit move further across. The first guide is represented by the color red, while the second guide is represented by the color white. This is a joyful time. Our spirit is taken to the four directions and then returns to the stars.

Wakan Tanka, or God, is pure love, the highest love one can know. God does not judge us. We are our own judges. When we can forgive ourselves and then others, we can understand more fully God's love.

Our lives have been a series of experiences to assist us in this learning. If we do not learn our lessons this time around, we will most likely have to return to those lessons again when we choose to come back or are returned to this earth.

We come here with a purpose. We receive assignments. Each person can have guardian angels or spirit helpers if they want them. All that is necessary is to ask for the help. They are ready and eager to work with us if we will allow them to do so. By asking, they know the help is desired. It is important to ask for the highest help available. All the highest ones come from the same place. They are there to assist. In assisting us, they have an opportunity to also advance.

There truly is no separation when we allow the Heavens to open to us. When a friend leaves, they are only a phone call away. When one crosses over, they have simply crossed over. They are in a much better space than we are here on this earth. Now they understand why we are doing what we are doing. They can sometimes do much more from the other side to help us than they could have done while they were here with us. We live in parallel universes.

During funerals, I may shed a few tears of self-pity for the loss I feel. However, I feel delight and am even ecstatic for the one who is crossing to the other side. The Bible tells us to rejoice when someone returns to Heaven. It is very painful to lose a spouse, a child, or a friend. Yet we can heal. We can open to the fact that we have their presence in a new way if we become willing to open to the invisible. The only problem is our limiting beliefs and thinking which prevents

this from taking place.

Since my first vision quest, work on myself has accelerated. Lessons and understandings are more clear. Doors open inward so that I have the opportunity to look more closely at myself. Dreams came, showing me there were still two doors for me to move inward through.

The earth is changing. The heavens are changing. Every change will cause change in us, bringing with it increased stress. Many will resist these changes in their lives and will choose not to survive. Those who are ready to accept the changes will have a great deal of work to do helping others. It is my desire to be of service to others, helping them through their changes.

All the major religions of the world teach love, forgiveness, and tolerance, yet we still focus on separation. As this message is put forth by the respective prophets, war is waged or ugly statements are made about others all in the name of God.

How easily we see this with different governments' destructive fighting, but fail to see it in ourselves. Our forefathers came to this land to escape religious persecution. They fought for the right to worship their God as they chose. They were welcomed by Native Americans, but in return, took their land and took away their way of life. These formerly religiously oppressed people proceeded to outlaw the Native American beliefs and tried to force their own religion on them.

I am truly thankful that so many Native Americans were able to hold onto their beliefs, their traditions, and this way. These ways help each one who chooses to participate in a ceremony to gain a respect for the Native Americans and this earth. Many Native Americans are concerned that if their ways are shared, the traditions will be completely lost. I understand this concern. In many ways, their traditional lives are all they have left.

Every time this subject is brought to my attention, I remember a visit that I had with Gary's father, Spencer, one time in South Dakota. We were sitting out in his front yard on a bench. We sat enjoying the cool breeze. The land around his home seemed so vast. As we sat there looking out over the land, he said, "Susanne, I didn't use to like the whites. I liked other races, but not the whites. This anger was removed from me through a prayer over there."

He motioned to a hill close by and continued, "I went over there and prayed for several days. At that time, I gained an understanding

that these ways are to be shared with all four colors and this will save what we cherish most for future generations. You pray with a pipe. These other people here from Oklahoma also pray with the pipe. Many people here on this reservation do not do so. Many of them have laid down our traditional ways.”

“Spencer, do you believe this sharing might save the world?”

Very quietly, Spencer replied, “Yes, I do, Susanne.”

I listened intently as he talked. “I believe that by sharing these sacred ways, it will bring back to our people what has been lost. Through the opening of these ways to others, the pride of our people can be returned. Our power can return. This power is something that many know nothing about. It is not the power most people understand. It is a power that comes from balance and peace.”

Then Spencer looked over the family land and said, “See this land, Susanne? Someday it would be good to have a program here for our youth. They need help. They need skills to live. They need help with their self-esteem.”

Spencer’s stern look softened as he went on sharing from his heart. “Now is the time for each of us to change, a time to remove prejudice, a time to accept one another. It is time to heal and learn more about each other. It is time to stop seeing color and to see into each other’s Spirit. It is time for all of us to be more open and learn. We must if we are to survive what is about to occur.”

I continued to ask questions and listen. “Spencer, what is coming?”

“Many changes are coming. Preparation must take place. A firm foundation will be necessary to move through the changes in a good way.”

I remembered my second vision quest. To be lasting and firm, a foundation must be balanced so it will not crumble and fall. I am learning how to stand on my own foundation that is currently being reconstructed, learning how to be my own support with God. Many others are doing the same. It is time to learn spiritual love, a time to see individuals as individuals. Like the Tree of Life, it is time for growth, a time to allow roots to take hold and grow deep as our branches reach high. We can then support others in a healthy way.

It is important to move towards “health and help” in the four ways we are... body, mind, heart, and spirit...completing the foundation for our own circle of life. This requires change within ourselves.

There is a core or real self within each individual, each culture, each business, and each government, and each has its foundation. Companies who no longer treat their employees with respect and honor will see their foundations crumble. Governments who do not truly care for all the people will also see their foundations crumble.

Those willing to take the painful steps needed to become more balanced will begin to create a functional environment around them. They move through changes, developing “good energy,” releasing it to others with whom they come into contact. This traditional way and the twelve-step programs are two ways to generate the energy to heal and help foundations gain strength.

When a community of people makes the choice to go back to the core and heal, they can then work together for a higher purpose. The same applies to a business or a government. For those willing to change, the future will not be so difficult.

Inner security enters as the foundation becomes strong and balanced. It is a security that fills, a security that supplies the ability for one to let go and allow God to work. It provides the ability to detach from materialistic views, to commit, and to keep commitments. Security allows us to surrender and to have love for self as well as others.

My foundation was gaining much strength. These new thoughts, truths, and understandings bring to me gifts that delight beyond words. New seeds are growing as the debris crumbles away.

FREELY GIVING AND RECEIVING

Every day teaches me about the energy of words and how important it is to watch what we say, especially when we pray. Every word written and every word said is heard by those spirits surrounding and helping us. They are also heard by God. Negative words produce negative energy and it comes back to us, while positive words produce positive energy that also returns to us.

I observe “how” words are heard, learning that every time I pray for patience, I receive a huge lesson to help me gain a greater amount of patience. I listened to other people pray in the lodge for patience. They also received lessons to teach them how to have more patience. I quit praying for patience. Next I noted that when I prayed for strength in a situation, I received a great opportunity to see how strong I could be physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. I tired of these lessons, too.

I watched as prayers by others were heard and answered. One man prayed both in the lodge and on his vision quest for a specific woman to become a part of his life. Gary, being the intercessor for his vision quest, gently suggested, “It might be better to not be so specific when each of us prays.”

This man seemed unable to hear the suggestion. He continued praying for this one specific woman, by name, to come join him in his life. He returned and did another quest. He again prayed the same prayer. It would be wonderful if she would simply share his life. After the second vision quest, she left her career, moved in with him, and was with him every day. A short while after her return, he came to do a third quest. This time, we heard him pray for more space in his life. He said he needed more alone time. She was sitting at his side. Within a year, they separated.

As we followed another man to his vision quest space, we stopped to pray four times. His last prayer was, “Please allow me to release my anger.”

He did just that. As we put the prayer ties around him, situations occurred which made him furious. He began lashing out at the people who were putting him up, threatening some of them with bodily harm. He released his anger on his supporters in all directions. We immediately left and returned to the lodge to pray for him, sending him as much serenity and peace as possible at that moment. We knew it might be difficult for him to remain in his prayer ties with this much anger. Amazingly, he completed his commitment. Three days later, he came back to the lodge and told us that he almost left, but could not. He then shared that it took him until the following day to become centered enough to listen for answers. He returned with no anger and a great amount of love for all.

Prayers are answered. Understanding now how important it is to be careful, I attempt to say a prayer exactly as I mean it. Words have great power. Every word is important.

I learn about other energy exchanges as I continue to support and give of myself. Giving opens a space for new to enter. I learned about the give away with my first vision quest. It is a fundamental part of Native American tradition that follows ceremony.

When a person completes a vision quest or receives a healing through the pipe in a requested ceremony, there is a give away. When a four-year commitment to Sun Dance is completed, there is a great give away.

The give away may be a feast to feed all who have supported at the ceremony, or it may be actual gifts for those supporting a healing, a vision quest or Sun Dance. It might include both, feast and gifts.

Most people give away what they do not want or need. It seems that they feel secure enough to give to others only after their needs and desires are satisfied.

With Native Americans, the give aways are unique. They do the opposite. They give their best first and are happy to do so. They let go of the best they have within their possession, even though they may have almost nothing materially. I watch them give away so much. Entire families, including parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins, work together to make gifts for a family member who agrees to sacrifice by going on the hill or to Sun Dance for the people.

Gary was an example for us. He had so little in material wealth. The few material possessions of quality that he did gain passed quickly through his hands to someone else. Someone asked him why he gave

away the flute he loved. He responded, "When I begin to become attached to something, it is time to give it away."

Can you imagine? What if I had no home, no car, no phone. What if all I had was one set of clothes and a bracelet I cherished. Would I be able to give the bracelet away? What if someone gave me a new flute I coveted, but could not afford to buy? Would I have the courage to let it go?

Native Americans understand the exchange of energy that takes place when they let go and seem to have no problem giving easily. Those who live in the traditional way give freely and seem to know the gifts will come back to them in a different way or the same way at the right time.

I have stood on the Rosebud Reservation soil and watched a blanket pass through several families as a gift. I have also watched this with the Ponca tribe here in Oklahoma. I have seen the same in other tribal ceremonies.

The gift giver does not become offended if the gift is passed on to another person. Each one knows that the gift will stop where it is needed the most. Perhaps the gift gains energy as it moves through several hands.

I am learning to give in many ways. I had very little jewelry, but what I did have was of good quality from my past when there seemed to be an abundance of money in my life. Some of it was quite beautiful. I rarely wore it and even sometimes hid it through fear that someone might take it. I began to think about giving it away, even though I needed money and could use the cash from selling it. Soon after these thoughts began to enter my mind, two good friends were victims of robberies. Their jewelry was taken. Then the robbers returned to both homes to take even more.

I had a gnawing feeling that this information came to me for a reason. Perhaps if I did not rid myself of the jewelry from my past, I would be robbed and I might lose more than just jewelry. I decided to follow through with an idea. I gave the first piece of jewelry to a friend who was with me at the time I made the decision to let go of these possessions.

Could I let go easily of this jewelry to which I was attached? I could try. The next few days I carefully picked out a piece of jewelry in the morning. I gave it to the next person to pass through my doorway. Of course, with my business in my home, I had no idea who would be

entering or how well I might know them.

Shortly after I let go of all my old jewelry, I began receiving gifts...new earrings, necklaces, and even bracelets. Today I have plenty of jewelry. Most of it is not real, but it is what I love to wear. Once my daughter asked me if there was a fire what would I grab. I listed my jewelry among the first three items.

Dawn sounded surprised as she responded with, "But, Mom, it's not real."

"I know, but it is colorful and I never had colorful jewelry that I actually enjoyed wearing."

I have taught in my seminars that when a person feels congested and cannot get over it, it might be time to look in the garage or in the closet and see what he is holding onto! If one will release, discard or give away what has not been worn or used in the previous two years, new and better replacements will begin to appear. The congestion then clears. The key is to have no fear while letting go of something and to understand that everything we have belongs to God anyway. We own no land, no home, nothing. God does.

As I walked this road and learned more about the energy of "giving," I also learned more about "receiving." At first this was difficult. It is easier for me to give than to receive. This message came to me from every direction. "Until you can receive, you cannot truly give. It is as important to receive in a good way as it is to give in a good way."

People gave their time and energy to me when they supported me in ceremony. Their example helped me. I received while I did my vision quest. Then I had the opportunity to give to those who supported.

I learned it does not matter how large or small the gift, it is the gesture that is truly recognized and appreciated. When my funds were extremely low, I combined what little I could with others to provide a feast. Everyone ate heartily and enjoyed receiving this "give away." At other times, I gave both gifts and a feast. Each gift was given and received with the same excitement. As each item to which I feel attached is released with love into the universe, I learn more about the flow of energy.

As I let go with joy a great gift came, a Lakota name. In the Bible, as a person changed, that person sometimes received a new name or a new spelling for their name. Sarai was changed to Sarah. Abram was changed to Abraham. Simon was changed to Peter.

On this spiritual path, a person can ask a medicine man for a

sacred name. The Grandfathers then work through the medicine person. Sometimes, a person without asking receives a name during a ceremony. When the Grandfathers name you, it tells you something about your life. This name can be used to help you focus, for it is a spirit name. As this name becomes internalized, you will change and understand what it means personally for you and your individual growth.

Through a ceremony, I was given the name “Zinctkala Zee Wi” which means “Yellow Bird Woman” in English. This felt right, because of the yellow within the phoenix feather that came to me in my dream. I was later told, “One of the things your name represents is the Meadow Lark.”

I have learned the Meadow Lark speaks to the Lakota people and the Lakota people hear and understand. The Meadow Lark also speaks to the Arapaho people and they understand. The Meadow Lark is said to be present at every vision quest. It sits in the South at the Sun Dance.

In the Lakota creation story, a bird came to the shell in the South. It was the Meadow Lark. This beautiful bird is said to sing most in the morning for it is most cheerful at that time of the day. It has high intuition. The Meadow Lark is also close to the Sun, just as the Phoenix is said to be in its mythical story. Along with the Meadow Lark, Iktome, the spider who can become yellow, sits in the South, bringing wisdom and understanding of what is illusion in our lives.

Yellow, a part of my sacred name, is representative of that which comes from the East, the birth of a new way of life, opening of doors, illumination. I have spoken to thousands, hopefully helping others on the subject of “change.” As time passes, I am understanding more about my sacred name and how it relates to my purpose on this earth.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE SEEN AND UNSEEN

What is my purpose? As my name gives me insight and as I walk forward on my medicine wheel, how am I to understand my relationship to all that is seen and unseen in life?

I know that my relationship to and understanding of the Grandfathers, Grandmothers, Wakan Tanka, and the sacred spirits is increasing with every step of this path. As I walk in this way, I continually learn. I receive more wisdom about the Bible, other religions, universal spiritual teachings, and about my life.

With each day, I become increasingly aware that we are never alone. Some people told me as a child that I had a guardian angel. I heard others say, "There is nothing really like that."

There are many recorded incidents showing us that when there is a time of human crisis, seen and unseen help comes. This help comes even to those who do not believe in something they cannot physically touch. These spirits are very active and gift us much. Often we are totally unaware and call it coincidence.

The Native American path shows us how each spirit has its own uniqueness and special way of relating. Many of the Spirits are presented in some form of nature. I have learned the spirits will show themselves to each of us when we are open to hearing, seeing, and learning from them. They appear in a form that we each will uniquely understand. They are simply waiting on us to decide whether we want to accept their help or not.

The animal spirits bring many messages to us once we become attuned. I began to listen carefully as information came about the animal spirits and what they represent. By no means do I consider myself to be an authority. I only know how much I have enjoyed the visits of these spirits and the teaching each has given me along this path.

The little light beings that kept me company on my first vision quest are now regular friends. I have only seen them on land where I

have participated in sweats and vision quests. They appear all over the land we use in Noble, Oklahoma. They have been seen on land in Arcadia and Tuttle and even at the lodge in Carl and Nancy's back yard in Oklahoma City.

They bring warmth and child's delight to me every time I see them. One night at Noble when I had not seen them for a while, several of us commented that we had missed seeing them. I walked over to a place on the land where they appeared most often and said aloud, "Deva Kingdom people, we miss you. It would be so wonderful if you would come to visit and show yourselves to us. We would love to visit with you."

Some people overheard me and began to laugh as they said to one another, "Susanne is out there talking to the Deva Kingdom."

I overheard them and laughed at what I was doing as I walked back to the lodge and entered it to sweat. When we came out of the lodge, the night was very dark. We walked only a few feet and the Deva were there for all of us to see. They heard and they came, forming a perfect medicine wheel with a rose in the South. Everyone stood astonished. No one was laughing then. We left the lodge to change from our sweat clothes. As we topped the hill above the lodge where we park our cars, these little light beings covered the entire area. We all stood at the top of the hill feeling blessed with this experience. These are not lightning bugs. They do not fly, and if you try to touch one of these beings, there is nothing there. You will only feel the ground.

One evening, they appeared inside the lodge at Carl and Nancy's while we were sweating. Elizabeth, Nancy, and I were excited as we watched them enter. The men did not seem to notice. I knew they were there to bring a message, but what would it be? At first there was one brilliant light sitting in front of Gary. It slowly moved over to sit in front of me. It then separated into two smaller lights, then became one again. It separated again into two lights. One light began to move away from the other. I followed its path. It was moving in the direction of John. It came back to shine beside the other light and then its light went off. The remaining one moved to my fingertip and sat there for a long time. I tried to understand what they were showing me. Things were fine between John and me. However, I now know it was a warning. Only a few weeks after that we began to have some problems that took months to work through. I am certain they were showing how bright two lights can be when they combine and how much less energy there

is when one extinguishes itself.

I began to better understand other spirit helpers. There is the elk who brings healing and love, the black tail deer who has its strong medicine, the owl who teaches us how to see in the dark and is called the night messenger, the ant who demonstrates perseverance, and the spider, Iktome, who helps strip our illusions. I realize now that all animals can teach. When doing a vision quest, I have learned how important it is to watch all animals that present themselves, for they each bring a special gift with them. They are delivering a message, an answer...the butterfly, the blue jay, the red bird, the crow, the owl, the grasshopper, the mosquito, the ant.

I learned from the armadillo who visited me on my second vision quest. During the following year, I began to acquire the ability to develop a tough shell of protection. I previously had difficulties with setting boundaries and drawing limits. As I walked through my lessons, I remembered the armadillo. I set new, healthy boundaries that, in turn, increased my self-esteem. I continue to work on this.

The armadillo or one of its friends visited again about six months following my quest. This time I was not on a vision quest, but I took note of its visit. One evening at John's home, we thought we heard something knocking at the back door. We listened. There was a second knock at the back door. John went to the door. "Susanne, it's an armadillo!"

This quickly reminded me of all I had learned from the armadillo. It seemed a little unusual to have an armadillo knock at the back door. Was this a message for John to prepare to protect himself, or was it a reminder for me?

As a result of vision quests, I pay much more attention on a daily basis to the lessons animals and birds deliver to each of us. I watch what crosses in front of my path and which direction the messenger is going. I am learning a great deal from these beautiful beings as I become more aware and listen.

I understand some about the spider, Iktome and how Iktome helps people to heal. I listened to some talk around the lodge about stories on the spider, Iktome, and the fear these stories induced. When fear sets in, we forget that everything is holy and sacred. Finally someone asked what I felt about Iktome.

I responded, "As I understand it, Iktome works in two ways. The good Iktomes help people who get caught in their own web. Iktome

pulls them out and gives them the understanding about their medicine wheel or their web of life.

The negative Iktomes play on our egos to trick us and keep us caught in our own webs as we deceive ourselves. As I remember all I can about a spider web, it helps me to understand this even more. There is a sticky material on the fine strands going around the inside of the web. That sticky material can hold us in our own web of illusion.

The good Iktomes take us gently by the hand and assist us in seeing situations differently. They give us the ability to move to the outside silky strand of the web to a position where we might view and study the situation we have been caught in which is part of the web.

Iktome helps us learn how to walk around the edge of our own web and give us the ability to walk back and forth to our center, staying on our own silky strands. It is important to be able to get to that center hole within our web in a good way. Iktome knows we can learn how to do this when we finally choose to listen and learn.

I understand the brown and red Iktomes are positive and help us see clearly, and the black Iktomes are the ones who pull us into our web of desire and illusion. Iktome can turn himself into any form, even a person, to deliver a message. The positive Iktome and the negative Iktome both help in life by assisting us in learning how to not deceive ourselves and become caught in our web. They also help us remove the part of our ego that puffs up when we begin to think that we are responsible for good things when it is really not us doing it.

As we understand more about both parts of Iktome, we know what kind of an Iktome appears in our lives. A sign of a negative Iktome might be someone who places on me more and more limitations or it might be someone who deceives me.

Iktome Zeeche, Iktome Who Paints Himself Yellow, fills us falsely and fools us. He makes himself yellow. When he appears, he makes us fool ourselves into believing, and this believing causes the change. The new belief in ourselves may bring a healing or give us the courage to make a needed change in life. This can be very good. Iktome Shaeche, 'Iktome That Is Red,' is good to share with us and helps us to see the situation as it really is. He helps us to move to the outside of the web.

In the Lakota creation story, Iktome was stirring up trouble, so Skan casts him to earth forever. This is the Iktome that comes and allows us to deceive ourselves, the one who tricks us. That's not

necessarily a bad thing. We all have lessons, so Iktome draws us into our lessons and forces us to finally ask for assistance and to begin to go toward health. When we do this, we see our lives differently. In the Christian way, we have Lucifer who was cast to the earth and was forced to roam. Before his fall, Lucifer was a beautiful angel. Before Iktome was cast to earth, Iktome was wisdom.

Iktome destroys limitations, so we might move to a new way of life. When Iktome is at work in our lives, it helps us gain the creative potential we need in order to take action. This assistance comes when Iktome helps us move to the center of the circle where the strings are smooth. He then helps us walk in balance, and return to the outside of the web. I have seen Iktome come into many ceremonies to help people.”

After the discussion ended, a friend walked up and handed me a stone. It felt good. Other healing spirits come in stones. As I walk this path, my relationship with stones also grows. The heart rocks, my buffalo rock, the healing stones.

The stone people, the Inyan Wasicus, have also come to help. They come to us inside and outside the lodge. These stone spirits bring light with them for some to see. As with all spirits, they come to help when requested and they also choose other times to come and heal us.

I know several young people who have had visits from them. They initially felt frightened. One late night, John’s twelve-year-old daughter, Savannah, telephoned me almost panicked.

“Susanne, lights are all over my room.”

I had been asleep. As I woke myself, I thought, “Her bedroom is upstairs and her only window is a very small attic window. Yet her room is full of light.”

“Savannah, are these reflections from something?”

“No, Susanne. It’s not possible. Everything is dark.”

“O.K., Savannah, do not worry. I believe you are having a visit from the stone people, the Inyan Wasicus. They come as lights. They are wanting you to know that you are not alone and that you are protected and loved.”

“Are you sure?”

“I feel quite certain that is it, because I know nothing else it can be, do you?”

“No. How do you know it is the little stone people?”

“Because they appeared to me as a light and I have heard this same story of how they appeared as lights from other young people. They can also come in dreams, Savannah.”

Tell me about your experiences with the stone people.”

“O.K., if we can both go to sleep afterwards.”

“I promise, Susanne.”

“The stone people came into my home one evening as I was walking towards this path. It happened several years after my prayer of February, 1986. I was sitting in my living room visiting with a friend when a blue light, similar to a beacon light, moved across my living room. I saw it, but did not say anything.

My friend, Mary, noticed and said, ‘Did you just see something?’

I smiled and nodded. When I acknowledged that I had, she asked, ‘Do you always have lights enter you living room to entertain guests?’

‘No, and I do not know what caused it, do you?’

‘No, but I did see it. It came from here and traveled to there.’

We both concurred. Today I do know. I understand that the stone people came to visit me as a sign.

These spirits have also come to visit other young people I know as lights and in dreams where they appeared as little people. They came to me in the form of little people to give me a healing. I shall always remember it.

They brought their gift to me the Valentine’s day following my second vision quest. Remember when I flew to Palm Springs for my sister’s wedding?”

“Yes, what happened, Susanne?”

“In the early morning hours of February 14th, I was in a house visiting with my cousin, Judy, when I heard noise outside the front door. Before opening the door, I peaked out the window and saw little people standing there. As I opened the door, they pulled me outside. The next thing I knew I was on the ground looking up at these little people who were short and stocky. They wore caps on their heads. Some of them, whom I felt were female, had old fashioned plaid scarves with fringe around the edge tied under their broad chins. Their eyes twinkled as they looked down at me. One was pressing really hard against my shoulder. They were touching me all over my body.

They finally stopped pushing on me and left. Rather than open the yard gate, they climbed over. I stood there watching them as they

scattered. As the last two scrambled over the fence, they looked back and I said, 'I hope you were putting good stuff into me.'

They just smiled. Through thought language, they seemed to be saying, 'We were. Be happy.'

I then turned and went back into the house to say good-bye to Judy. I gave her a big hug and left. As I traveled down the road, I heard some scurrying on the right side of the road. I pulled over and got out of the car. I stepped to the edge of the trees and looked into the forest. Something stuck its long pointed, slender nose down my ear. I wasn't sure what it was, possibly an ant eater? I stood very still as it drilled into my left ear with its nose. I did not dare turn my head to see it. Whatever it was drilled and drilled. I thought it must be hanging onto a branch and sticking its nose down my ear. I woke up and looked at my watch. What a dream! It was approximately 5:00 a.m. in the morning. I could not get back to sleep. I pictured the little people and their smiles, the twinkle in their eyes. I wondered why my ear hurt.

Around 8:00 a.m., I was called to breakfast and the day began. With the excitement of my sister's wedding and all the preparations, I did not think much more about the dream. Later that day I told my sister that Palm Springs must be good for me, because for the first time in a long time, I did not have a headache. If I went a day out of a month without a headache, it was a miracle. Many times my headache worsened as the day progressed, sometimes turning into nausea.

It was noon and I could still feel a small pain in my ear, but later the pain completely stopped. The following day I mentioned to my daughter, Dawn, who also lived in Palm Springs, that my headache had not returned. She passed it off, saying that it was probably not the allergy season for Palm Springs and my sinuses must be clear.

When I returned to Oklahoma, my headaches no longer came daily. I very rarely had one after that and, if I did, I knew there was a reason. In other words, the headache could actually be seen as a sign of something happening in my life instead of a daily occurrence.

I did not share this dream. I held its energy. Eventually, I mentioned the dream to Gary. He listened intently. Someone who was sitting nearby listening said, 'Susanne, maybe the disappearance of your headaches was just a coincidence.'

Gary looked down and said, 'Do what everyone tends to do, just logic it away. So many allow logic to get in the way of seeing what is happening spiritually.' He stood and walked off.

Nancy had been listening as I shared my dream and its results with Gary. When everyone left us, she told me that she, too, had seen these people in her dreams. Her description was the same as mine. She said Gary had told her they were the Inyan Wasicus, the stone people. I was delighted to have this information and grateful to the stone people for my healing.”

It was quiet. I said, “Savannah, that drilling in my ear was a healing. It seemed to clear out my sinuses or something. I am appreciative. Were you bored or did this help? Maybe they are bringing you help in some way?”

“No, I wasn’t bored. That was a good story. Thank you, Susanne.” We were both ready to go back to sleep.

Someone put another log on the fire to keep the rocks warm for a sweat. I moved my chair away from the smoke coming in my direction. I continued to watch the fire and think about spiritual helpers that we could see and all we could not see.

From where I was sitting, I could see the healing stone that is many times used in the sweat lodge. When we enter the lodge, a stone may sit in front of the person pouring water. This stone may be touched to the Grandfathers, the heated stones, and a prayer may be said with it. The stone will regain healing energies to be used for the benefit of all in the sweat as it is passed during the healing round. Each person takes the stone and rubs it where assistance is needed for healing, and many have felt the result of the healing power within the stone.

I remember how fascinated John was with his healing in the lodge one evening. Before the sweat, he had a rash on the right side of his face by his eye. It had been bothering him for about two months and he had decided to see a doctor about it the next day. He had not mentioned it to anyone else, but me. When I got in the van after the sweat, he was looking in the mirror.

He told me, “During the third round, the healing round, Gary seemed to be fumbling with a rock touching me in different places on my face. At first I tried to take the rock from him, thinking that Gary was passing me the healing stone for my use, but he would not release it. There seemed to be a purpose in his actions. Then I realized a Grandfather told Gary to doctor me with his healing stone. He touched the healing stone to the rash by my eye.”

John then turned to me. “Look, do you see it?”

“I can barely see anything there now.”

The rash left quickly after the sweat was over and never returned.

I have seen healing powers put into the stone by medicine persons using the breath of life and prayer. The spirit of the healing stone is powerful, and I have seen many healings with the energy of this spirit.

ASK FOR A HEALING

God's spirit helpers do heal us, and these healings are gifts. The spirit helpers love for us to ask for help any time we need it. They want us to call upon them. Once asked, they jump at the opportunity to help us. All we have to do is remember "Ask and ye shall receive."

I wonder why we forget to ask for help. We all tend to go to the doctor when we have a physical problem. Why are we so hesitant about looking into the mental, emotional, and spiritual parts of ourselves? We know that when we are "in balance," we can prevent, and many times cure, disease.

As the year passed, I watched a variety of healings take place. I learned more about going back to change the energy. Instead of beginning with the physical, the healing begins with the spiritual and moves back through the emotional and mental to the physical.

Healing on this path may begin with the presentation of a pipe, entering a lodge or a ceremony, or through prayer. The person receiving the pipe for a healing is not responsible for the healing, although that person definitely participates. Nor is it the person pouring the water in the sweat lodge who is responsible for a healing. It is the prayers and the faith that bring the healings. You never know when or how it will happen, but you know it will come.

A healing for a physical ailment may not happen in the way expected. We pray for health and help and healing. There is a difference between a cure and a healing. The healing may come in acceptance. It may be that the physical problem remains, but with acceptance, the good coming from it is seen and understood. Somehow the problem becomes tolerable and life improves. The disease itself may remain, but a healing of one's Spirit is received. The person is able to accept what is happening and make peace within self and with others surrounding the situation, so that life may be left or continued in a good way. At other times, the disease or physical problem completely leaves the body.

As time goes by, I feel a pure sense of love for all that I have been given on this road. If someone had told me five years ago what I would see with my own eyes on this high road that opened in front of me, I would have laughed at them. I continually find myself praying aloud, "Thank you for the many healings I have observed on this road and through this way. I am so very grateful for what you have chosen to show me. Thank you."

My cousin survived the motorcycle crash. He can talk and is doing quite well. Billy, in a wheel chair, has finished high school and is attending college, making excellent grades and living life.

My cousin surviving the aneurysm is quite self-sufficient. Judy drives, does the family shopping, travels with her husband Phil, and often takes care of their grandchildren.

Gary suggested that Judy play the flute to bring forth more healing and reconnection of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. It increased her ability to focus, allowing her speech to improve. This also helped her increase her "breath of life" which brought more words to the surface. Her reading, writing, and speech continually improved.

With many people praying within sweat lodge, within church, and within homes, many more miracles take place. It all keeps going back to prayer. I believe the spirits' work is miraculous! The work of the Grandfathers is miraculous. The work of God is miraculous.

Carl once presented a pipe to Gary for a healing ceremony for Tanner, a small boy who stays in his home while his mother works. Gary said he would take a look at the situation and we would do a healing ceremony at Carl and Nancy's home if the boy's mother was in agreement.

The doctors had diagnosed Tanner with a rare, degenerative disease, Blount Disease. His knee caps were turned, making his legs bowed. At times, one leg was turned to such a degree that he walked with it sideways in front of his other foot. With little known about the disease, doctors recommended Tanner wear braces for three years and then have surgery at the age of five.

In a healing ceremony, blankets are hung over all windows and door openings, so no light can enter. Then prayers begin to invite the spirits.

When the lights first went off, Tanner became frightened and cried. Suddenly he became very silent, yet wide awake. He remained silent during the whole ceremony which took several hours.

Before the ceremony, Gary asked me to bring a small clean white cloth with me. When I arrived, he asked me to place the cloth beside me. During the ceremony, Gary lit a small candle and instructed Carl to bring Tanner to sit by my side. I watched him place a straw on Tanner's knee. He sucked on the straw and spit something out on the white cloth. He repeated this several times. He kept spitting out what looked like white gristly stuff mixed with a small amount of blood. With Tanner sitting next to me, Carl and I were the only ones who could really see what was happening. Tanner seemed to be experiencing absolutely no pain. I had never seen this before and sat there stunned.

When the ceremony was over, someone turned on the lights and Tanner asked, "Where's the bird and the little people?" It was explained that they had to leave. Obviously, this little boy had seen something we adults had not seen.

Following the ceremony, I looked to see if there was any physical evidence of the treatment on Tanner's leg. I saw nothing. There was no indication anything had been removed from his leg.

Gary said the complete healing would take time. He told Tanner to go into the sweat lodge in Carl and Nancy's back yard any time he wanted to do so. Several weeks later, he began going back to the lodge before a sweat, taking the dirt from the pit and rubbing it on his legs and on his knees. No one told him to do this, but he continued doing it repeatedly.

Tanner went back to the doctor and was fitted for braces, but he hated them. He wore them for approximately two weeks. Then one day he said to Carl, "Da, I need to sweat, one rock. I pour the water and leave the door open."

Before the next sweat, Tanner was ready, and he crawled up on Carl's lap. First, he poured the water on his one rock and then he placed his leg in the rising steam. He picked up a healing rock and rubbed his knee. He offered tobacco to the fire and prayed, "Grandfathers, fix my boo boo legs." Tanner did all of this impromptu. No one had given him instructions and yet he knew exactly what to do. He was being guided from the other side.

We all watched in amazement as, over time, his knee caps began to turn. When his mother took him back to his doctor for his check-up, the doctor asked if Tanner had been wearing his braces day and night? No. The doctor then told her that he had three other patients with this disease and Tanner was the only one who showed progress.

His knee cap had turned five centimeters.

Two years later, Tanner's legs were completely straight. His orthopedic physician had given all the children the same treatment. Tanner's healing ceremony and continued prayers for healing have been the only difference. Tanner's own innocent youth gave him an innate understanding of what he saw and was told during the ceremony.

I have seen Gary use his technique with a straw in several other situations. He has done it with someone who had pneumonia, with myself when I had a kidney infection, and with a person named Jane who was stung by wasps and had a severe allergic reaction.

It was a beautiful spring afternoon. We were preparing to sweat and pray for those on vision quests. Several of us were camping near the lodge, including Jane. She was walking into the woods when she passed a wasp nest. She must have disturbed them, because several stung her. She came running back into camp. As she passed me, she told me what happened. I asked, "Jane, are you allergic?"

"I don't know. I used to be, but I don't know if I am still allergic or not." She hurried to her tent.

I went on down by the lodge and shared what had happened with Gary. She did not join us, so I went to her tent to check on her. When I opened the flap of the tent, she looked almost hysterical. There was a wild look about her and she was curled up in the corner. I asked, "Jane, how are you doing?"

"Not good."

I remained calm and said, "Come with me, Jane. Gary says to come down to the lodge."

When I got her to the lodge, Gary was prepared. I watched as he pulled the toxins out of Jane's body through a straw. When he finished, he said that she would be fine for the weekend; however, she needed to go to the doctor upon her return to town. They may have to do something more for her then.

She stayed the weekend. When she returned to town, she went to her doctor who was stunned with her story. He told Jane that a reaction like that could be expected to cause death within an hour or so.

Another time, I invited a cousin to the lodge. After arriving, he made a decision to ask for a healing. This man had seemed to live a perfect life. He looked happy. Being an excellent medical doctor, he lived well. At least, it appeared there were no financial worries. He

had a family and all were in good health. It looked as if he had everything.

He did not. He was not happy. Nothing was working. A spiritual transformation had begun in his life. He sought counseling and was doing a great deal of internal work. He knew the problem was within.

Then he found himself at the sweat lodge with us. He had not come planning to ask for a healing, but then he knew that was why he was there.

He filled a pipe and took it to Gary. Gary saw him coming, looked at him, and said, "Go put it on the mound, the altar, and you can present it before the late sweat."

Gary then went to bed. We all stayed by the fire talking until about 2 o'clock in the morning. I finally said, "I don't believe there is going to be a late sweat."

Someone else laughed and said, "Neither do I."

I smiled at my relative who had decided he wanted a healing and said, "We'll probably find out about the healing first thing in the morning."

He was a little frustrated with waiting. "I hope so, because I have to leave fairly early."

We all went to our tents and vans for sleep and dream time. The following morning, we sweat. Gary asked my cousin who wanted the healing to share with us. He opened up and shared very honestly about his frustration with life and talked about a hole he felt inside. He felt empty in several areas of his life. He wanted joy and happiness to return. This reminded me of my own prayer years earlier.

Then he continued, "I must tell you. Last night you knew exactly what you were doing. I made the decision to ask for this healing, filled the pipe, offered it, and doing as I was told, placed it on the mound. I then expected immediate attention."

He continued, "I was anxious to sweat, receive my healing, and leave. I thought surely you would recognize what an important man I was. After all, I am a doctor! I live on a time schedule and have appointments to keep. I was furious when things did not happen the way I thought they should. The longer I pondered this after I went to bed, the madder I got. I was going to leave, but began to hear things outside my tent. I became terrified and too frightened to leave the tent. Here I was, a grown man, a very influential and successful man, and I was scared to leave my tent."

He paused. "Now I realize that everything happened perfectly. I was being prepared to receive a healing. My ego had to be handled and put out of the way first."

By the end of the sweat, the spirits had given him a long list of things to do. It was interesting to watch him go about completing his list of activities. He forgot his time schedule. He made prayer ties. He walked up the hill and prayed alone. He made a carving on a tree trunk. Then he made a picture out of the things Mother Earth gave him to use. He was to paint the picture later, using real paints. He chose to stay the entire weekend.

He proudly showed many of us his picture. Now, this was a delight to watch. An emotional healing was taking place in front of our eyes. This grown man, a medical doctor, was enthusiastic about a picture made from twigs, mud, a feather he found, and other gifts from nature. I watched as the weight lifted off his shoulders.

Today he shares that this weekend literally saved his life. This healing led to many changes and the healing continues today.

The spirits have helped me with healing more than once. They continually help me in my everyday life. When I need their help, I ask.

Prior to a vision quest weekend when I was to support, I suffered from a very bad eye infection and went to the doctor. I explained, "I have no glasses, and I have a seminar to do in five days. Is there any possible way I can wear my contact lens again by that time?"

"No. You cannot put contacts into your eyes for ten days. It may even take longer. Your infection is very bad."

The doctor then gave me a prescription for eye drops and creams which I immediately took to the pharmacist to fill. That evening, I left for the vision quest. When I arrived, I was telling others around me about the problem with my eye. Gary heard. He said, "Susanne, we can take care of that in the lodge if you want."

I knew he meant the Grandfathers could help and agreed. During the sweat, he prayed and placed two fingers on my eyes. I saw two bright lights. When the healing rock was handed to me, I was told to use it on both eyes. After that I never used the drops again. A few days later, I put on my contacts. I returned to the doctor ten days later. When she checked my eyes, she said, "They are perfectly clear. Those drops and creams must have worked well."

I looked at her and said, "I want to share something with you."

She listened intently as I described what I had done. She

responded, "Susanne, there is no way one dose of drops could help you. I, too, believe in this type of healing through prayer. Please call me the next time you have any ceremony. My husband and I would like to attend."

As I turned my attention to gratitude, I thought about the small plates many of us prepare before eating our meals. It is important to always show gratitude to the spirits for their healings or for simply joining us for purification ceremonies at the lodge. On a small plate, we put a little portion of the best of everything we have to eat. We then set this plate on the altar by the lodge or give it to the fire. We feed the Spirits first, and we give them our best. This is the action of giving an offering. It is a very tangible way to show how truly grateful we are. We then say a blessing before we eat. Many do this on a regular basis.

Our gratitude is also shown when we build a fire to heat the rocks. We feed the fire with tobacco, or place tobacco in the fire at each direction to thank the Grandfathers for their presence. Again, this is taking an action that reminds us of our gratitude before entering the lodge.

There are times when the spirits provide gifts through human beings in the form of a "medicine." Some call these people with a gift for healing a medicine man or woman. I have heard elders say there are no more medicine men or women today. The old medicine persons practiced their medicine in the light of the day in front of the people. Not only were they gifted with the power of medicine, but the recipient and others were in a space where they could accept it.

Now doctoring is done in complete darkness in ceremonies. It seems to be the only way the people feel able to accept it. So today most medicine men and women are called interpreters. According to the elders, interpreters only interpret the will of the Spirit, but do not have their own power to heal. Today's interpreters are not considered to be as strong as the "old" Medicine Men.

Yet there are those that have some form of medicine. Gary has medicine. He has been given a medicine to help others heal. He communicates with the Grandfathers and he has spirit helpers which work with him. He has said to us in the lodge many times, "The greatest medicine there is, is when you make someone else feel good about themselves."

I have heard him tell a few people the spirits had gifted them with a medicine after they returned from a vision quest. He never tells

them what it is. They have to learn for themselves. Their special ability will be revealed to them as they become ready.

Sometimes a medicine man will pass his medicine onto another person. When this is done, the DNA of that person is said to change. When an inheritance such as this is passed on, only the spirits know when a person is ready. After the DNA has been reorganized and the process of letting go and receiving is completed, the gifts begin to open in a very gentle way.

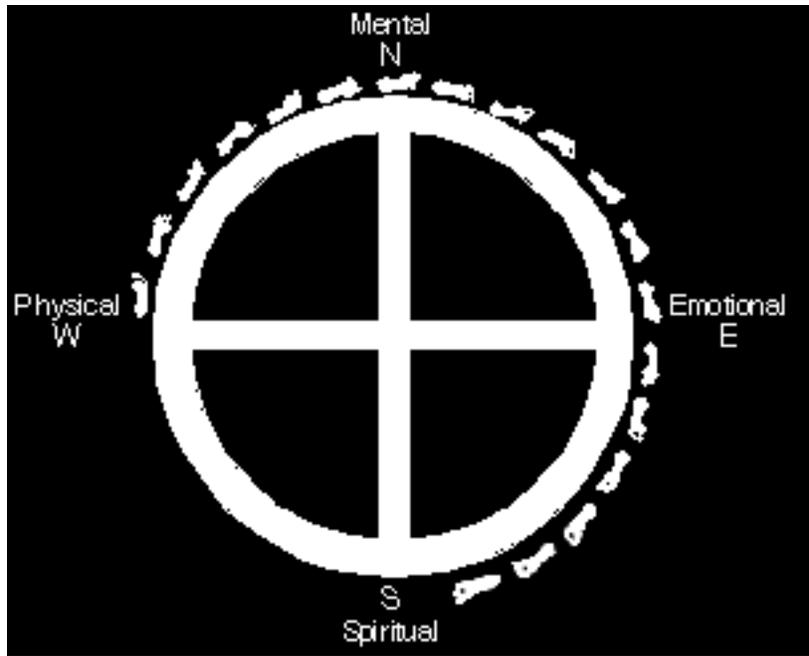
Medicine cannot be bought or had for the asking. It is a gift. It is the spirits that know who is to receive it. A person who has been gifted medicine knows when and to whom their medicine is to be passed.

If a person receives medicine and becomes an abuser of substances or begins using what he has been given to his own advantage or in a harmful way, the spirits generally warn him. If he does not heed the warning, the spirits stop working with that person until he is capable of helping himself. The spirits are always there to help the healer work with people when he is again in a balanced way.

In truth, a person with medicine is still human. The Spirits have given him their power. The responsibility of carrying a medicine can cause medicine men and women to become confused. They take on guilt when a healing does not go in the way they expected. They also sometimes slip and forget that it is the spirits who are doing the healing, not themselves. They can become "puffed up" until they remember they are only the tool through which the healing takes place.

Fortunately, most are able to remain humble and understand. They feel blessed as they watch people be healed. They have no problem in remembering that they are only the instrument through which a healing takes place, and they are pleased to be able to help.

True medicine is the art of knowing each one of us is of equal importance, and healing is merely the ability to open and be a vessel for God's healing to flow through.



By the third quest, I had finally made it this far around the circle.

THIRD QUEST

Healings come in countless ways. Many healings are immediate, but sometimes you don't know you have had a healing until a situation arises and you reflect back on how you used to face it. You find yourself looking at things differently and reacting differently. As I approached my third vision quest, I knew something was happening, because I reacted differently to situations.

I thought I must be in the South, but was stepping into the North part of the fourth wheel in the South, as I approached this quest. Situations took place before the time of fasting and prayers that confirmed I was going to the North where it is cold and lonely. When I presented my pipe to Gary for that third vision quest, he said, "It is important to do this quest soon."

Again, from the moment of commitment, my lessons began. Everything led to the big lesson that came on the day I was to begin my quest. Gary and Elizabeth had gone to New Orleans before this quest. They stayed in touch with me almost daily every time they left town. This trip was no different. The day before I was to go on the hill, they telephoned and told me what to do when I got out to the land. I listened intently to every instruction and said, "I will have everything ready and waiting for you when you arrive at the land."

On the day I was to go on the hill, a friend took me to Noble where the vision quest was to take place. She helped me gather my trees for the quest, and then she returned home to do errands. I was alone on the land with no car. I prepared the trees and prayer flags.

When a vision quest begins, there are usually many people at the site helping with the preparations. The energy builds as everybody becomes involved. I had supporters who were coming and Carl was to bring some other people out who would be going on the hill the day after I began my vision quest. Time passed and no one arrived. I picked my site in the woods and prepared it.

As I did so, a beautiful redbird watched and sang. When I

returned to the lodge, it followed me. I sat and prayed for a while. Then I walked the half mile or so to the end of the road and looked in both directions to see if anyone was even in sight. There were no cars, no vans, nothing. The bird was waiting for me as I walked back up the long road and rounded the corner. It accompanied me the rest of the way back to my seat by the lodge.

At 7 o'clock in the evening, I was still alone. I kept remembering, "Everything happens just as it is to happen once a person begins a quest."

Gary had told me on the phone, "Susanne, prepare the fire and light it when you get to the land. We'll be there in time for you to go up."

I had done as instructed. I had made the medicine wheel with tobacco before laying the wood with a prayer. I had put my seven rocks in the fire, one at a time each with a prayer, and then added the other rocks. The fire burned brightly as I prepared the trees according to instructions. One by one, I leaned each tree against the lodge. With all the trees complete, I made the prayer flags and attached them to the trees. Still no one came.

I finally heard the sound of an automobile and saw Carl's van coming up the road. John arrived next with his son, Boston. Later another couple came. We visited for a while and watched the fire. We could not sweat, because the seven stones for my quest were already in the fire and we could not use them until the time arrived for me to go on the hill. Gary was still not there to "put me up." What were we to do? Everyone had to go home, because this was Thursday night and those in attendance had school and work the following day. Most of the others left.

Only Carl and a woman named Jane remained. Jane was preparing to go on the hill the day after I was to begin my quest. Per instructions I had been fasting since midnight the previous night. I had only drunk sweet grass tea during the day. I decided to carry out my part of the commitment as if my quest had begun "as scheduled."

I felt the Spirits were with me on the land and were as ready as I for it to all begin. I decided to continue as if I were on the hill, so I stopped drinking tea. I spent my first night by the fire. Amazingly, the following day when Gary and Elizabeth still had not arrived, I was able to remain balanced though I was beginning to feel strange. It was as if I were already out there with the Grandfathers, but I kept working to

help others prepare. In the afternoon, I phoned John. Through a strange voice, I asked, "John, can you please leave work early today and come help?"

"Help? How? Where are you? Is Gary still not there?"

"No, he isn't here, and neither am I. I am feeling strange, John."

"I can tell, but I am not going to take responsibility for putting you on the hill. You made your commitment with Gary."

"I know, but if he is not here by the time you arrive, I am asking you and Carl to simply help me carry what I am to take with me. I will go up alone. I know the Grandfathers and the spirits are already working with me."

"Susanne, I can tell by talking to you that you are way out there. I'll be on my way as soon as I can possibly get away."

"John, my truest belief is being shown to me. I made my prayer ties in a good way. I purified in a good way. I feel like the Grandfathers and the spirits have been watching this and are here working with me. They have listened to me make my commitment and watched as I prepared. I believe my quest is taking place as scheduled. I hope to see you soon. Bye."

With that, I hung up. When I returned back to camp, Gary and Elizabeth were just pulling in. They explained there had been problems. Then Gary asked, "Susanne, are you going up for two days?"

It was not like him to forget how many days I had pledged. "No. I was to go up yesterday. The fire has been burning since yesterday. I quit eating at the proper time and quit drinking at the proper time as if I were on the hill. I feel as if the first day is almost over, and I cannot tell you how amazed I am with what has been happening to me."

Thoughts ran through me. All that had taken place confirmed my being in the North on this vision quest. People were not with me as I prepared. They were only present when it was absolutely necessary. Gary had not even been there. It was quite different from the previous time and it was all for me to understand. In the North, one feels very alone. While moving to the Northeast and then on to the East, one must be patient while waiting for the birth to take place. I felt I had been patient and fairly balanced considering it all.

Gary turned to me and said, "Susanne, go to your spot and stay there until just before dark. Then come back here and we will sweat you and put you up in a proper manner."

I did as he said. I walked up the hill alone. As quickly as I sat

down in my spot, lights immediately appeared in the sky forming various symbols. This was confirmation...an answer. I was right. I was not alone. My prayer ties were not even around me yet. The Grandfathers and the spirits had been with me all along. They had been watching and waiting. They knew I had kept my part of the commitment.

As the sun set, I walked back down the path to the lodge. Other people had arrived. I watched as their faces turned from a frightful look to a delightful greeting when they saw me. Their first clue was my clothing. I had on jeans, not my vision quest dress. Many asked, "What are you doing here?"

I explained, "Do not worry. It's just fine. In fact, it's great. I did not step across my prayer ties and you are still in time to put me up."

Every person, including those who had never attended a vision quest, mentioned my eyes. Several made the same comment. "Susanne, you should see your eyes! You are gone. You are not here."

I gently responded to each one with, "I know."

Things finally seemed to be going right. We sweat. During the sweat, Gary said, "The spirits brought many situations to this woman to see if they could make her mad. They couldn't do it. When they spoke, she remained a listener. They are happy."

Finally, I was put up in a good way with everyone making prayers that brought delight, tears to my eyes, and love. Many people were there, many good friends. They placed me in my space, made more prayers, and again left me to pray.

Before leaving me on the hill, Gary once again talked to me. I carefully listened to his words. "I hate to tell you this, but you are going to face your greatest fear almost immediately after you step over your prayer ties. Stand all night and really focus on the altar in front of you. Remember this altar as you face into the storms this coming year. At daybreak, begin to think about how good your life is going to be in the future." He then turned and left. I was happy to finally be in my prayer ties, but I thought, "How can I even concentrate after being left with those words? Perhaps I will just stay here when they come to get me. Who would want to leave a safe place like this to go face their greatest fear?"

I tried to shake Gary's words and focus on my prayers. I held onto my pipe and prayed all night, concentrating on the altar. I internalized it. I thought all night about everything that had been stripped from my life and grieved each layer. It was so very still during the night,

just as it is still many times in life right before the door opens for us.

At daybreak, I sat down, but felt alert. With first light, clouds came and then the rain began. It was an unusually cool day, and I was cold. This was another sign that I was in the North. The redbird stayed with me all day dancing about the trees around me. Of course...the color red represents the North.

As the morning continued, I tried to focus on happiness, joy, and helping others. My attention turned to Iktome as he sat on my South flag. I thought about how he strips us of our illusions and assists us in seeing our reality. I said, "Iktome, is there something else that needs to be stripped? Obviously so, or you would not be here. What illusions must you remove in my life for me to see my reality more clearly?"

I tried again to focus on happiness, thinking about the warmth of the beautiful sun. I hoped to see it soon. I thought about the phoenix and it being a friend to the sun as I sat there in the rain. Naturally it rained, for there was to be more death and a rebirth taking place.

I wondered if the harder the rain, the greater the birth would be? Eventually the rain stopped and the supporters came to get me. I was cold and wet enough that I was eager to go. I had decided that I would remember this altar and could face whatever fear was coming for the joy I, my children, loved ones, and friends would have in the future. I chose to go face my greatest fear and move through that fear so I could hopefully let it go.

As I walked down the hill to the lodge, I felt I was still in the Northeast. The confirmation that I would remain in the North longer came in the sweat when I was told, "Susanne, you have to go into the earth again for a while longer."

I understood. I felt a few tears about to brim over, and I could not stop them. I was right. I knew I would again be connected to the earth and all that would take place within and upon her. There would be more death before the rebirth. The previous year had been so difficult and now I knew more difficulty was coming. However, I also knew I would not be doing this alone. I would have help from the Grandfathers, from many spirits, especially Spotted Eagle Feather Man who is with me always, the good Iktome, the stone people, and others. There would also be help provided by many friends on this earth. I knew I had members from this family who would support me and members from my blood family who would also be there to help.

FACING THE FEAR

After my feast, John, Boston, and I left to quickly dress for my family's reunion that was being held at Lake Murray. I was looking forward to this, because I had not seen some of these relatives since I was a small girl. We ate and visited. At one point during the afternoon, my cousin Margaret told us to get together with our immediate families. Groups of families stood together. Most groups included three or four generations. She asked that the eldest of each family introduce their entire group and tell something about them.

I realized I was the only one standing completely alone. My father was in a nursing home and could not carry on a rational conversation. All present were from my mother's side of the family and she had died many years before. I had been both widowed and divorced. My children, now grown, were working and unable to attend. My sister lived in another state and could not come to the reunion.

When Margaret came to me, she looked at me and hurriedly introduced me as she realized I was standing alone. John and Boston were standing off to the side. Margaret tried to make light of my standing alone and asked John and Boston to join me, saying that she was making them associate members of the family. I thought, "Was this my big fear...standing alone?"

The following week an old girlfriend of John's telephoned him and asked him to attend an event of some kind with her. Even though he declined, I felt weird. As he shared with me, I felt a tinge of fear about being "abandoned and alone." The issue of "being alone," like the situation at the vision quest and the reunion seemed to be hitting me head on in all parts of my life.

Later that year, John and I had a fierce argument about my being left behind while he and his children went with his entire family on a cruise. I had not been invited and felt very left out. The way I felt was absurd, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not stop the feelings. My anger and my actions were irrational. However, for me, it was a

great teaching. It became a great opportunity for me to learn about myself and my issues.

At one point John shouted at me which is a very unusual thing for him to do. It touched something from my past. I knew neither of us were being rational about statements made at the time, but I felt hurt and I did not like the way I was feeling. It was hitting something deep within.

The lesson became very clear to me. I had created the illusion that I was a part of his family when I was not. John had not created my illusion. I had done it. Iktome was working with me again. I was being stripped of my illusions and my fairy tale life once more. I had almost forgotten that John and I were not family. I loved John as my partner. I loved his children almost as much as my own and had spent a great amount of time with them, thinking of them as family. I had also spent almost every holiday with his family and felt close to all of them. Now they were all leaving and going some place without me. Why was this happening? To make me see something about my fear of being alone?

Iktome had sat on my prayer flag in the South during all my last vision quests. He had a great deal of work to do with me to make me stop creating my illusions, to help me understand what is real in my life, and to show me all that brought me to the present.

Again, from the very beginning of this relationship, I realized that I had manipulated my way into situations where I probably did not belong. Looking back, I saw I had done this in all of my relationships with males in my past.

I stepped back from John and his family and went back to work on myself. I looked deeper inside and related everything to my early childhood. I wrote down my feelings and was finally able to trace them back through two marriages to my father. I realized that I had reacted to John in an irrational way the same as I had reacted to a "tone of voice" from my father as a child.

I could see a pattern, and I set out to change those patterns. I worked on myself, moving from illusion to reality. With each understanding, I figured out how to "take my power back." I did as an adult what I could not do as a child. I began to gain a new inner strength.

My normal tendency would have been to run at this point. Instead of leaving, I simply stepped back and took a long, good look within myself. It was my problem. It was my fear. I chose to not see John much during this time. He watched my actions and reactions

whenever we were together. He kept inviting me to go places. I kept saying “no.” I knew I could not be around him or others within his family I loved until I healed within. I knew if I moved back into this situation, and that was a big “if” at the time, my hurt might come out sideways.

Finally I agreed to drive to Oklahoma City with John and his daughter Savannah. Through the day, we visited. I shared with John some of what I was learning about myself and he shared with me. He said, “Susanne, I believe I just might have to date you to get you through this.”

“You probably will.”

He sat back and looked at me. Then he responded, “I have a feeling that you are going to be better than ever when you get through this thing. I want to see what you are going to be like and what the results of this will be.”

I smiled. I, too, knew I was going to be different. I had studied my patterns and gained new insights about myself as I continued to progress around my wheel of self-transformation. I became more appreciative of John. We both knew I had to walk through this alone. I also knew this was another part of my vision quest. I was not alone and patience surrounded me.

John did telephone me the following week to ask me on a date. I accepted. The night came, and I felt as if I were in high school again. I dressed up and so did he. He picked me up and we began again. Our relationship moved to a higher level. Why? I had changed. I learned I had needs. It would be important for me to state my needs, and I began doing that in a gentle way so our relationship could grow.

I now understood how unfair I had been my entire life to my partners and even my parents. How could I expect them to know what I needed if I had never figured it out myself? When I did know what I wanted and needed, I was still hesitant as an adult to tell them. If someone asked where I wanted to eat and I knew I might enjoy sea food, I generally responded with, “Wherever you want to go is fine with me.” If someone asked what movie I wanted to see, I responded with, “What movie would you like to see?” I did not say the name of any movie I hoped to see. I lied to myself and thought I could accept anything. I was very good at accepting the crumbs.

How was I to receive what was mine until I could allow someone to give it to me? I learned to set new boundaries for myself. I checked myself to see how it felt. It felt good.

I still love to give, but I now know it is much more fun to both give and receive. My sister had always told me that I did not know how to receive. She knew how. She was right. I am learning to receive now as well as give.

I listen to what feels right when I say “yes” and when I say “no” to a request. If it does not feel good, I ask myself questions about my internal reaction. I see if my answer is congruent with what I value. As I act in accordance with my inner self, my confidence rises in my most intimate relationship, my career, and every other part of my life.

I face into the storms today as quickly as possible. I focus on that altar in my prayer space. I visualize the cedar tree in the center with the sacred red felt on it representing all that is and the fruit trees on each side of the cedar tree. One fruit tree represents all that is above and the other represents the earth and all that takes place upon her and within her.

The memory of that altar brought me strength all year as I faced many problems. I used every technique and skill I had received from my Al-Anon program, and I used the tools I discovered on this beautiful road. I was moving closer to cleaning out the last debris and my field was becoming much richer. I was almost there.

As the year progressed, I received a healing for a fear of snakes. As a little girl, I had dreams of snakes around my feet and was afraid. I began dreaming of snakes again. These dreams were different from the ones I had as a child.

My first dream was about a solid black snake that crawled onto the second finger of my left hand. It had butterfly-looking, lacy red wings at its head and two antennae. I do not know what this represented, but it was beautiful. I talked to it. I said, “I always thought you were masculine, but now I see that you are feminine.”

The next dream was of a pure white snake on the ground which was coiled and rising up to the sky. It was about waist high and John told this snake, “You are so adorable, I think I will just take you home with me.”

After that, I had multiple dreams where I would be in water with snakes swimming all around me. They seemed to have the markings of diamonds on their backs. I talked to them and apologized for being in their territory. I said I did not wish to scare them. In one dream, I had to put my hand on a ledge to pull myself out of the water. Snakes were around my feet. The ledge also had water on it and was infested with

snakes. One bit me between my second and third fingers on the same hand that lit up on my first quest. It was poisonous, but the poison went through my system and did not hurt me. I called out for help. No help came. Again I was alone! I sat there on the cool ground and focused on healing within the body. I lived. I was just fine.

Later in another dream, I was swimming across a lake to a school. Snakes were swimming all around me. They bit me three times, but again no harm came to me. When I awoke, I went to the Bible and read Matthew 10:16 where Jesus was talking to the twelve apostles. He said that they would be going out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, it was important that they be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. I would love to be able to be both wise and again innocent someday.

When I shared my dreams with John, he responded by telling me about Carl Jung's philosophy. "Susanne, that sounds good. Jung associates dreams about snake bites with something good being given to the person being bitten, possibly wisdom."

When I shared with Carl about the dreams, he telephoned me with verses in the Bible where snake bites were received, saying that the bites were associated with healing. One verse (Acts 28:5) told about Paul being bitten by a viper. The serpent grabbed his hand when he went to get firewood. Paul shook it off. The people were amazed when Paul did not die.

One day I was leaving a very nice restaurant in Oklahoma City when I saw a snake moving across the parking lot area. I felt compassion for the snake rather than fear. I knew the snake might be afraid. I amazed myself by helping it to the other side.

Now I was ready to face another fear. Since the words "Sun Dance" came out of that first Native American's mouth when he insisted I find an Indian to adopt me, I slowly began to suspect that I personally would face a decision one day about Sun Dancing. He had an insistence and a determination that was unusual for such an isolated meeting. He knew I was someone who had never attended any ceremonies at all. Why was he so insistent? I felt that night as if God had given me a direction when I asked what ceremony I needed to attend and he replied, "The Sun Dance."

A gnawing turmoil grew about Sun Dancing. Many questions came to my mind. Could I dance at the Sun Dance as long as required? Would I have the stamina? Would I bring honor to the group of people

with whom I sweat and to my race by keeping my commitment? Would I have the strength to complete it? The fear, of course, was coming because it was all an unknown. I had never Sun Danced before.

A COMMITMENT TO DANCE

I was eager to experience the energy within the circle of the Sun Dance. My curiosity was high as I wondered why I seemed predestined to participate in this ceremony. As I considered dancing, I fought guilt about not helping to support with Allen, since I knew the importance of and the amount of work the supporters must do each day. I knew Anita would also not be there to help Allen, since she had made a pledge to dance at a different Sun Dance that year. It did not occur to me that the Creator just might send someone else to support if I made the decision to dance. I resolved many of these issues when I finally gained the courage to discuss the possibility of Sun Dancing with Gary.

One afternoon when we were visiting, I finally asked, "Gary, is it possible to present a pipe to dance two days of the Sun Dance?"

"Yes."

"Great! That way I can do both. I can dance part of the time and help as a supporter part of the time. Is it possible to present a pipe for only one year?"

Again the answer was "Yes, and it will be good for you to learn about the energy. The important thing is to keep your commitment."

I filled my pipe on the following day and presented it to dance. It was accepted. An anxious feeling began to develop inside me while waiting for the Sun Dance. I tried to envision what it would be like to participate as a dancer in this "dance of prayer."

I had gone without food and water on vision quests, but I wasn't sure I could do this and dance at the same time. I overheard conversations the previous year about those people who came to dance four days and were able to complete only one day. I wondered what the people from the reservation would think of me and how I would feel if I did not make it. So far, those in our group who pledged to Sun Dance had all completed their commitments. They each had committed for four days. Until then, only John, Kathy, and Robert from Oklahoma

had danced at this Sun Dance, along with Gary and Elizabeth. I felt we, from Oklahoma, were beginning to be accepted. I did not want to jeopardize this acceptance.

Finally, I realized I was subjecting myself to many unnecessary doubts. The Grandfathers and other spirits working to help me had always assisted me before, so why did I fear they would desert me now? I prepared to dance. Judy supplied me with material and tobacco for making hundreds of prayer ties. A friend made my dress. I found gifts for the family and acquired offerings for the singers and intercessor.

The drive to South Dakota with John was peaceful. This time we arrived during the day, and we could see to set up our camp. Everyone was busy with preparations. The leaders instructed the Sun Dancers to not touch or drink water for the four days of purification. We also could not touch anything sharp. Each day was hectic. There was much to do to prepare.

I felt funny being a dancer instead of a supporter and appreciated greatly everything done for the dancers. We were forced to depend on the supporters to make sage tea, to assist us when we needed to cut something, etc. Since I remembered clearly what it was like to be a supporter, I attempted to keep my requests to a minimum. We gathered wood, rocks, sage, and dug roots to be used during the Sun Dance. We tied hundreds of prayer ties. We visited with other dancers from the local area and from other states. This was a small Sun Dance. I prayed for my family and the family sponsoring the Sun Dance, people I knew and people I did not know. I prayed for the Earth and everything happening to her.

During a quiet time, I had an opportunity to sit and visit with Spencer, Gary's father. He explained how important it was for the dancers to be here during the purification time. He also talked about commitment, explaining how significant it was for me to complete my pledge. He said, "Susanne, no matter how hard it gets or how bad you feel, do not stay in the arbor. If necessary, you crawl out to the Sun Dance circle. Once you make it that far, the prayers of the supporters will pick you up and carry you through the round of dancing."

I wondered if he had sensed the insecure feelings I had about dancing. I looked at this elder who always rode in his pickup from his house in the distance to the Sun Dance grounds. Spencer was not well, and I knew it. I said, "Spencer, I understand."

We said good-bye to the previous year's tree on the fourth day

of purification and gently removed it from the Sun Dance circle. It had completed its cycle. It was time for a new "Tree of Life." We then cut down another cottonwood tree. Just as before, everyone present took part. We were filled with emotion as we watched this tree sacrifice its life so that the prayers of many people might be answered.

As the tree fell, we all caught it. We then carefully carried the tree so that no limbs or branches ever touched the ground. We stopped four times as it made its journey to the center of the Sun Dance circle. Dancers and supporters attached their prayer flags to the top branches of the tree. Some attached their ropes at the fork of the tree. The tree was taking on a new life. I stepped back and took a long look. The tree was splendid!

Finally the "Tree of Life" was prepared and raised. A tingling of appreciation and happiness moved through my entire body as I watched the tree stand. I hoped I would be like this tree, tall and balanced, for I had tried to walk in balance through all that was required of me during purification. We placed prayer ties around its trunk. John and I carried a bucket of red dirt we had brought with us from Oklahoma out to the center and placed it around the trunk of the tree. This red dirt reminded me of our hearts. It also reminded me of the blood of the people.

Tipis had been set up earlier, one for the women and one for the men Sun Dancers. It was almost time. I went to bed in the women's tipi. I tossed and turned all night and woke up with that pounding headache that seems to come with each purification.

We were up before daylight for the morning sweat. After the sweat, I began to feel nauseous. I filled my pipe with prayers and then changed into my dance dress. Finally, I put on my headpiece of sage that felt like a crown, then wrist bracelets and leg bands which had all been so carefully created of sage. I then picked up the sage fan I had made. I remembered that the leaders told us we could not touch ourselves during the dance, so I felt this sage fan might become invaluable. I thought of Jesus who could not touch himself when he was on the cross. Not being able to physically comfort self helps bring a remembrance of the cross and Christ's crucifixion and his dire situation, the shedding of his earthly life and blood.

I stepped outside the tipi and proceeded to line up with the rest of the dancers. The men went first. The women followed. I stayed a few feet behind the dancer in front of me, carrying my pipe. The drum

beat began and slowly we walked around the arbor. It was early, but there were already people in the arbor praying. They stood up as we approached. We entered the circle from the East and placed our pipes on the altar, then followed the Sun Dance leader around the circle clockwise.

For a few seconds, my thoughts flew back to that Indian stranger. Again, I wondered who he was and where he was now. I wish he knew this was happening. I wondered if he had already been shown.

We stopped in the West and faced East. The singing and drums continued. We raised our hands to the tree. We focused on the top of the tree. We greeted the sun as it rose over the horizon. I put myself into the hands of the Grandfathers, Wakan Tanka, and those helping me. The Sun Dance had begun and I felt absolutely miserable.

We danced in each of the four directions before we took a break. My head was still pounding and my stomach was churning. It was so cold. At the first break, I lay down in the shade of the arbor made for the Sun Dancers and tried to rest. We were told not to talk to anyone while in the arbor. It was important to continue focusing on prayer during the breaks and rest. I tried to get my mind off my physical condition. Spencer's words flew back to me as I heard the drum call us for the next round. I forced myself to get up and join the other dancers, determined to keep my commitment. By this time, there were more people in the arbor for support.

We entered the circle again. I focused on the tree and prayed harder, remembering that first vision quest when, on the third night, I had to "rise above the pain and hold onto my pipe" to stay within my ties.

This was only the first day! How could I do this? I decided I would make it "one step at a time." The day seemed to last forever. However, I was already learning about energy and the Sun Dance, for I noticed that while I was within the circle dancing, the pain would subside. Each time I went into the arbor to rest, the pain came back full force. On this cool day, I felt much warmer within the circle while dancing and much colder in the arbor.

Toward the end of the day, I was taken by an assistant to pick up my pipe from the altar before we moved around the circle to the South gate. At that gate, I presented my pipe to one of the supporters in the arbor. I felt gratitude as an elder from the Rosebud Reservation

accepted it. He had kind eyes and a gentle way. I hoped he would feel the prayers I had put into the pipe. When he finished smoking it, he returned to the South Gate to give it back to me. Another round followed. Finally at sunset the day ended. Every muscle in my body ached. I felt it would be a miracle if I made it to the tipi, but I did. Without undressing, I fell to my sleeping bag exhausted and miserable. I decided I would stay right where I was, not move my head, and not go to the evening sweat. I hurt. This was not to be, for the intercessor missed me and sent someone to tell me they were waiting for me. I felt miserable, but I went to the lodge, questioning my sanity all the way. During the sweat, I prayed for a healing for myself and asked forgiveness for my thoughts. I barely remember leaving the lodge, changing into dry clothes, and collapsing into my sleeping bag again.

When morning came, it brought with it a new day. I sweat, filled my pipe, and made myself ready. Much to my surprise, I felt much better and my spirits were up. I could feel my strength returning. There was a new energy entering my body. I wondered if I had endured a twenty-four hour virus or if I had made myself sick with my doubts and insecurities. Perhaps I was simply detoxifying. It really didn't matter. I felt so happy to feel so much better. I said a silent prayer of gratitude as we entered the circle and began to dance. As the day unfolded, I could feel the energy building around the tree. When I lifted my hands to it, I felt the energy flow through me. It was increasing. The reverence of the people sitting in the arbor touched me. Spencer was right. You could feel their prayers.

During the breaks, different individuals addressed the group from the PA system. I enjoyed listening to the experiences they were sharing. One elderly woman said she had slept well the night before after five years of being unable to sleep. Someone else told of being cured of a heart problem. There were those who spoke of being able to give up alcohol and drugs. A few even spoke of how they were beginning to let go of their prejudices against non-Indians Sun Dancing.

Whenever we came into the arbor to rest after a round of dancing, I took off my headpiece of sage. Whenever we prepared to line up and return to dance, I replaced it. Every time I donned the head piece, I was reminded of Christ' crown of thorns. Thoughts kept running through my head as to why so many people did not understand this ceremony. How could they not understand something that was so tangible and so meaningful and seemed to exude information in such

an unusual way about Christ and all He did? How did I not know about this until only a few years before? How did the Native Americans know so much? How did these sacred rites become so representative of what I had read in the Bible?

Although the drumming stopped during breaks, the sound continued in my head. It never stopped. I heard it continue in the darkness as I fell asleep at night. It was beginning to feel like the heartbeat of Mother Earth within me.

That second day was marred only by the sadness I felt. Gary and Elizabeth were no longer dancing with us because of a conflict taking place. They quit dancing after the first day. When a Sun Dancer quits dancing, the ones remaining feel the loss associated with the emptiness of the space that person previously filled. This is representative of what we feel when we experience the loss of someone in this lifetime. These two individuals left two big empty spaces, even though they remained to support us.

I had learned while supporting at the Sun Dance how every action during every second of a Sun Dance is both sacred and meaningful. My inner being told me this couple would soon separate themselves from us somehow. They may have been in conflict with each other. Eventually, this conflict would affect all of us, but I continued dancing. The situation provided the opportunity to increase my ability to keep my energies focused on dancing even though conflict was taking place around me. Maybe I could also learn to stay more focused on what is important in everyday life when conflict and chaos surround me.

I danced the two days. I fulfilled my commitment, but I could not leave the circle. My energy was so strong and good by the end of the day, I felt as if I could go on forever. I no longer worried about Allen and the other supporters. They seemed to be doing just fine without my help. I did not worry about Gary and Elizabeth. I knew they were with all of us as we danced, for they supported in such a way that we felt it. I continued to dance two more days. I wanted to learn more from this tree.

On the third day we did a healing round. Many of the male dancers had been connected with their rope to tree and had released by this time. As we danced, the energy kept building as we all continued to focus on the top of the tree. Many people lined up for healing. They entered the circle. One by one, the Sun Dancers touched each of

them with their fans of sage or feathers. I felt grateful to be able to move the energy from within this circle to these people, giving something back.

As the day went on, I listened to the tree. I learned as I felt the energy build. The prayer flags again became the many spirits who come to help us when we finally remember to ask for help. They were sending us energy, health, and help.

An invisible line was coming from Heaven down through the tree, into the earth, through our feet, into us, up, and back to Heaven. There was a circle of energy. I would breathe in, breathe out, pull energy in, hold it, and release it out into this circle. What I pulled into me, I reflected back. As I moved forward during the dance rounds, towards the tree, I thought about “freely” moving towards my life in the future. Then, as I stepped backwards to my dance spot, I deliberated on all that holds me back, keeping me the same in life, holding me in the same spot. I contemplated my past and all that had been injected into me. I thought about how we all do this. I liked moving towards the tree, touching the tree and praying, much more than moving backwards to my dance position.

I knew, however, that it was important to go back to my past and to take care of what I had not taken care of previously in my life. This is the only way I could ever hope to become balanced like the “Tree of Life” that stood so majestically before me. I wanted balance and the ability to make balanced decisions. To do this, it was important to do two things.

First, I had to go back to what I needed to be complete in my own internal medicine wheel. Second, I had to move forward, going through the other wheels of my medicine wheel. All decisions I make will spiral out in my medicine wheel, just as we spiral out as we dance.

I visualized how it might happen. Initially, the decisions might be unsteady, wavering ones. I might strive for something for so long that it causes all parts of the medicine wheel to shake. I won't know how to accept the decision made, and others won't know how to accept it. A perfect example of this took place when I made the decision to file for divorce. I made an unsteady, wavering decision, because I did not know what would happen or how I might be after I divorced. When I did make the decision, it was difficult for me to accept my decision, because I was moving against an inner belief that told me divorce was wrong. Then people began making statements to pull me backwards. They

also felt frightened about my decision. It was like an explosion inside me. However, I knew I could not go back to the marriage. I could not return to that way of life. This provided two energies, mine and theirs, and we were all striving for our interpretation of what was positive.

When this happened, smaller things that were at my inner core and had not been taken care of were blown out of proportion. They seem enlarged. I had to go back and change the energies in several areas of my life, moving into the core of myself to understand all lessons and situations that were difficult to face. I had to take responsibility for my own defects and fears.

As I focused on the tree, I realized that one need not be afraid as I was before coming into the circle to dance. One can never become lost for long within this circle. If a person does become lost, that person can move to the center where the tree stands, where the energy from Heaven enters the core of the tree, and move out again from the tree to his or her place.

We can do the same outside this Sun Dance circle as we move through life. Whenever we feel lost or off-balance, we can go to our center, to that space of pure love. We can pray, and then move back out to our appropriate spaces, balanced once again. Prayer, fasting, focusing on the tree, healing...it all works together miraculously.

Before the dancing ended on that third day, there was another healing round. Many came from long distances to receive healing. Each one was touched by every dancer and each had the opportunity to move to the tree and return to the shade under the arbor. The day was complete.

As the final morning arrived, we entered the arbor for the last time. This was the day for many dancers to become connected to the tree with their ropes. Elderly Native Americans honored this Sun Dance by joining us in this dance of life. I looked at this spectacular tree who had shared so much with us. I knew this was a time when each person was to deepen their roots and have growth. There would be much learning. I looked at the fork in the tree, the cherry tree branches making a cross right above the fork. I thought about Christ and his healings. This made me wonder how many healings had taken place here and how many healings would take place through the year as a result of this? What would happen upon this beautiful mother earth? I watched the sun peak in and out of the clouds as it had done all four days. I appreciated the warmth it sent for the last two days of the dance, since

the first two days were somewhat cool. This seemed appropriate...West and North, cool...East and South, warmer.

I listened to the wind. I found that the wind could be coming from one direction, feeling cold. Then, in an instant, it could change, coming from the other direction, bringing warmth. Change can take place that quickly in our lives.

According to what I had learned about watching all that was taking place, when Gary re-entered the circle at mid-morning, I knew that he would return to us even if something happened between him and Elizabeth. I tried to store in my memory the day and time everything happened, including Gary's re-entrance, to see how it corresponded with events during the following year.

The dancing did not take the entire day. We ended the Sun Dance for the feast in mid-afternoon. When we left the circle the last time, the people who had been supporting and praying in the arbor during the four days of the dance made a line. Each one shook hands with us and said, "Thank you." We said the same to them. In that moment, all Native Americans and all non-Indians felt love and compassion for one another. It was a miraculous, grand feeling. I wanted it to last and for us to remember we could all pull together at other times to help each other. The Sun Dance was a time for me to dance with other Sun Dancers for the people, an opportunity to give in a very special way, an opportunity for additional learning and for growth.

After the feast, we broke camp. It was difficult to say good-bye. Just as every ceremony has its own energy and flavor, so did this one.

MORE ANSWERS FOLLOWED

Following each ceremony such as this, participants are wakan, in a holy state, for four days as they return from the spiritual world to the physical world. They have spent time in a very intense and sacred manner. As they move back into this world during the four days following ceremonies, more answers and dreams come. I had a vivid dream about the Sun Dance and acceptance.

I was in my bed. Horses and buffaloes were under it, raising my bed to the ceiling. I got down and went to the door. I opened the door to find another door. I opened the second door only to find another door. I opened the third door to find myself in a room that looked like a motel room. I changed my clothes and left to go pledge to Sun Dance. When I got there, the people were standing in a circle in a large, open field. There was an elderly man sitting in the center of the circle where the tree would be placed. I had my pipe, but could not find my pipe filling. Someone noticed and handed me some of their pipe filling mixture. I then filled my pipe and took it to the middle of the circle to the elderly man. He accepted it. Then an elderly woman gave me a yellow blouse with purple flowers on it. She said I was to wear it every day until the appropriate Sun Dance. I explained to her that I had to do seminars and this would be very difficult. She just smiled and said I would figure out a way to do it and I would understand why after my next Sun Dance.

I awoke with a feeling that the dream was showing me that an elder which represented the Native American way had accepted my sacrifice of dancing and was gifting me symbols of the colors. Yellow represented a birth and new beginnings and purple represented the path of spiritual love. I decided to cut small swatches of yellow and purple cloth and make a macramé string of purple and yellow thread. I could pin the two purple and yellow items to the inside of my clothing to honor the dream and to remind me of these elders in my dream, the

Sun Dance, and walking in the Sun Dance way of life. I wondered what I would learn on completion of my next Sun Dance.

After a good night's sleep, we began the drive home. My mind seemed to relax and float into various areas of teachings and the learning I had experienced during the Sun Dance. It seemed that long before Jung developed his theories on masculine and feminine energies, the Native Americans saw masculine energy as active, aggressive, and logical while feminine energy was passive, receptive, nurturing. This path shows that both energies exist in each person, regardless of gender, at all times. While a person is working in the West part of the medicine wheel, a seed is planted. In the West and North parts of the wheel, a person deals with masculine issues while in the East and South, feminine issues are more pervasive.

The energy line comes down through the middle of the tree, dividing the tree in half between masculine and feminine. During the Sun Dance, the women follow the men into the Sun Dance circle.

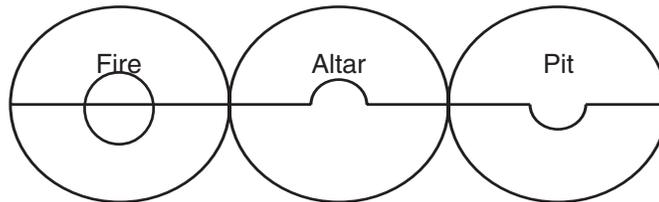
During a mixed sweat, the men all sit in the Northwest, the North, and the Northeast while the women all sit in the Southeast, the South, and the Southwest.

As we drove home from the Sun Dance, I picked up a pad and pencil and began to draw, write answers, and think about concepts that were becoming more clear to me. I thought about the sweat lodges we entered every morning and evening during the Sun Dance.



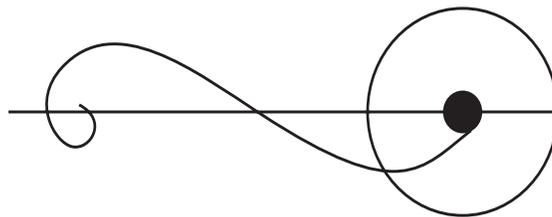
I began to write. "The sweat lodge is a dome. What is above the earth reaches up to the sky and is masculine. The other half, which we do not see, is below the earth's surface and is feminine."

Masculine Above



Feminine Below

The altar in front of the lodge is the same size and shape as the pit inside, because the dirt from the pit is placed upon the earth in front of the lodge to become the altar. By making space in the earth (digging the hole), the sky comes into the hole bringing in the masculine to the feminine. The mound is made on top of the earth in front of the lodge, bringing the feminine to the masculine. What was below and a part of the earth is now brought above the earth. What was going into the earth is now protruding out of the earth. This altar is very holy and sacred." This reminded me of the Yin/Yang symbol in oriental thought.



"Our own masculine and feminine traits relate to the Heavens and to Earth. The masculine brings positive qualities of aggressiveness, drive for expansion, experience, and mastery of life. The masculine way is to be attentive to inner currents and to act upon them in a responsible way. The seed for growth is held by the masculine.

The feminine positive qualities include nurturing of others and providing inspiration and feelings to the masculine. The feminine opens

to the seed planted within and knows the secret of physical manifestation. Knowledge of when to retreat or when to be passive is held by the feminine, giving one an internal instinct or intuition for withdrawal, self-contemplation, and love. The Sun Dance has assisted me in learning more about the masculine and feminine qualities within all.”

I felt happy as I remembered what one elder had shared with me about the Preparing for Womanhood Ceremony. “This ceremony was one of the seven Lakota ceremonies brought by the White Buffalo Calf Woman. It honors the young girl who is becoming a woman as she begins her first moon time or menstrual cycle. She stays at home with her mother. During those days, she is shown how to do crafts and how to do other tasks alongside her mother. She does not cook. At the end of this first moon time, a great ceremony and feast is held in the young woman’s honor. Those attending bring her gifts”

Another elder shared more information about women and their moon time. “On this road, women originally held a place of honor and respect. It was a woman who brought the pipe to the Lakota people. It was woman who was given the ability to bring new life into this world. Therefore, the Lakota man was to honor women. Her prayers were said to be even stronger than a man’s. She was considered very sacred. Today, Native American women are not, as a rule, given this place of honor and respect.”

At another time, I found myself in the middle of a conversation with a young Lakota man and a variety of elder women sharing information with me about a woman’s cycle. Their words kept flowing back to me and I continued writing, thinking as I did so.

“There is a Lakota word for a woman’s menstrual cycle. However, this word is not to be said in front of a woman. Thus, the young man would not consider telling me the word. This has to do with what is considered proper conduct between men and women. It is good to understand that the Lakota way is a very spiritual way. The myths, symbols, stories, everything has to do with proper relationships and our kinship to animals, relatives, rocks, Spirits, sun, moon, stars, and all that is. It has to do with Mitakuye Oyasin, which means ‘We are all related.’ When the people were more in tune to nature and were traveling together in groups, most women had their menstrual cycle at the same time and in accordance with the moon cycle. The moon’s cycle is twenty-eight days, or four times seven...four directions and six

directions plus Wakan Tanka or God. Sacred numbers. During their 'time of the month,' the female retreated just as the moon retreated. This came to be known as her 'moon time.'

During moon time, the woman was honored. She was considered especially Holy, or 'Wakan,' just as the White Buffalo Calf Woman was Holy when she brought the pipe. The woman had the ability to bring forth birth, just as the White Buffalo Calf Woman gave birth to the pipe.

In earlier times a woman was not touched during her moon. She went alone to another tipi where she was free of chores and work. She could do crafts. She was given a time to rest, time to go within herself as her energy changed. This worked more harmoniously for the entire group. She took this time to honor herself. She did not attend ceremonies. She did not cook for others. She avoided being around the pipe. Afterwards, she returned to her tipi and resumed her normal life.

Because a Lakota man is very uncomfortable mentioning such things to a woman, difficulties arise. When the male does talk about this, he thinks he is being more respectful by referring to this time as the female being sick.

The word 'sick' is an expression that is not a translation from any Lakota word. This relates back to the white clergy's use of the word and how they described a woman during menstruation. It may go back to the Bible's verses on uncleanness. Perhaps there was no word to describe what was meant in Hebrew when the Bible was interpreted into English language, just as there was no word in the Lakota to be appropriately translated to English.

Problems arise unknowingly because some men, in avoiding the Lakota word and terms for such a condition, think when dealing with non-Indians that they are being more gentle, proper, and acceptable by using the word 'sick' given to them by this Anglo culture. Unfortunately, the opposite often happens. They don't realize that referring to a female's cycle as sickness is offensive to many women."

Many ask, "Why is it important not to enter a sweat lodge or a ceremony during the moon time?"

One answer might go like this, "During ceremonies, everyone is praying. Prayers go up and out. The energy naturally spirals clockwise and upward. When a woman is bleeding, her

energy is said to spiral counterclockwise and downward. If she enters the lodge or the ceremonies with those who are not in the same way as she, her energy is so strong that it is said to ground all of the prayers. It interferes with the flow of the energy of the prayers moving upward.”

I continued to write what others shared with me. “During the moon time, the energy surrounding a woman is like an aura system. When she comes near or in contact with energy moving clockwise and upward, her energy, because it is going counter clockwise and downward, causes an unstable energy and vibration. Her direction during this time should be back inside herself rather than outward.”

Another elder stated, “In the past, many ceremonialists have gone out of their way to honor the woman during this time of the month. When they finished a sweat and were having a feast, helpers were instructed to prepare a plate for any woman who had not been able to go into the sweat with the others. She was to be served before anyone else.

At a few Sun Dances, a small arbor was prepared for women who pledged to dance, but began their moon time. They were allowed to go to that special arbor before or during the dance and continue dancing. The arbor was placed so they could hear the drum and the singers. Sometimes a second type of arbor was made for those women so they could spend time with others who were also on their moon. Elder women, the Grandmothers, would go there to speak to them and to help them learn. By providing these facilities, everyone had an opportunity to grow and receive answers during the Sun Dance in a good way.”

Their conversations held me spellbound. As I wrote, I suddenly understood why we, as women, sometimes react more strongly to situations during our menstrual times. It all seemed logical and much easier to understand. I also wondered if this energy of women during menstrual time could be used in a good way for healing of others? Perhaps I would find out more about this in the future.

As I thought about energy, I thought about the tree and its balanced energy. More understandings came about much of what I already knew. I continued to discuss subjects with John and jot notes I wanted to remember.

“It is important to learn to balance our energies, for when we are out of balance in life... including being out of balance with masculine and feminine energy, left brain and right brain, our light and our

shadow...we have greater stress and possibly dis-ease. Being in balance, being centered, walking in the center, reduces stress and brings healing and health.”

How do I come back into balance when I feel off balanced? “By praying, by journaling, by being with supportive friends and relatives. Studying my dreams also brings me more balance as I learn what they are sharing with me.

Through dreams that began coming on a regular basis, I realized more about the masculine and feminine four parts of self. A blonde female, a brunette female, a sandy-haired male, and a brunette male began to appear in my dreams. Their appearances became more frequent. As I kept track, I understood one was the shadow side and the other was the positive side of my feminine, while the males represented the shadow and positive sides of my masculine. Initially, there was disharmony. Eventually, they have all become friends in my dreams. This integration happened through many sweat lodge experiences, the Sun Dance, and through the continual removal of obstacles while opening myself as I moved to my center.

The more balanced I become, the more peace I feel within. The better my own energy within is balanced, the more I may walk from my own center to those doors that will open outward with ease. I will more easily know what I want and do not want in life. I will have a relationship with All That Is in a very different way.”

I stopped making notes when I heard a strange noise. John’s new van was having trouble. We pulled into a motel and made the decision to have fun in spite of our troubles. John and I did things differently from the year before. We were again having car trouble to slow down our return home. We knew what was happening and laughed. We chose not to hang around car dealerships waiting for repairs this time. We went to a motel, and I took a shower. It felt like being in Heaven.

Buying this new van had not changed anything. While the van was being looked at, we rented a raft and took an all day float trip down the Niobrara River. As we stopped at other dealerships along the way, we visited museums in the small surrounding communities. Again, it took almost four days to make the one day trip.

A GROWING CONNECTION

Back home, I sat one Saturday and prayed with my pipe. I always feel protected while holding it. Each time I fill it, I am surprised how good I feel afterwards. I believe this connection with the pipe began on vision quests when I held onto it the entire time. I'm grateful that everything I put into my pipe is good, and I trust only good will come to me through it.

The very first time I discussed the pipe with Gary, he said, "Susanne, one does not worship the pipe. It is to be used as a focusing tool for prayer. Lit or unlit, it works. It has the power to bring many answers."

The bowl of pipestone is red. Most of the stone from which the pipe is made comes from one large piece of rock located under the earth in Minnesota. Gary shared stories with us that had been passed to him. One evening as John and I visited with him, he shared a story about a flood. "A great flood came and all were destroyed, except a young maiden. An eagle saved her and took her to a high place in the rocky area of the Black Hills. He brought her food every day. When the flood subsided, he became a man and married her. Their children became the Lakota people."

He continued, "The pipestone is not only the blood of the people lost in the flood, but it perhaps also is the blood and tears of Christ. The bowl of the pipe is the earth, the feminine. The wood stem of the pipe is all that grows upon the earth, the masculine. It is a ceremonial instrument, a traveling altar. It is a bridge between the earth and the sky, the visible and the invisible, the physical and the spiritual. It is a direct communication device with the Grandfathers. It is to be respected and cared for in a good way.

When we pray with a pipe, it is best to pray for health and help for a person or a situation. It is not up to us to decide what someone else needs. We pray for the Grandfathers to intercede and do what they know is the right thing for that person or for the situation at hand.

Praying for 'health and help' is a simplified version of the Lord's prayer. We pray for a person in the four ways they are, and as we do so, we are praying for balance in that person's life.

When a person becomes a pipe carrier, that person makes a life-long commitment that carries with it a great deal of responsibility. The pipe carrier commits to live life in a good way, setting a good example and living life in such a way that it will be an honor to the pipe.

When praying with a pipe, you can pray to the Grandfathers in each of the four directions, to the eagle who carries our prayers and all else in the sky, to the earth and all within her, and to Wakan Tanka, who is the creator, the Great Spirit, God. You are to pray from the heart. You tell the Grandfathers how you feel and let them help you."

Before I fill my pipe for prayer, I light a braid of sweet grass and a piece of sage, smudging the bowl and the stem, purifying it and purifying what will be moving into me. I fill my pipe with cansasa which is red willow bark (actually red twig dogwood bark).

White Buffalo Calf Woman brought the pipe to the Lakota people. When the White Buffalo Calf Woman came, she told one of the young men what to smoke in the pipe. She said that there were many willows, but only one was as pure as the heart. She also said, "You will know it when you see it. You will recognize it by its red bark. Take the layer underneath."

I put a little cansasa in for every direction and for Wakan Tanka as I pray. I thank the White Buffalo Calf Woman for bringing this pipe. I thank Jesus for his life. I ask for balance as I bring it together. When I light it, I bring my prayers in and release them through the pipe. I think of the "breath of life." The smoke of the cansasha is white. My prayer becomes tangible for me to see in the smoke. I know that breath brings life and is life. Yet, this filling of my pipe with prayers somehow brings more understanding to me. For me, it has made a big difference.

It is something I can see. It brings me a greater understanding of energy. I am provided with a tangible experience, seeing how energy moves into us and how we can push it outward. As I watch the smoke, I think about the breath of life coming into me. As I let go, it expands. I think about the words we have within us and what happens when we push them out into the world. I think about the negative and the positive.

I have become much more aware of what we take into ourselves, what we allow to come into us, and what we put out into the universe. I am beginning to comprehend how it affects our relationship

to everything in the environment, mother earth, and every living creature.

I now want only good energy to move into anything I touch or prepare, because this energy will move from me to others without them even knowing it. I am careful about when and where I cook. When I do, I do it with a positive feeling, so those sharing it can take in the love. I know it is best not to do a task if I am going to resent it. I am attempting to move towards a life of love and balance, treating everything and everyone as sacred.

When someone or something throws me off balance, I try to focus on the pipe. The pipe is a reminder that the Grandfathers, Wambli Gleshka (spotted eagle), and the Grandmothers are working with me and through me. When they work through me, it is Wakan Tanka, God, not I, doing it.

It is important how we pray with or without the pipe. I have seen people pray for humility and then complain when they are put into a humiliating situation. There is a difference in praying in a humble way and asking to be taught humility. Some people pray to lose their ego and then wonder why they feel so low and dejected. It might be better for them to pray for a healthy ego. Some pray for strength and get many lessons to make them stronger. They might better pray for the ability to do what is necessary when times are hard. Others have asked to “learn to pray.” They were given many things in their life that gave them the opportunity to learn to pray.

When my prayers don't seem to bring results, I consider the words of my prayers. If I decide what is best for me and pray for it, I know I will eventually get it and it may not be what I really wanted. Thus, I pray for health and help in situations and for the highest good of all concerned.

If I am holding a grudge or feeling angry about something, I pray about this first so the negative energy can get out of the way. If someone has offended me or if I resent someone, I pray for their health and help. When we pray for someone else, we also receive.

When a person sweats and commits to a pipe, there will be many pressures from different directions. If the person continues to stay committed, eventually something magical seems to happen. Answers and insights come bringing peace and comfort.

Much had been stripped away since I stepped onto this path. I thought about how I see everything differently now. What I had seen as weakness began to look like strength. What seemed strong wasn't

really. My old beliefs had come from others, and some of the beliefs I had been given were not true. I had held onto these beliefs to feel safe. Eventually, I had to “let go.”

When I did my first vision quest, I had been able to rise above the pain and remain on the hill. The pipe was something solid I could hold onto, protecting me from the cold. As my fears were released, I was filled with a solid sense of security.

The foundation for all of this is prayer. No matter what goes on, I can focus on the pipe in daily life just as I do on a vision quest. Focusing on the pipe in cold weather during a quest brings warmth or makes a hot day seem cooler. Focusing on the pipe does not mean it has to be in my hands. It does not even have to be close to me for me to focus on it. Instead of being bothered by rain, I can enjoy it. As the clouds, thunder, and lightning surround me, I’m not afraid.

It is important that I take care of my pipe. It reminds me to take care of myself. I think about what I am filling myself with in everyday life, and I think about cleaning out the left over residue from the pipe in the best way I can. I attempt to be like the pipe, becoming a hollow vessel for prayer to move through. I wonder if that will ever be possible?

There is a beautiful history written by Lakotas about the pipe. Along with the pipe, White Buffalo Calf Woman also brought to the people the Seven Sacred Rites. I have participated in three, the Rite of Purification (the sweat lodge), the Crying for a Vision (the vision quest or hanbleceya in Lakota), and the Sun Dance. The other four rites are the Keeping of the Soul, the Making of Relatives, Preparing for Womanhood, and Throwing the Ball. Each rite I have participated in has taught me about how everything is connected and about energy.

After my first sweat, John told me, “The lodge is a sphere like the universe, and when you sit in the center of it, you are sitting in the center of the universe. The top half is a dome formed by willow branches. Years ago the willows were covered with buffalo hides. Today canvas tarps are used. The upper half of the dome represents the sky. The bottom half of the sphere goes into the earth.”

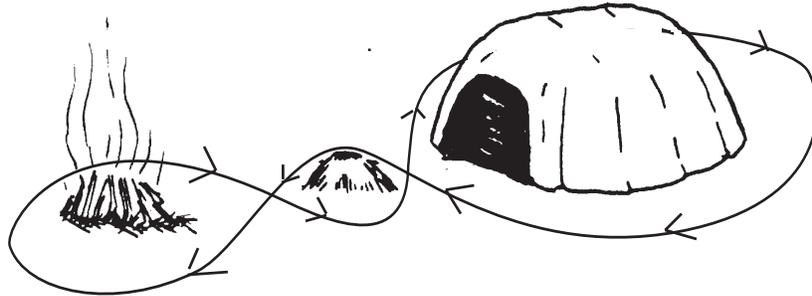
After I had sweat a few times, I felt I was indeed sitting in the middle of a universe. The learnings that take place in the sweat lodge are not on a conscious level. The subconscious just takes over when you are truthful in prayers and sincerely want to change yourself and your life. It is individual and personal. A person can learn and gain a simple understanding about this road in a few sweats. A much greater

understanding comes with continued participation.

Each sweat ceremony consists of four rounds. There is a round for each of the four parts of self (body, mind, heart, and soul). The first round helps us shed negativity from the physical. The second round is for prayer. Each person prays silently or aloud, ending each prayer with "Mitakuye Oyasin" or "We are all related." The third round is for healing. A feather or a healing stone may be passed in this round for each individual to use as needed. The feather and/or the healing stone again reminds us that we are all related. The fourth round is for closing and thanking the spirits who have come to assist us.

Everyone is affected differently in the lodge. One person will think it was unbearably hot while the other person sitting next to him will think it was pleasant. It depends on the individual, what he needs to work on, and his present attitude.

The door is opened four times during a purification ceremony. Between each round, the light of wisdom shines through the open door where you can see the mound or altar and the fire beyond it. A pipe may be resting on the altar. The stem faces West. The bowl faces you. This represents the "opening of the mind." There is a "line of life" made by sprinkling tobacco from the fire to the mound. The fire, the mound, and the lodge represent three parts of the universe. The energy flows around each of them, connecting all three. Sometimes the energy can be seen. It is an unusual feeling, an appreciative feeling, when one actually has the opportunity to see it.



Beyond the altar is the fire. The wood used to make the fire has at one time been a living tree. Even though it has lost its life, it still has something to give. Stones are placed on the wood. When the fire

is lit, it gives life to the stones. Once they are hot, they are carried into the lodge. They then become the "Grandfathers and the ancient ones." When water, which represents life, is poured onto them, they give off a steam that gives us our "breath of life."

Once the fire is lit for any ceremony, the energy begins to flow, making everything around the lodge sacred. Anything that happens in the area after lighting the fire is considered a teaching. The fire represents the future, the mound the present, the lodge the past. They all give. They all receive.

The mound in front of the lodge represents the present. A cedar staff may be placed in the center of the mound. Cedar is the favorite wood of the Wakinyan, the thunder beings. It reflects negativity. The Wakinyan are the protectors of the pipe. The staff stands for purity. The staff is to remind us that we all are to help people get up again after they fall. We help them up and if they fall again, we help them up again when they are ready.

As we pray while standing next to the altar, we are giving back to our ancestors. We should remember them and all they gave to us, the pipe, the teachings, the lodge, the lessons which are not written, but are passed down from generation to generation. In this way, the substance of their being will always be there. The flesh will fall away, but we, the spirit and the energy, remain.

When a buffalo skull is placed on the mound, it reminds us of the spirit remaining. The skull faces the lodge. This represents looking at both the past and the present. The buffalo, to the Lakota and many other plains' tribes, represents life. In the past, they benefited from every part of the buffalo. They wasted nothing. I recall the story of Moses and the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness. God provided for them by giving them quail and manna. They were told to take only what they needed. The Native Americans did the same with the buffalo. They took only what was necessary to survive. The systematic killing of the buffalo by the white man destroyed not only the animal, but a way of life for these people. The buffalo skull represents death, but it also represents life. The spirit of the buffalo remains. It is there to support the pipe. It is there in a truthfulness of giving. It is to be honored.

The fire is prepared hours before the purification ceremony. Many people only arrive in time to participate in the sweat. It has been my observation that the ones who benefit the most from a ceremony

are the ones who help in the preparations for the ceremonies. Each step in the preparation contains a teaching, for everything in this way has meaning.

If you arrive early, you might see someone remove the ashes from the previous fire and then scrape the earth. When I arrive early, I begin by doing this. The scraping away of the earth beneath the old fire is about us. It is the removing of ignorance, a removal of the primal, physical urges of the body. It is preparing us for a cleansing away of the things we do not need in our lives anymore. The one to begin preparing the fire draws a medicine wheel on the earth with tobacco where the new fire will be built.

When I build the fire, I do so as I was shown. Others may do it differently with a different teaching. When a fire is built in a sacred manner, it is all good. When I build the fire, I lay the tobacco. Then I place four logs on the ground, laying West and East. I put four more logs on top of them going North and South. They are of equal balance. These logs remind me that everything is equal and show me that opposites can "balance." They teach us about the negative and the positive. With the fire built in this way, there will be a new beginning, a spiritual beginning, moving from the low road, West to East, to the high road going from North to South.

I always lay the first seven stones gently on top of the wood, one for each direction, beginning in the West, moving to the North, on to the East, and then to the South. Then I put one in the fire for all that is Above, one for below, and one for Wakan Tanka(God). Many other stones are then added.

The fire gives of itself to help others. It also shows us the process of receiving. It burns according to the way we give to it and shows us through the movement of the flame different answers about what is happening and what is to come. In watching the fire, I have learned that it gives me answers, not only about my life, but also about what is taking place during a vision quest.

If more than one person is on the hill, signs in one area of the fire may correlate to advancement or difficulties being felt by the person in that area of the hill. If the fire burns well on all sides but the East, a person in the East may be having trouble. If only one person is on the hill, this difficulty may be arising out of the East with a birth of new ideas, a birth of inner knowing or new understanding as they move forward on their medicine wheel.

There is a teaching of acceptance with the fire as I make it, trust it, and pray with it. After the fire is burning, some people come and pray to the directions, giving a small amount of tobacco to the fire after they complete their prayer. The manner in which the fire is built and cared for comes into the sweat lodge.

For purification sweats, the fire builder places as much wood on the fire as is necessary for the purpose of that sweat. However, during a vision quest, supporters keep the fire burning day and night until the people praying on the hill return to the lodge. As long as it burns, the energy around the fire is connected with the energy on the hill. After everyone returns and the final sweat is over, the fire is then allowed to burn down on its own.

Watching the fire helps people gain understanding. The fire shares. It sends up our prayers. It provides its own energy.

After repeated use, the rocks used disintegrate until they can no longer hold the fire. They are thought to have given their "lives" for our benefit. When they are no longer useable, these sacred rocks go into the hoop. This hoop or arch of spent stones around the west edge of the sweat lodge fire represents the band of the Milky Way, with the rocks being returned to it just as we are returned into the Milky Way after our life force is spent.

This hoop, if it were raised up would arch over the sweat lodge. It would then move into the earth and come back around, becoming a full circle or sphere. This represents the universe.

As the hoop reaches upward, it encompasses all of the universe, both illusion and reality. We live in illusion when we believe that the physical is all there is. Reality is attained by the realization of our true spiritual selves. Between illusion and reality is confusion.

When we live in illusion, we chase after physical things. We tend to see illusion, accept it, and do not see beyond it. Since we have chosen to inhabit the earth at this time, it is our task to learn what is illusion and what is reality.

One day Gary called me over before the sweat. We had been talking about Iktome earlier in the day. He said, "Susanne, go sit in the lodge and look carefully."

I did so. When I returned, he began drawing on the ground. Sitting inside the lodge, I could see the similarities in the structure and nature. The support posts are made from young willow trees and bound by tying them. The willows make a form similar to Iktome, the spider

who brings us lessons on illusion and reality.

It also connects us to the universe, because the shape of a star is formed in the top of the frame for all to see. Cloth tarps are molded over this form so securely that no light enters and the steam from the sacred rocks stays in the lodge. In most Lakota lodges, the door faces the West.

We arrive at a sweat ceremony early to make our prayer ties and make preparations for the sweat or the ceremony. This has become most meaningful to me. I remember the prayer ties I made at my very first sweat. Making prayer ties helps me focus, meditate, and pray. When I pray and make prayer ties, I easily remember why I am here. The chit-chat in my head stops. My mind becomes more clear and open. I look forward to vision quests or Sun Dances for I spend hours in prayer. I'm now able to more easily bring the joy and bliss I feel at that time into my everyday life. As a result, I'm more able to act rather than react, remaining more balanced.

During prayer, all four parts of self become more focused: the body (physical action of doing); the heart (the emotion of what I say); the mind (thinking of what I am doing and saying); and the spirit (my soul). As I put prayers into these ties, an energy from inside is placed out in front of me, causing a path to open which becomes the high road.

When making prayer ties, we are engaging the right hemisphere of our brain, the side where dreams come from. It is our creative, spiritual side. The energy will then come back to us as an answer, in or outside the lodge.

Making prayer ties makes the prayer tangible. The energy goes away from us and into the prayer tie as we tie it. We release this energy and bind it into the cloth. The prayer is becoming true even as we speak it. We are giving it to the Grandfathers. We let the Spirits begin to work. Our belief and trust are an important part of this process. Answers many times come even as the prayer ties are being made.

We take our prayer ties into the sweat lodge. When we get inside, we hang the prayer ties above us on the frame of the lodge. They will remain inside the lodge for at least four days while the prayers are answered.

After four days, or when someone prepares for another sweat, the prayer ties within the lodge are taken out and placed in the fire to be carried up to Wakan Tanka.

A vision quest is an opportunity for each questor to leave the world and spend time alone with God. It is a time to surrender my will to what the Grandfathers and the spirits and Wakan Tanka choose to share with me. It is a time to pray, a time to watch, and a time to listen. When I first decide to do a vision quest, what I call opportunities and what some others call tests begin. Then when I present my pipe to quest for the vision, the energy increases. As the spirits work, I see my lessons in life more clearly, so I may learn my own private truths. Everything that happens from the time the pipe is presented prepares me for what will be coming with the quest.

During the four day purification before the actual quest, the energy increases which intensifies situations and feelings for me. An energy switch takes place as I walk toward the quest. I move from the physical to the mental to the emotional and then to the spiritual when it is time to be placed on the hill. It is important to stay as balanced as possible to have clarity about what is happening, to understand, and to learn. The more balanced I can remain as I walk up that hill, the better the quest will be. It all sounds so simple, but is sometimes quite difficult.

This is a time to learn how difficult it would be if we did not have easy access to water. During purification, I have sometimes asked for help to make sure that I do not touch water. This is a part of the hanbleceya. Perhaps it is important for us to learn that we must ask for help. Not touching water is a very good way to learn not only to appreciate water, but to appreciate all that we take for granted.

At my first vision quest, a man who was just beginning to follow the traditional ways quested at the same time. He was either not told or did not hear when he was told about not touching water during the four days of purification. He showered every day. The rain soaked me for the first day. After we came down and I learned he had showered daily, I tried to take my mind off him and remember what I thought about while sitting on that hill. I focused on, "Whatever happens on this vision quest is an opportunity for me to learn. I understood a birth in me was taking place. There is always a breaking of water with a birth, and with every quest, we are reborn. There is a letting go that takes place while you are on the hill. Something dies and something is born anew."

Everything that takes place on a vision quest is perfect for the questor. It is well orchestrated. I was told by Gary, "Your first hanbleceya is about your future. You might consider doing a quest every year for

the next few years. You will understand what was shown to you during your quest during the following year. In fact, in three and four years, or even years from now, something will happen to bring you back to what you saw in your first vision quest. It will bring confirmation of your thoughts and a new understanding of life. Vision quests bring a much greater understanding of the entire universe. You will know more about how we are all related.”

Since learning about this way, I have thought many times, “Why have we not done more praying in this manner?” Long before White Buffalo Calf Woman brought the pipe, the Native Americans were doing vision quests. They were fasting and praying for answers. The Bible even gives examples of similar quests. Moses went off to the mountain. Jesus went out into the wilderness. The Apostles fasted and prayed for guidance after Jesus died. How had I read the Bible so many times looking for my answers and never even considered doing this for myself? Why did I have to wait so long to discover this beautiful way to find answers?

A vision quest is a time to pray for self and a time to heal. Balance comes with this healing. With balance entering, more health enters for self and everyone within our environment. It also helps others asking for help. Balanced energy walking upon the Mother Earth helps heal her. I wonder what would happen if the leaders of our country would take the time to heal themselves before they tried to lead the Nation? What would happen if they sought answers in this way?

I have learned how important it is to notice everything that happens during hanbleceya. I attempt to notice what I am praying for as the leaves are blowing a certain direction. I pay attention to the change in the weather and how I deal with it. I watch the trees, the clouds, the colors, and the birds. Everything is bringing an answer. All is orchestrated perfectly.

All that come to my spot are delivering messages. They are representative of something in my life. I kill nothing that enters the prayer ties. I keep remembering “Be still and listen. Be still and learn. Watch. What is it bringing you? What can you learn from it? What is it teaching you?”

I am truly in awe of the way it all works. There are so many answers that are available to us once we open and are ready to listen and receive.

If we could just all learn to work together in our everyday lives

the same way we do during these quests. I have attended many vision quests, and every one of them has been unique, different, and wonderful. Supporters strive to leave their egos behind and work together as a group. We don't always accomplish this, but we all know when difficulties do arise, we are to look at the situation and our part in it. This is another opportunity for our growth.

Often, if discord happens with the supporters, the questor is perhaps having a very difficult time and is wrestling with a similar issue on the hill. Again, what is in the physical realm is also in the spiritual realm.

For my first quest, Gary had said, "Susanne, ask people to support you. Find three or four who can be there to help."

I wondered what they would do. I have found out that supporters help in many ways. They tend the fire, help with the food, possibly help gather rocks, and cut wood. I always ask two primary supporters to help me.

Those two help me do everything the day I go on the hill. This includes helping me put on new clothes after the sweat. Perhaps this represents the two they say come to help me cross over when I leave this earth.

These supporters eat and drink for me during the days and nights of the quest. They pray for me. Amazingly, it works! Even during a three night quest, I do not feel hungry. If I do get a little gnawing of hunger, I just send a message by thought to the supporters. Some supporter will hear. They may not like chicken, and yet they crave it and eat it for me. Later, the supporters find out why he or she was hungry for chicken while I was on the hill. A supporter may get thirsty for something he or she does not ordinarily choose to drink. As a supporter, it is important to listen for messages and to follow intuition. This may seem irrational, but it works.

Vision quests are generally scheduled after the thunder beings come out of the earth in the Spring and before they return to the earth in the fall. However, there are times when people feel they need to quest in the cold of winter. This is a personal decision.

Vision quests have been done in the coldest part of winter. The weather tells a great deal about the person's life going on the hill. I saw a man go up in December in Oklahoma and it was unusually warm for he was entering the East on the Medicine Wheel. On the other hand, I have seen it turn unusually cool, actually cold, in the

middle of summer when someone else went up, a person who was in the North. I have seen a woman choose to quest in December and the temperature hit a record low in Oklahoma. When her ex-husband went up the following fall, the temperature soared to a record high. Perhaps this is how far apart their lives were together. I've experienced vision quests that were very hot, cold, wet, and dry. All were perfect for what was necessary to be learned.

It is always a good feeling when the questor returns to the lodge. It is still a serious time, and no one speaks. The supporters bring back the questor in silence. They quietly gather all the questor took on the hill and bring it back to the lodge. Inside the lodge, the questor is able to see all of those who supported. He or she does not speak until the sweat begins unless the one conducting the vision quest gets into the lodge and asks a question. While the supporters hurry to dress for the sweat, drink is offered to the questor sitting in the lodge waiting.

During the sweat comes the opportunity to share what happened from the time the one questing went on the hill until returning to the lodge. Answers are brought back to the people. Even though something took place on the hill for the person doing the quest, it may be something a supporter needs to hear and something that each and everyone can use. This is only one way the person's prayers and fasting help the rest of the people.

After the sweat is completed, there is a feast to honor those who have returned from the hill. Usually a large stew is made. Traditional foods may also be served, such as choke cherries that have been thickened and sweetened with sugar.

As soon as possible, there is a give away. It may be during the feast or following the feast. This is a wonderful experience in and of itself for the questors now have the opportunity to give back to those who have supported them. It is an opportunity to practice "letting go" of attachments. Some people make things to give away. Others take what they have and love from home and give it away. It is good to give the best possible, for the people who have supported have done the same. This is an exchange of energy.

I gave beautiful gifts at my first vision quest, but when times were more difficult and money more scarce, I spent time gathering little stones that represented my supporters. I spread them out for my giveaway and told my friends there was a stone personally picked for

each of them. There was also a reason why I picked each rock for the person. I told them to use their intuition and see if they could pick the rock that was theirs. Amazingly enough, only one person picked a rock that I had not picked for them. Word gifts went with the rocks. After each chose their stone, I shared with them what the meaning of this rock had for them. Everyone seemed to enjoy this just as much as the more expensive gifts I had presented in the past. A give away is another opportunity to pass the energy of love.

Many people ask if it is appropriate to give money to the person to whom they presented their pipe. This is a difficult question. The person receiving their pipe most likely accepted it with no expectation of receiving money in return. I believe a donation of money from the one requesting assistance is a way to have an exchange of energy. The person putting someone up takes a great deal of energy and time to help others. It is energy that would be spent in a different direction had the person not been asked to do this. If I decide to do a vision quest and feel good about making a monetary donation, I give my blanket plus a donation. I attempt to give my best and everyone is happy, including me. I feel good. Others have given far more than I could possibly consider giving. The gifts have always seemed to be appreciated the same.

Sometimes a person decides to do a “wopila” which is a give away feast for supporters. In other words, a few weeks following the ceremony, the person holds a feast for all those who have come to support. This is a good way to give back to the people. It is all a choice.

John gave me this suggestion and I have been glad that I carefully listened to his words. “When returning home after a quest, be gentle with yourself for you are still wakan or in a holy state for four days. You have sacrificed and fasted for yourself personally and for the people. This is a time to re-energize. It is a good time to gift yourself with lots of water, proper food, and rest. During this time, answers always continue to come. Dreams during the quest will be recalled. Insignificant details may be remembered and studied.”

After many ceremonies, I understood being “wakan.” Our bodies must return to the physical. There is an energy change as the questor goes from the spiritual, to emotional, to mental, and then to physical. By the fourth day, those attending spiritual ceremonies that are this intense are able to integrate back into life in a new way.

I was also told, "As you walk back into your normal world, you adjust to it in a new way as a better you. As you face your normal storms, you can move quickly in your mind to that spot, that place on the hill, where you were more centered and balanced."

The vision quest is different from the Sun Dance. The quest is for the questor. Others benefit from this sacrifice, but the focus is on self. On the other hand, the Sun Dance focuses on the healing of all the people, the world, and what is taking place upon it. Yes, the dancers and supporters receive messages about their own lives, but the focus is on healing of all.

The Sun Dance is considered the most sacred of the seven rites. In the past, the government did not allow the Native Americans to hold their Sun Dances. The Sun Dance continued in secret. In 1978, the government passed The American Indian Religious Freedom Act which permitted open participation in previously banned religious ceremonies. Now, every year more and more dancers come to dance. Non-Indian people are also joining in these ceremonies when allowed to do so.

Once a Sun Dancer makes the commitment through the pipe to dance, this person is bound. Supporters are invited to attend and help with preparations for the dance. They eat and drink for the dancer during the four days of dancing and assist in feeding all the people attending the dance.

A Sun Dance requires months of planning and preparation. Singers are presented pipes to attend the dance. If they accept the pipe, they are committed. The arbor has to be built. Boughs of pines must be cut for the tops of the arbor to provide shade. There are sweat lodges to be constructed, rocks to be gathered. Enough wood must be cut to last the entire Sun Dance. Large quantities of sage and medicine herbs are gathered to make the teas for doctoring the dancers when necessary. The grounds are prepared for the large group of people who attend. Camping areas are cleared. Food is purchased to be prepared for hundreds who come to support, pray, and be healed. Tipis are raised.

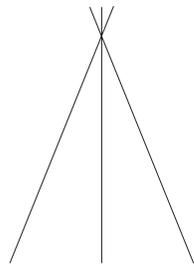
There are four days of purification before the Sun Dance. Each day of purification, the excitement grows as more people arrive and make their camps. The Sun Dance begins from the moment one enters the grounds, for everything that takes place has meaning for the supporters and the Sun Dancers. It is planned well by the Grandfathers

to bring teachings to each of us in different ways.

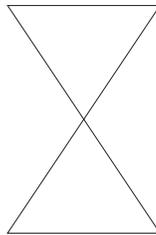
After purification begins, the dancers are to keep their focus, prepare, and pray. They may purify in the same way one does for a vision quest. Sometimes the Sun Dance leaders make other requirements of the Sun Dancers. Perhaps the intercessor receives information as to what to do during purification. The leader and the intercessor are generally two separate men. While the Sun Dancers make their preparations, the supporters also have a great amount of work. Every day is very active for everyone involved.

Each dancer must make certain that all dance apparel is ready. The dancers make hundreds of prayer ties and prayer flags to go on the tree. Supporters may also make prayer ties to be placed on the tree. Prayer ties are sometimes made to go around the entire arbor. Each dancer makes bracelets, ankle bands, and head pieces of sage to wear when dancing.

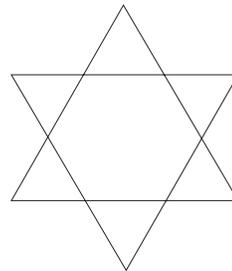
One day as Gary and I talked, he gave me more understanding. "In the old way, a dancer wore two braids. A yellow line was painted down the middle of the hair line. This signified balancing the two sides of man, the left and right brain of the masculine and feminine energy.



Yellow



Two Triangles



Two Triangles
form a star

This also has other meanings. It represents a tipi (the first three poles of the tipi), a star (the two triangles), and the trinity. It represents Sun, Buffalo, and Man. They no longer paint the yellow down the hair line. Today, some wear a medicine wheel with a feather attached to it in their hair. This symbolizes what is inside of man."

On the last day of purification, the tree is brought in. Prayer ties, flags, and ropes are added. It is a tree that has given its life for the

healing of the people and the world. The healing and energy of prayer from every Sun Dance must reach far and wide. People may feel the results of a Sun Dance that do not even know the word.

The Sun Dance provides us with a teaching principle that belongs to the Native American people. It is a teaching from the tree. When a person goes to Sun Dance and prays, answers for that person are discovered.

Many healings occur during Sun Dance. I danced with one woman who had diabetes until five years before I danced with her. She shared that she received a healing at Sun Dance. She has not had to take insulin since that time.

I've danced with another man, Bob, who was told by medical doctors that he could not work the rest of his life because of heart problems. As a result of his condition, he was about to lose his home and all he owned. He came to the Sun Dance and stood in the healing round. Then he made a decision to sweat. He stood outside the sweat lodge and talked to Wakan Tanka. He prayed, "Give me life or give me death, for it is your choice. I am going to sweat and pray for my healing and for the healing of others." His wife was very worried that he wouldn't survive the sweat, but he did. He then decided to dance. He made the same prayer and danced one day with us. He came back the following year and told us of the healing he had received the previous year after people prayed over him in that healing line. He was back working full time and living a full life.

Another man had come with his wife to support and then decided to go into the Sun Dance circle for the healing round. He was assisted by others as he came out into the healing line. He was then placed in a chair. He wore an oxygen tank and could not even walk alone for more than ten feet or so. He was completely off the oxygen tank by the next Sun Dance.

During the Sun Dance, one often feels an unbelievable connection with the beautiful creator. As the sun or the rain beats down on the dancers, it supplies energy to continue. With the connection and energy building each day, the dancers become one with all.

The Sun Dance continually teaches about energy and movement around the medicine wheel. We feel the spiral of energy. This spiraling outward is represented by the dancers as they spiral out in a circle and then progress on to the next direction.

By the end of the fourth day of Sun Dance, it seems that all in

attendance gain a new respect for each other. The dancers know how much the supporters help and the supporters appreciate the sacrifice made by the dancers.

As this growing connection with the pipe and these ways continued through the year, I began to feel nudged through dreams and thoughts to present a pipe to Gary for my fourth vision quest. Finally I stopped resisting and again presented the pipe to Gary.

PREPARING FOR ANOTHER SACRED QUEST

Gary accepted the pipe and handed it back to me. Rather than saying, "How many days?" as he previously had done when accepting pipes for quests, he said, "I'll be at Bear Butte in South Dakota in the middle of the summer and will be available to do hanbleceyas." I interpreted his remark to mean I was to do this fourth vision quest in the sacred Black Hills. I had planned to go on the hill in Oklahoma, but now it sounded as if I were to do it at Bear Butte. Not knowing for sure, I made some prayer ties to find my answer.

Confirmation came in the following sweat. I shared my answer with others. Friends and John also decided to quest there.

After the sweat, we were having a delicious feast when Gary leaned back, smiled, and said, "It's graduation time." I knew from his comment that I was preparing for an unforgettable event. I prayed that I would be given the opportunity to move forward into the next portion of the medicine wheel. Doors would open and I would be free to give back what I had learned.

Life was packed with more lessons and answers as I walked toward this hanbleceya. I made prayer ties and began to acquire all I needed to do this vision quest. People from Oklahoma and Texas offered to go and support us. Savannah, John's daughter, telephoned to say she would be joining us on the trip. Both tension and excitement grew as the time to travel to South Dakota finally came.

On a warm Tuesday in July, John, Savannah, and I left in John's van. My desire was to get there quickly. I hoped to arrive on Wednesday. We were to go up on the hill on Friday. John wanted to make a few stops along the way. When we stopped at a large tourist spot, I asked, "John, what are we doing?"

"I thought we would make this a fun trip and stop to see some sights."

I slowly responded. "I thought we were going to do that

afterwards? It was my understanding that you didn't like being around people much during purification."

"Well, we may as well see some sights on the way."

Suddenly, I realized we had two different plans. My plan was to get to Bear Butte as quickly as possible and have play time on the return trip, camping and traveling with others on a slow, fun path home. John's son, Boston, was to join us in New Mexico on the return trip, and we were to rendezvous with a group of people, including Boston and Savannah. John's agenda was different. He hoped to have Savannah enjoy the trip more by moving towards our vision quest spots slowly, stopping at different points of interest along the way.

I kept trying not to be tense and to just let things be. I voiced my concerns and attempted to stay balanced. I felt ambivalent, but I knew this was a test of patience as we traveled toward Bear Butte. I was being given the opportunity to surrender, set my ego aside, and allow everything to simply fall into place. It was both difficult and easy at times, just as in all of life. I knew this situation was taking place so that I might see something else about myself more clearly. As usual, lessons were stronger during purification time, and this trip was taking place within the four days before the quest. I knew the more balanced I stayed, the better the vision quest. Two nights passed.

As I saw Bear Butte from a distance on the third day, a wave of relief came over me. We had made it. We were finally there! The sun hitting the rocks on the butte made a beautiful purple sight. John smiled as he watched the tension roll off me. I knew there would be friends waiting for us, wondering what had kept us.

We moved closer, following the road around the base further into this inactive volcano. Grass was plentiful and we saw a herd of buffalo grazing, content to just be there.

John stopped at the Rangers' Station to ask questions. We learned from the rangers that the Native Americans consider the butte to be sacred ground even though it is now a state park. The rangers showed great respect for this belief.

They guided us to a private road leading to a meadow used for religious purposes. The meadow was thick and lush. The terrain to the West moved into a rolling hill, while the meadow in the North and East gradually became more steep as it extended until it finally reached tall, rugged, vertical cliffs against a clear blue sky. The area was spectacular and yet peaceful.

Three sweat lodge frames were visible in the meadow. One had been covered with tarps. We could see a fire already burning. John parked the van. We didn't even get the door open before friends ran up to greet us. They looked relieved to see us arrive. I am certain I also had a look of renewed calm on my face as I greeted them. It was almost sun down.

Gary greeted us and suggested we go to find our sacred spaces where we would individually pray in the upcoming days, pointing in the direction of a trail ahead. We only had a short time to explore before darkness came. John and I moved along the trail that wound through clusters of pine trees. Smaller trails forked off the main one. We noticed there were signs posted to notify those walking on the trails that Native Americans were praying in certain areas and people were not to go beyond the signs.

We saw bundles of prayer flags left in trees. Some of the trees had rocks placed in the forked branches. Obviously, many had prayed on this beautiful mountain. I felt an awesome reverence as we explored.

We made it to the top of the mountain. On the way down, John found his spot. I did not find mine, but I felt so pleased to be there that I did not care. I trusted that everything, from the trip to what would be taking place in the next few days, was being carefully orchestrated.

As the sun moved toward the horizon, the time came to sweat. Fatigue was starting to slow me down. After the sweat, I visited a short time with those who came to support and with others from other states who had asked Gary to do their vision quests also. We ate some stew, which we greatly appreciated. Fasting would begin at midnight for those going up the following day and that included me.

After a good night's sleep, we rose early. I made myself a glass of sweet grass tea and chose a spot under a tree to sit and make my prayer flags. I looked around at all the people who were there, feeling a special attachment to all of them. I then watched as Gary gently visited with each person going on the hill.

As I sat there, the cliffs and rocks to the East kept beckoning me. I became so intrigued by them that I had a difficult time concentrating on anything else. Gary came over and sat down beside me. For a long while, neither one of us spoke a word. I knew he was listening to my silent prayers as I filled my flags with them. This was our fourth hanbleceya together, and we knew each other well. We spoke without words. Finally, he asked, "Susanne, do you know where

you are going yet?"

Without hesitation, I replied and motioned to my right. "I didn't find my spot last night, but I am going to the East...over there...but not too far up."

I wanted to go to the majestic cliffs that looked like the doors opening out, but was not certain I could climb as high as they seemed to be. I only knew for sure that I was to go to the East. It was as if the Grandfather in the East was calling me. Gary asked John and Tracy where their spots were located. John was going to the West, and Tracy had picked the East, also. Afterwards, Gary turned to me, saying, "Susanne, since John is going high in the West, I will go with him and help him. Fred and a few others will go with us. Carl and the others will take you and Tracy."

I grinned. "Fine." He then left to do other things.

I was ready. I gathered all my offerings to take with me and put them by the sweat lodge. My seven stones were already in the fire. I filled my pipe and sat down in the lodge to wait, trying to rid myself of this feeling of impatience. I was ready to go and I wanted to sweat. I could not wait to get to the spot that seemed to be calling me. I wasn't certain I could even get us up there.

Gary finally announced to all that it was time. The rocks were ready. We were ready. After a one-round sweat and many prayers, we all changed into the clothes we were to wear while on our quest. Our supporters waited to carry up the things we needed to take with us.

FOURTH VISION QUEST

I stepped outside the lodge and stood there waiting for the others. I watched as John headed to the West. He was taking a buffalo robe with him. I took a few minutes to say a silent prayer for him as I watched him head in that direction up the mountain. Then I turned and saw that we were ready to move to the East. Carl led and everyone fell in line. We began to follow the path and then we moved off the path through the meadow. The grass was tall and green. It seemed as if I couldn't stop my feet, except when Carl stopped four times for us to pray, once for each direction, as we moved up the mountain. As we climbed higher, Carl pointed out several sites to me, saying, "Susanne, it looks beautiful from here."

I kept motioning him to go higher. We went higher and higher until I finally reached the two large cliffs that had called to me while I made my prayer ties in the meadow. They looked like "my" doors, and I felt as though I had "made it."

As I stopped, the supporters looked doubtfully at each other. It was very rocky. Carl asked me questioningly, "Are you sure about this spot?"

Without hesitating, I nodded, "Yes."

Supporters began to place the trees around me. Since my area was rocky, they could not dig holes to place them in the ground as usual. Several supporters quickly gathered stones and placed them around the base of the trees to which I had tied my prayer flags. The prayer ties were then unrolled around the trees, enclosing me within. I felt safe. Their prayers began. Each supporter said an individual prayer for me. I felt immense joy as I listened to the love in those prayers. The support overwhelmed me. People had come from Oklahoma, Colorado, Arizona, and Louisiana.

They sang a song and left me to pray. I was again reminded of what we must do every time there is a death and a birth in life, even when there is physical death. We must leave that person's spirit for the

time being. We must turn our back and go in the direction of life, while the person's spirit returns to God. Then I was alone. I spread sage over an area where I could rest.

It had been at least eighteen hours since I had eaten anything, and I felt somewhat weak after the long climb to this beautiful high spot. I looked around at all I had with me in my tiny area. Everything I needed was there. I had a bucket, a ladle, a knife, and an ax. What had these items come to represent to me? A bucket is taken to "receive" gifts from the spirits. The ladle represents acceptance of this gift. The knife is for practical purposes, such as cutting the string of prayer ties to leave the spot upon completion of the quest. Perhaps the bucket, ladle, knife, and ax are all I need to survive in nature. Memories flooded in from my first vision quest three years ago.

I stood, overlooking it all. It was Friday afternoon, the first day. It was difficult to believe that I was standing on Bear Butte. I knew deep within me that this special space had been calling to me for a long time. I had seen it before in a vision. There was a large cliff on each side of me. I felt as if this were my temple. The cliffs represented doors, and those doors were opening "out" to the world. That was important to me, since I had spent so much time going inward to my center.

I wanted to break through a barrier with that fourth quest. With help, I would move through that barrier to the light and learn how to soar and how to bring what had been inside me to the outside.

I stood on solid rock, very rough solid rock. One foot was lower than the other. It was definitely not going to be comfortable, but I knew that I had not chosen this spot for comfort. I had come to pray. I had no intention of coming so high up, but I felt happy. This small space was "mine." Here I would be receiving many answers in the following two nights and days.

As I faced West, I saw a magnificent view of a lake far in the distance. The sun reflected on its still waters, making it look almost like a mirror. Directly in front of me, the rock extended out approximately four feet, making a ledge that dropped off sharply to what appeared to be a long way to the bottom. A large pine tree rose above the ledge directly in front of me. Its roots must have been strong for this tree to be able to push through the rock and grow to be so magnificently large. I wondered if its birth was difficult? How hard must it have been for this tree to push through rock in order to grow? Rock and wood. I looked

down at the pipe in my hand. What makes up the sacred pipe? Rock and wood.

When something is alive, it can push up and break through impenetrable barriers. It then brings joy and happiness to the many who come in contact with it.

From where I was standing, I could not see the tree's beginnings, the bottom of the trunk. How had it become so tall and magnificent? I could only imagine. Its roots must have become quite large, going into the earth and becoming deeper and wider with time. This helped it become even stronger. It obviously had weathered many storms. Still it was beautiful and perfect, growing to be much larger than any other tree I could see. As it stood straight and tall in front of me, I knew it would teach me much.

Looking down, I could see a part of the camp below. It seemed so small. The people looked very tiny, but some were still distinguishable. I was so high and at such an angle that I heard no sounds from the camp. The only sound I heard was the beautiful music of nature.

To the North of me was another pine tree. It was only about eight feet tall and had a small, thorny bush at its feet. An eagle's nest was nestled into the ledge not far from me. Standing there, I almost had to pinch myself to make certain this was truly happening. I remembered being told in a ceremony one night long ago that I would hear the sound of the eagle on a vision quest.

To the East, I could see the mountain gently slope down to meet the horizon. I became excited, because I knew I was going to be able to see the sun as it made its first appearance each morning. I would be able to experience its awakening, its light, its energy, and its warmth.

The view to the South was breathtaking. I could see for miles. I looked over the slope of the mountain, noting where the pine trees ended. At that level, the trees became more sparse and there was more grass. The grass turned a deep green, covering the gentle slope of the mountain and the valley at the bottom. There was a road in the distance and a patchwork landscape made by the fields. Looking back, I could see my life fit together just as neatly as this patchwork of fields. I could see the fields through which my own path traveled, leading me to this cliff where I chose to spend this time in prayer.

Every change in my life has made a drastic difference. Each

major change has brought a new beginning and a new field to work. Each beginning created a new me with a different energy. Quickly after I changed from calling myself Susanne instead of Susie, this spiritual path opened for me. With understandings internalized on this path, another name came to me..."Zinctkala Zee Wi," or in English "Yellow Bird Woman." Gifts will come with this name, just as gifts came with the new energy of "Susanne."

As a yellow butterfly landed on my lap, I felt as if hundreds of seeds were around me as I looked at my prayer ties made specially for this vision quest. I knew my prayers would be answered if I could keep my commitment and remain within my ties for two days and two nights. Every tie contained a prayer to gain a new energy, the energy of my spiritual Lakota name. With this new energy, I hoped to release what had kept me bound and bring that which was within me to the outside. I felt a new life was coming to me with the energy of this name and this vision quest...with the growth of the seeds. I listened to the song of a bird and the call of eagles as I sat thinking about new life and the changes it might bring.

What had brought me, a fifty-two year old, well-educated woman from Oklahoma to this precarious spot on a sacred mountain in South Dakota to pray and find my answers?

As the sun went behind the mountain, a slight chill danced across my body. The supporters had placed the trees that set up my boundaries very close together. I was to stay within a spot about three feet by five feet. I knew Gary had instructed the supporters to do this. It was made much smaller than any space I ever had for a quest. I draped my new wool blanket around me. I wondered if fuzz would get on the new yellow hanbleceya dress that my cousin had made for me. I chuckled as I wondered who out here would care, the birds? the butterflies?

My first impression was that my spot was solid rock, surrounded by cliffs. Then I noticed holes all around that I had not seen before. Suddenly, I realized what I had done!

Gary had warned me about rattlesnakes at Bear Butte. For weeks he teased me, "Susanne, you had better choose your spot carefully at Bear Butte. If you wake up, roll over gently. Move slowly, so the snake which has cuddled up to you will have time to move out of the way. It is important not to scare it."

Now it looked as if I were standing on an area that the snakes

had chosen long before I. I said my evening prayers, praying to all the directions. “Grandfather of the West, Grandfather of the North, Grandfather of the East, Grandfather of the South, Spotted Eagle who carries our prayers to Wakan Tanka, this beautiful Earth who is now like our Mother, the Highest Spirits working with me, and Wakan Tanka, thank you for this opportunity. Thank you, Jesus Christ, for guiding me here in such a beautiful way. You have blessed every choice I have made in my life from my physical birth on and have helped me learn so much already from those choices. Thank you for the drastic changes that caused me to step upon a spiritual path seven years ago to move me closer to you. For this, I am grateful. Thank you for blessing the beautiful people who have kept these traditions alive. Reach down and touch them. Bring them their health and help. Help Gary, as he has helped so many others. I ask that you bring answers to the supporters here and to those supporting that are unable to be here as you bring me answers. Thank you for bringing health and help to others who are fasting and praying at this time and to all our families at home. You know the prayer I have made about my birth as I walked toward this space. I am grateful for answers I have already received and for what you are preparing for this time we spend together. If possible, help me become more like that phoenix, rising from my own ashes and helping others to do the same, understanding so much more about self and relatedness to all, for this will help us cross-culturally.”

I then seriously prayed aloud for the snake nation to hear what I had to say. “For the snake nation, I ask a blessing, and I ask that each snake please listen and hear what I am about to share with you. I am here to pray. I am not here to harm you in any way and, if you come, I will just have to stay and share this spot with you in a good way. You see, I must remain here. Please understand this is for the health and help of all people and creatures of every kind. Mitakuye Oyasin.”

I felt so peaceful as I settled in for the evening. I wasn’t even afraid. Did those dreams about snakes heal me that much? Obviously, they prepared me in some way to release a fear, because I faced this trial much differently than I would have in the past.

I watched the pale blue fade from the sky. The colors of the cliffs changed as the sun moved below the horizon. As the sky became a brilliant dark blue, the evening star appeared. Others followed until the sky was gloriously lit. The big dipper seemed to rest on this mountain. The North Star was directly above Bear Butte. The Milky

Way was aglow. I felt as if I could reach out and touch the stars. The moon was waning.

As I watched, clouds were forming in the West. The wind picked up, and it was getting colder. Something was definitely different this quest. A storm was approaching and I felt happy about the arrival of the thunder beings. The lightning began. As it came closer, I thought how lightning arouses, how it heals, how it illuminates, how it provides the necessary energy to begin every prayer's movement around the medicine wheel. It danced across the sky and on top of the mountain. Nature was giving me a magnificent fireworks show. The long drawn-out rolls of thunder announced the arrival of the Grandfathers. As the clouds moved toward us, they covered the stars.

The lightning looked blue. I remembered what Gary shared with me about lightning. There are three colors. The red lightning removes negativity and destroys that which is not good so new life can come from it. The yellow lightning simply destroys the negative in this world. This is the lightning that splits the trees in such a way that there is no more growth. The blue lightning hits things that are holy. It hits places and things that are sacred to recharge them and give them more energy. As I watched all that was happening, I prayed for John and others who were also doing a vision quest.

A knowing ran through my body. John and I were both fasting and praying at the same time. We had always supported each other before with only one of us questing at a time. Now, we were standing in different directions. He was in the West and I was in the East. I wondered what this meant and how it would affect us in the future.

I could not think about John and our relationship for long, because the wind picked up and became very strong. A thought came to me. Stand up and greet it. Face into it. I stood up to greet it...just as it spiraled up the chimney in front of me. With all my might, I tightly held on to my pipe and prayed. It seemed as if the sky opened up and a torrent of rain fell on me. Again I knew something was truly different. I felt exhilarated and very alive with no fear of cold and wet. For this birthing, there must be a breaking of water. I understood! Our prayers were strong and were being answered. It felt as if the Grandfathers were responding as intensely as our preparations for this hanbleceya had been. Preparations for this quest had been different, more difficult. We had driven many miles and chosen spots which took great effort to reach. In addition, it was as if I could feel the energy and power of all

those who had been here before me. I could feel, see, and hear them through the wind, rain, lightning, and thunder.

I wrapped my blanket around me and lay as flat as I could, keeping the pipe dry and pointed to the West. The wind was coming from all directions. At one point, the wind lifted me up off the rock. The "Spirit of the Wind" was moving in and through me. I could feel the energy coming with the wind beneath me, around me, and above me. I felt surrounded by it. It felt like a small tornado. The wind put me back down as gently as it had picked me up. I could feel the rock beneath me again.

With all that was happening around me, I felt exhausted and sleepy. How could that be? With it cold, stormy, and windy, I began to doze. At least, my eyes were closed. A bright light suddenly surrounded me. I felt something begin to touch me on different parts of my body. I could see the color of prayer flags as they reached over to touch me. I realized the dream was the new birth. I knew I was being accepted, welcomed, and encouraged.

I opened my eyes. It was still raining, but now there was no wind and the rain fell gently. I watched the storm move slowly across the sky to the East and then disappear. It was very dark and I felt it was around 3:00 in the morning. I sat up, facing into the West and saw only dark clouds above me. Further West, I saw purple and pink clouds. Behind those clouds, I could see stars. What was this, a sign? What did this mean? I pinched myself to be sure I was awake. I was. I felt something was being shown. I wondered if the others questing saw it? Pink represents love. Purple and pink together represent spiritual love. Were they telling us that love and joy would be coming? I felt exhilarated. I knew the Grandfathers were trying to communicate in every way with us. I lay there, happy and content, watching the stars and contemplating the messages of the night.

Instead of putting different prayers in each prayer tie as I had done in the past, Gary had instructed me to put the same prayer in every tie. This prayer had to do with opening new doors and how I would walk this path. The Grandfathers had heard. I felt they were telling me that I was now ready. They would show me what to do and open the doors. I felt I was going to begin a new journey, a deeper and more intense journey.

As morning neared and the stars were disappearing, I noticed the morning star, who brings wisdom and transformation from night to

day, from dark to light. I said my prayers with her.

Then everything seemed lighter and she disappeared. Daylight brought a new day. I looked at my flags to see if they had survived the storm. They had, but were now all leaning in different directions. The prayer ties were still there, but now many of them were on the ground. Everything had survived the storm. I felt extremely pleased and somewhat amazed that we were in tact.

The strength of the wind and rain had been more than I had ever dreamed I could experience unprotected. My amazement came from the joy and the lack of fear my faith had brought.

I looked to the East. A pink and gold haze preceded the sun, announcing the birth of a beautiful new day. The transformation from night to day had taken time, much like the transformation in my life over the previous seven years.

It was a cool, crisp morning. I heard the birds as they awakened and began to play. Then I heard a sound that I don't think I shall ever forget. It was a high pitched, loud whistle-like sound. I had heard a similar sound during Sun Dance. The men often blow eagle bone whistles as they dance. This whistle is also used during those rounds when dancers connect to the tree with a rope. It helps the one connecting to the tree focus and distance self from the pain. I suspected eagles were very near. The sound came from my right, slightly above me and about thirty feet away. I was unable to get a clear view of the nest I had previously spotted. I felt certain a family of eagles was now inhabiting the nest. From all the noise, I also guessed it was feeding time for the little ones. Sharing space with eagles was a rare and mystical experience. A feeling of oneness with nature overwhelmed me.

I napped. Sleeping was extremely difficult. My space was so small that I could not lie flat without being out of my ties. The rough, hard rock sloped at an angle to the left, preventing me from getting comfortable enough to even try to sleep without rolling out of my space. I positioned myself carefully. This didn't last long for the air changed from warm to hot and squelched any hope of sleeping. I had dressed for cold nights, but now my dress was stifling. The rays of the sun penetrated the dress and me. If I had been certain no one from camp below could see me, I'd have taken off my dress. But I wasn't sure. This and the probability of severe sunburn drove me to stay dressed and to opt for sweating. As many sweats as I've done, you'd think this

wouldn't really affect me, but it did. I also was starting to become thirsty.

I said a prayer and became absorbed in my surroundings in hopes of taking my mind off the heat and my thirst. I focused on the rocks. I looked at the solid rock that I sat upon. I then studied the cliffs carefully. The cliff on my left appeared to have many faces. The faces appeared very pained. They seemed to reflect the pain on the reservation and the pain I had felt in my lifetime. I allowed myself to feel pain as the rocks' rough features cried out to me. Then I noticed this same rock had allowed the seeds of dainty, yellow flowers to take root and grow there. The cliff gently held those beautiful little flowers in its crevices, protecting them, nourishing them, letting them bloom and flourish.

On my right stood the solid, smooth cliff. It was much higher than the cliff on the left. At the top of the solid, smooth cliff grew a beautiful bush. Only one white flower bloomed at the top of the bush. The bush extended straight out the side of the cliff, its' branches turning upward toward the sky. I knew if it could grow in what seemed an impossible place, defying its' adversaries, withstanding storms like the one we had experienced together the previous night, and still bloom, then I could also. I thought about Bible scriptures concerning rocks, about our foundations being made of sand or rock. After the storm, I was definitely glad my foundation here was rock. I sat upon it and paid attention to every butterfly, ant, bird, and insect that came to me, cherishing the moment.

According to the placement of the sun, it seemed to be afternoon. I sat holding my pipe and continued to face West. Again I saw little lights appear against the blue sky, the lights that come on all my quests. I mused as I watched. They have generally appeared in the sky, moved into the earth and risen out of the earth forming symbols. Then they would move back into the earth. I said aloud, "Thank you for coming. Now how are you going to do this?"

They showed me. Since there was no earth in front of me, they appeared in the sky and moved into the cliff to my right. As they came out of the cliff, they formed symbols. First a chalice, then a square with three dots over it, and a bird in flight. They all went into the cliff and came back out again making new symbols. I watched them in delight.

After they stopped, fatigue weighted my mind and body. I

wanted to contemplate the light's messages, but was too tired. I was certain the night would be cold and I would not sleep well, so I again made the decision to take a nap. I fell quickly asleep and started to dream. I saw my friend Allen and others standing in the middle of camp. A ball dropped from Heaven. A few jumped and reached for the ball, but Allen caught it. I then awoke. The dream was very short, yet so vivid. I thought about its meaning. Allen has supported me on every one of my quests and he was again in camp. He and Claudia planned to move to South Dakota soon and I knew I would miss him greatly. What had this dream meant? What came to mind was the ceremony of "The Ball Game," one of the ceremonies I had never experienced. In the past during this sacred rite, the ball represented a gift from Wakan Tanka. All the people tried to catch the ball. The one who caught it received a great blessing. It was said the ball would bring strength to the generations of the future. The ball was also to help the receiver be able to walk this sacred path with greater wisdom. I decided this must be a gift sent to Allen through my quest. I looked forward to sharing this with him in the lodge after I completed the commitment.

I watched the evening slowly turn to night. Again there were millions of stars. I slept better than expected and could not remember dreaming. Once again, I awoke with the morning star and watched first light appear.

The sunrise seemed more beautiful than ever. I watched as the sun moved higher into the sky. I knew this was my last day and wondered how much more time I had in this gorgeous spot? I looked around at the beauty. My thoughts turned to what had been shown to me. The cliffs became the doors outside of me and within me. They were opening outward offering me passage through their threshold. The flower became me, as I imagined opening and reaching up to the sun. As if perfectly orchestrated, I felt a feather brush against my left cheek at that exact moment. It startled me. Then I realized that the wing of an eagle had actually touched my cheek as it flew right by me. It soared out in front of me, hanging over the cliff, and then flew behind the cliff to my right, out of sight. Was it a baby eagle learning to fly? I felt like that young eagle. I was ready to fly, to soar. I was filled with appreciation.

I suddenly realized there had been no Iktome with me on this quest. Iktome sat in the South during my first three vision quests. Did

this mean that I would now be able to see reality more clearly than illusion? Had I made it to that higher field? Would Spotted Eagle Feather Man be helping me more now?

I wondered when Gary was going to come for me? I looked forward to seeing Kathy. She was going to arrive from Colorado after they had put me on the hill. I couldn't wait to hear what John and Tracy had learned on their quests. I thought about Inoquin, a descendent of Geronimo, and her husband Daniel, who were also "on the hill." I even began to think about our trip home later. We planned to have such a good time on our trip back to Oklahoma. I hoped someone made fry bread for the feast.

I heard footsteps. They were coming for me. Gary had sent Carl and three other supporters to bring me back to the lodge. I watched as they gently removed my prayer ties and flags. I had gathered some small rocks from within my tiny spot for keepsakes, but decided they were to stay here on this sacred mountain. I watched as the supporters placed my flags in the tree beside my spot. Carl told me to head down to the lodge. They would bring the rest of my things.

As I started my descent, I turned and looked around. I thanked all of them...the Grandfathers, Spotted Eagle, Grandmother, Wakan Tanka, Spotted Eagle Feather Man, the Inyan Wasicus (the stone people), and all other spirits who worked with me during this quest. They had brought me answers, protection, and love. I thanked them for my being shown this way, for all they had given me, and for what was coming in the future.

The sound of eagles...and the eagle who gently touched my cheek, I shall always have this with me. Thank you. I thanked those who did not show themselves, but allowed me to stay in their territory, the snakes.

Carl...Bill...Andy...Jason...thanks! It takes people who truly love you to climb this high to bring you back. I began the walk back to the lodge. I felt wonderful. It was a beautiful day.

As I sat in the lodge waiting for the final sweat, I watched Gary as he climbed into the lodge. I was grateful to this young man who had given so much to me and many others. I knew that I would be thankful for the wisdom he shared and the gentleness of his teachings forever. He shared, but never demanded or made rules. He guided me to find my own answers. I felt a deep love for him and asked for health and help for him in all his remaining years.

Others began entering the lodge. I looked forward to their stories and to what would come to each of us in the next four days. I felt relief when John entered. The other two questors arrived, along with some supporters. Each questor was given a glass of water to drink, or to sip, before the sweat. We then had a one-round sweat which took a long time, since five of us shared our stories. I was exhausted, but exhilarated. I had done an hanbleceya (vision quest) at Bear Butte, high on a hill with the eagles! What a gift! I was glad to hear that everyone was safe and had survived the storm. Everyone had come back in a good way.

As we stepped out of the lodge, my eyes scanned the beautiful meadow. I felt even more attached to Mother Earth. I hoped I would learn how to walk upon her with more gentle shoes. As I walk upon her more balanced, it will help heal her. Perhaps the more we each do this, the more nurturing she will receive. As my thoughts turned to nurturing the earth, I caught a whiff of Nancy's stew and the fry bread. I changed clothes as quickly as I could and knew what my direction would be for at least the next few minutes.

RELEASING

We all left and traveled across Wyoming, through Colorado, and on to New Mexico. There were fifteen of us in all. It was a magical trip. It was one of those trips where everyone wants to repeat it with the same people again...except for one night.

I prepared to go to bed, only to find part of the bedding gone. John gave it away, and it was his bedding to give away. I had not even brought any bedding. I could not sleep. The bed felt worse than the rocks had felt under me on the quest. I lay awake in frustration.

I was surprised by some of my own responses after that vision quest. This situation coming off the mountain was similar to my frustration going toward the mountain. Was this about self-value? Were situations being presented to make me stand up for myself and to learn to state my needs or was I being selfish? What in the world was happening with me?

Now here I was coming off rocks and feeling frustrated about my outdoor sleeping paraphernalia? It didn't make any sense. Why was this upsetting me? What was happening? I got mad and stayed that way until the next day.

John and the men went to see Chaco Canyon, leaving about five o'clock in the morning. Nancy, the girls, and a few of the young men remained at camp to play in a nearby hot springs. I truly felt I was over being mad until I saw John again. Anger returned. I knew I had to say what was on my mind, and I did. We then got some of the bedding back and all was fine. Happiness flowed in as frustration moved away from me.

Upon returning home, I continued my routine of selling nutritional products and presenting seminars to corporations on subjects such as "Growing Through Change," "Self-Esteem," and "Stereotypes and Myths." I had written two other books, not yet published. I kept being nudged to write another book about my experience of walking around the medicine wheel, so someone else might gain the courage

to do the same. I decided to do something to confirm my answer and to make a commitment to the completion of this project. I presented a pipe, and the pipe was accepted. I knew this meant I was to write the book and that I would have additional help from the Grandfathers when writing.

In September, we received a call saying that Spencer had died. Spencer had supported us in Sun Dancing on his property. Now we had an opportunity to support the family. Carl telephoned me and asked if I planned to go to South Dakota to the burial. It was to be a traditional burial. My logical side told me to stay home. The other part of me told me to go. I telephoned John to discuss the situation.

“John, Carl wants me to go with him to Spencer’s funeral. It looks as if Dave and Bill may also be going, but that is not for certain. What do you think?”

“Susanne, I can't go. I believe it would be wonderful if you would go and represent us. Spencer has been very supportive of us.”

When we finally arrived, we drove fifteen miles on the long gravel road to Spencer’s house. The house was empty. No one in the family was there. We turned around and went back into town. There were many cars at the Catholic Church, so we stopped. Kathy had come from Colorado and had been at the hospital with the family before the death. She was now working in the kitchen with others preparing the food.

Everyone seemed surprised to see us, but were very grateful that we had come. We were happy to be there. I quickly went into the kitchen to find members of the family serving food. Then I understood. The family comes together and prepares the food. Friends come and receive the food. It is like the last give away.

People stay with the body around the clock. That night, the body was to remain in the Church. Family pictures were displayed on tables set up close to the casket.

A family member with whom I had shared some special moments asked me to join her in returning to the home. The house needed to be cleaned and prepared for the events of the following day.

As I sat visiting with some others, I saw a man with a familiar face on the front row. It was another of Gary’s relatives. This one I had not met, but I recognized him from a movie I had seen. I approached him and smiled at this elder who had so much character about him.

“Hello. Are you that famous movie star?”

He smiled and responded without missing a beat. "Some say I am."

"I loved watching you play the part of the medicine man in Thunder Heart."

By now, he was beaming. "My grandchildren still want to know where that gold Rolex is!"

We laughed, and I saw it was time to leave.

I left with Carl, Bill, and Dave. Other family members arrived at the house about the same time as we did. I asked what we needed to do and began working. There were dishes to wash and other cleaning that was necessary before the morning. Some of the family sat down at the table. After several hours of cleaning, I decided to join them. I was tired. The trip had been much longer than planned and we still had not really slept.

I excused myself about 3:00 a.m. and went to the van to sleep. The men in the van were sleeping in the house and by the fire outside. In fact, Dave and Carl had been asked to watch the fire all night. Apparently the fire was going to remain lit as it would be at an hanbleceya. I awoke early. A few others were awake when I entered the house. I asked to take a shower. They said "Certainly! There's more to do before people arrive, but there's time."

After I bathed, Carl and I had to go to town to buy food. Kathy gave me a list of ingredients needed to make traditional foods. When we arrived at the grocery store, I quickly understood there was not enough money for meat. As I stood at the meat counter, the butcher asked, "Is there something I can help you with?"

"I don't believe so. I am here to help with a funeral. I was sent to town to buy groceries, but do not have enough money for all that is on this list. I don't know what to do about the meat."

He looked at me and said, "Go buy everything else you absolutely must have on the list and then come tell me where you are in the process."

Carl helped me figure what we could do without on the list. I selected all I could and returned to the meat counter. The butcher said, "Where are you now?"

"I have \$15.00 for meat."

He turned to another worker and said, "Go get that slab and cut it for stew meat."

He gave us a huge slab of meat for only \$15.00. Amazed, I

thanked the gentleman. We returned to the house. A tipi was sitting by the house for Spencer's open casket, so people might spend time with him. The family was busy preparing for friends who were coming to be with Spencer. Many came to pay their respect. One at a time, they went inside to share something with him.

Several of the women in the family decided to sweat and pray. They asked me to join them, and I was delighted to do so. Afterwards, we served food to friends who came to stay awake with Spencer. Carl, Dave, and Bill found, cut, and split wood to keep the fire burning continually. After the meal, it was time to do dishes. There were many people and many dishes. As I left the house to crawl into the van, I saw a man with whom I danced at the last Sun Dance. I remembered meeting him and his wife and visiting with them about his healing. He recognized my smile, but could not remember my name. Nor could I remember his full name. We re-introduced ourselves and began to visit. His name was Bob. Someone requested my help again, and I excused myself. We agreed to continue our visit the next morning.

I went to bed that evening exhausted, but knew we were there to support and participate in that event. We rose early. When I awoke, I noticed Kathy, also exhausted, sleeping in the van with me. I slipped into the house to put on fresh clothes and prepare for the day.

After I dressed and put everything back in the van, I returned to the house. Bob was there. We had visited only about ten minutes when he turned to me and said, "Susanne, I am here because the family has asked me to conduct this last ritual for Spencer. I want you to assist me."

"I don't know how the family will feel about this, Bob."

"I am the one asking you, because you are supposed to do this. Will you do it?"

I thought for a minute and wondered to myself why this was happening. I thought maybe Spencer was orchestrating his own ceremony. My mind flashed through some discussions we had shared. "Yes."

"Good."

About that time, one of the daughters said, "Bob, we are ready for you to talk to us." He looked at me and said, "Come with me." I quietly followed him into the room and stood behind the family, occasionally receiving a glance from someone who seemed to be questioning my presence. As Bob finished, he looked at me through

the group and said, "Susanne is going to assist me."

Spencer wanted to be buried on his own property on a hill everyone passed as they came to the house. A medicine wheel of rocks had been made on that hill years earlier. We all walked behind the body as it was taken in a horse drawn wagon to the top of the hill. There Bob motioned to me to come with him. We moved to the head of the casket. Bob said, "Susanne, you pray for me as I pray for Spencer." I stood beside him, preparing to do what he asked. He took his pipe from his pipe bag and handed the pipe bag to me to hold carefully. Then the praying began. As he turned to each direction, I did the same...praying for him as he prayed for Spencer. After the prayer, a Sun Dance song and drumming began. Again, we turned to each direction. As we faced North, the winds increased greatly. I looked and saw my lights in front of us in the sky. I was delighted to see them and thanked them for coming.

Spencer's body was placed in the grave. Each child and grandchild was given the shovel to place dirt in the grave. As I stood there, I looked at the many Native Americans on this reservation standing on the other sides of the casket. What was I doing at the head of Spencer's casket? With so many of his close friends here, why did Bob ask me to assist? I felt Bob taking the pipe bag out of my hands, and I knew this part of the ceremony was finished.

Rae, the young girl with whom I shared prayer ties and laughter at my first Sun Dance came up to me and took me by the hand. She wanted to walk back to the house with me. I noticed how much she had grown and how pretty she was becoming.

When each person was ready, they also returned to the house for the feast. A great amount of work awaited some of us for the family was again to serve all who had come. By the time we finished, over two hundred had been fed. When I finally had the opportunity to fill my plate, there was nothing left to eat. Every bowl and plate had been wiped clean.

I had not even eaten breakfast that day. Oh well, I thought and then headed for the van where I had hidden a box of Cheez-its. Dave, Bill, and Carl were there. They all had empty plates, including a dessert plate scraped clean. They were laughing and visiting.

I went for my Cheez-its, but could not find them. "Do any of you know where my cheez-its are?"

They laughed and said, "Yes, Susanne, we do. We ate them."

I just looked at them. "You what?"

"We ate them. They were so-o-o good." They continued visiting and laughing. Little did they know. I had finally reached my limit! I reacted, and I was certain they were not prepared for it...but I was two ways it is best not to be...too tired and too hungry for levity.

I looked at them and in an ugly tone that indicates a "yes" reply is greatly desired, I said, "Are you ready to go?"

They looked at each other and then looked at me. "Are you?"

"Yes."

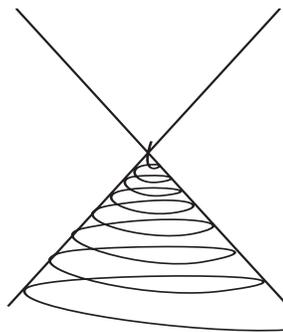
"O.K., we're ready."

With that, I left to go say my good-byes to everyone, but some said, "Don't leave yet. We are about to do a give away."

So we stayed a while longer. I sat and watched as the family gave blankets and other gifts to those people called forward, Bob, the drummers, the singers. We each went through the line and shook hands with all who participated. As I passed Bob, he handed me a gift that had just been presented to him by the family, a feather. I was so grateful that some of the tired feeling and hunger pains even diminished.

With the give away over and many hugs given and received, we all climbed into the van to leave, stopping at every store until we found Cheez-its and then a meal for me. The men insisted. With a full stomach, I was much better and much happier. The trip home was easier.

I attempted to go back to work and my daily life. In sweats, messages kept coming to me about being bound and my responsibility to remove the ropes. I made prayer ties to help break the ropes that bound me.



Finally, the answer came. As a person moves to the center and is about to break through to the other side, the person becomes bound tighter and tighter. The spiral begins large at the bottom and then becomes smaller and smaller as he moves higher and higher in life. Then the spiral moves out if one is able to cross through the center.

The ropes seemed to get looser. Time passed and I watched for signs. The first clue came as a healing took place with Nancy. One day she telephoned, saying, "Susanne, can you come to Oklahoma City and take me to the hospital? I am having a difficult time breathing and cannot find anyone else."

Without hesitation, I replied, "I'll be right there."

I made the twenty-five mile trip from Norman to Oklahoma City and took her to the hospital. Never did I think to call an ambulance. I simply got in the car and went to the City. When we arrived at the emergency room, they quickly checked Nancy in and moved her past everyone else in the waiting room. Her blood pressure was extremely high and she wasn't breathing well.

In the emergency room, we were told her oxygen levels were abnormally low. The doctors did a great deal of work with her that day and then sent her home with prescriptions for medication. Two weeks later she was back in the emergency room and was checked into the hospital where they found she had emphysema. This time she went home with an oxygen tank and was told she would have to use it round the clock. She was also told that she would most likely never get her oxygen level above sixty again in her life, even while using the oxygen full time.

After multiple trips to the hospital, she seemed to be getting worse. She loved this path of the sweat lodge, participating in and supporting vision quests, and Sun Dance. At first she grieved because it seemed like this part of her life was gone. Then she became angry, feeling as if the Grandfathers had shown her this way of life only to take it from her.

She had been able to sweat for only one round without her oxygen. Then a friend asked Nancy to support her on a vision quest. She wanted Nancy to walk up the hill and pray for her. Her husband, Carl, was explaining to the friend that she could not do this. Nancy overheard and decided that she could and must help her friend with the quest. The next night during a regular sweat, she committed to follow through and asked for a spiritual healing and forgiveness for her

anger over her physical condition. She asked the Grandfathers to help her accept her physical condition and to show her a way that she could still be of service to others.

Two days later, Nancy telephoned and asked, "Susanne, will you please go with me to receive my medical reports?"

For a minute, I hesitated. Then I knew my answer. I began this with her and it was important I finish it with her. Besides, I wanted to hear her final pulmonary reports and see what was happening since we had all been praying for her. I finally said, "Certainly. When are we going?"

We arrived on time and waited to be taken to an examination room. When Nancy's name was finally called, we followed the nurse to a room. A doctor came to give her a check-up and the final outcome of her tests. He read the chart and looked at the results of the tests made the previous day. A surprised look came over his face as he read her oxygen level, 74. He then excused himself.

He quickly left the room and was gone almost forty-five minutes. Out of boredom, I walked down the hall to see where he had gone. He and another doctor were mulling over Nancy's chart. I went back to the room and reported to Nancy.

When the doctor came back in, he said, "Nancy, we do not see jumps like this in oxygen level. The day before Thanksgiving your oxygen level was 52 and it has been that way for two months. Now, only a few weeks later, it is 74. I do not know what has caused this."

I noticed his beaded stethoscope and interrupted. "Excuse me, Doctor, where did you get your stethoscope beaded?"

He rubbed it fondly and said, "I hired a Cherokee person from Ada to bead it." Smiling, he added, "He will bead anything for money. I met him when I was doing an internship at Carl Albert Hospital, a hospital for Native Americans in Ada."

I asked, "Have you ever attended a sweat lodge ceremony?"

"No, but I have always wanted to go to one."

Then Nancy rejoined the conversation. "Come join us in my back yard. We have a lodge and do this almost weekly." Then she smiled and looked at him carefully as she said, "I went into two sweats last week only for a short time each evening."

He looked at her intently and replied, "Well, I guess that is what we might attribute your improvement to."

The next words were music to our ears. "For right now, go off

your oxygen eight hours a day.”

Nancy was extremely grateful for then she could participate in sweat lodge activities. Soon that wasn't enough. She wanted to do a vision quest. She prayed about it and started having dreams about coming off the oxygen and her medications. She followed her dreams.

Again she telephoned and asked me to return with her to the hospital to have more tests done. She immediately told the doctor about her dreams and what she had done. Tests showed her oxygen level was 84. He just shook his head and said, “I am not going to mess with success. You doctor yourself just as you have been doing.”

Her oxygen tank was picked up to the surprise of many. I had watched another healing take place.

The holidays were good. We found ourselves supporting a vision quest over New Years Eve. It was cold, like ice and snow cold, and yet it was great fun for many of us to be together. There were over twenty people who supported and spent that weekend camping. Nancy was even able to be in attendance.

A gift then came. My sister sent me plane tickets to attend her one year wedding anniversary party in Palm Springs. I was delighted. Dawn, my daughter, was working in Palm Springs. I could see my sister, my brother-in-law, and Dawn. As I prepared to leave, my father became extremely ill and was sent to the hospital. I was beginning to notice a pattern. Every time I planned a trip of any distance away, he went into the hospital. Was his subconscious picking up the fact that I was leaving? Are we all unfortunately that in tune with each other? I had not even mentioned my leaving to him yet. His wife encouraged me to stay home. I felt certain that if I stayed with my decision to go, his subconscious would realize I was keeping my commitment and he would improve. I suspected he might just “perk up” as his subconscious accepted the fact that I was not going to stay at home. He could not let go of controlling my decision and holding onto me. I held to my decision to go. I was right. Within twelve hours of that decision, he was doing much better.

I went to see him, assuring him that I would be returning. Afterwards, I left to attend and enjoy a Valentine's Day anniversary party for my sister and brother-in-law. John flew to Palm Springs a few days later to join us. It was on this weekend that I was introduced to a literary agent from New York. He said he would take a look at my book when I finished it. Since all in life is brought together in such a beautiful

manner, I wondered what this offer might bring in the future.

After my return home, I plunged back into work. In a few days, I received a surprising phone call. A vivacious blond cousin, fifty-one years of age, had become devastatingly ill. We had spent many times laughing and playing together through our years as friends and cousins. I generally stayed with either her or Judy when visiting in Pauls Valley during my youth.

I could not leave for Florida where she was hospitalized, so I express mailed a letter to her about our childhood. I was gaining a better understanding of the subconscious energy. Carol was already in a coma. Her brother read it to her anyway. That evening her vital signs greatly improved. We all felt she had heard the letter. However, by the next day she began to slip away again and died from pneumonia within the week.

Julia, her mother, asked me to read a poem at Carol's memorial service entitled "Safely Home." One week later, when Carol's ashes arrived, her brother asked me to again read the poem at the graveside service. Again, I did so. He acted upon a dream about becoming free he had the night after Carol died. He brought a pigeon to the service. As he said his final words at the service, he took the caged bird and released it. It was a gorgeous bird and it was now free.

Afterwards, I visited many grave sites close to Carol's where other relatives of mine were placed...my grandparents, my mother, her brother. Then I had to return to a friend's vision quest that I had committed to support months before.

As I drove, I wondered what else was going to happen? Were deaths taking place inside me as I participated in them on the outside? Was this a clue about reaching the center and releasing? Was I releasing something as these spirits were released? I knew I was reacting very differently to death. With a growing understanding as to how little separation there seems to be when someone dies, I felt at peace about people crossing to the other side, even Carol. I knew she felt the love of many as she went on her way.

If what happens within is happening without, what is the death within myself? What part of me am I releasing? As I returned to the quest, my focus turned to those on the hill who were shedding their old ways and were understanding so much more.

The following week, a man telephoned and asked to meet with me about my seminars. I met with him, and our discussion quickly

turned to terminal illness and death. At the end of our conversation, he asked if I would go with him to meet his mother and visit with her. We left for her home. He shared with me that she had cancer and was not communicating with people. He also said she was not trying to improve. When we arrived, he briefly explained to her that I knew something about nutrition before leaving us alone.

I cautiously approached the subject of cancer with her. I simply asked questions and listened. She was ready to go and knew how she wanted to do it. I asked what happened before her diagnosis of cancer? She explained that she had developed cancer shortly after her husband died. His death brought her a sense of loneliness. She continued to share, saying she wanted to stay in her home as long as possible and did not want to go to any more treatments. She was ready for her death. Others were not.

I told her that she could telephone me any time she wanted. I would be a support for her. I dropped by occasionally to visit with her. We had delightful visits as she progressed over the following few months. Then one evening she telephoned me and said urgently, "Susanne, can you please come to my home immediately? I hate to do this to you, but I need you to talk to someone for me."

I responded. In truth, she simply needed my energy for her to gain the courage to say what she needed to say to a nephew. He wanted her to continue treatment and go against what she believed she was to do. I was not there long. By the time I left, she was happier.

I saw her only one more time before she died. She looked radiant and strong on that final visit. I listened as she told me about some miracles that were taking place surrounding her illness. Shortly after that last visit, she died the way she wanted.

Amidst everything, a friend of mine began suggesting to me that she wanted to present a pipe to me. She wanted me to do her vision quest. Was I to take it? I kept delaying, stalling. Finally, Gary came to visit. John, Gary, and I were in John's van traveling to Oklahoma City when I shared with Gary what this woman wanted me to do.

"Gary, she has been sweating with us for a while. She asked me to come to her home and visit. When I got there, she wanted to present a pipe and wanted me to do her hanbleceya. I suggested she think about this. Truthfully, I wanted to visit with you about it first."

"Susanne, don't back out now. You know what to do."

I knew it was time. The next time she asked to present her

pipe, I agreed. She filled it and I accepted it. Of course, I knew I would have nothing to do with what would take place on her quest. I would set my ego aside and get me out of the way, so the work could be done. That is why I have an Iktome carved on my pipe stem. It is to remind me that it is never I who does anything. It is the Grandfathers and the spirits who are helping the person for whom I pray.

I, of course, did not plan to pour the water for I would honor what my teacher taught me about this tradition. Both men and women would be supporting this woman. A man would pour the water. Carl poured the water whenever I lead the sweats. It worked just fine.

Balance of the masculine and feminine seemed to be the theme for these quests of both men and women. Innocent teasing between the men and women increased in the lodge. I knew, if kept up, feelings could be hurt. A few days afterwards, my concern grew about statements we had made. An answer darted in from a Grandfather as I looked in the mirror one morning. "Each time a woman says something about the masculine, she is saying something bad about the masculine side of herself. Each time a man says something hurtful about women in jest, he is saying something about his feminine side."

I kept seeing Gary in my mind as he motioned towards the earth in my second hanbleceya. "Everything you say, Susanne, goes into the earth and then comes back to you."

Another woman presented me a pipe to do her vision quest. This time I did not resist. I knew it would be good, and I was willing.

Frustration over my relationship with John was slowly growing. I was not feeling as if I could trust talking to him. This realization came when I found myself talking to others rather than to John. What was it? I used to talk to him. What was wrong? I searched my mind to find what was missing. I realized I no longer felt valued. I felt like a low priority in the relationship. There seemed to be a block between us. Was it his past or mine?

The dreams kept coming. I was always going to a school in my dreams. In one, I was told John had counterfeit feelings for me. In other dreams, he was seeing other women. Then in a dream, he told me he was in a great deal of pain.

Finally, I filled my pipe for answers. After praying with it for four days, I received my answer. I took the filled pipe with me to Pauls Valley. As I drove there, I wondered what words would come to me to explain what I was doing. I arrived just as he finished the day's work on

June 10th, 1993. Almost a year had passed since we had done our quests walking in opposite directions to sit on two different mountains at Bear Butte.

When I arrived, I dreaded saying the words, but knew I had to follow what my dreams kept showing me. They were giving me guidance. I felt like a wall was being built between us and we were going no further. He seemed satisfied with the relationship as it was and I was not. I also thought that maybe there was more he had to work through before he could ever receive love or love someone. Was I doing this for him or for me? I did not know. In as calm a voice as possible, I said I was letting go of him. I almost gulped a sob as I glanced at his children's pictures. I explained that I was tired of being loved at a distance. John was watching me carefully. He did not seem the least bit upset. I opened my arms wide and tried to demonstrate what I was attempting to say within. With my arms outstretched, I said, "If you are ever able to love me like this, my door will be open for you. However, if you are not able to love me like this, do not come back. Please understand I do not know if I am doing this for me or for you. I only know it will be better for both of us for me to let go, because that is what I have been shown."

John said, "Susanne, do you realize we are supposed to go to New Mexico tomorrow and to Sun Dance in a few weeks?"

"Yes."

He asked, "Are you still going?"

As my composed feeling slowly returned, I responded, "Yes, but we will not be together."

We then shared the pipe, and oddly enough, went to eat together afterwards. By the time I returned to Norman, I felt peaceful and just fine.

Our phone calls to each other ceased. Several of us met at Carl and Nancy's to travel to Abiquiu in their "big" van. John and I somehow remained separate from each other, though we were traveling in the same confined space. He stayed in our friends' home in Abiqui while Nancy and I made our home in the van.

In a few weeks, we traveled to Sun Dance in South Dakota. For the first time, I was not going with John. I traveled ahead with Carl.

When I saw Gary in South Dakota, he asked, "Susanne, are you ready to dance?"

"Yes."

“They’re going to give you a hard time about some things this year.” I wondered what he meant.

ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS CONFIRMATION

Dancers had arrived from Arizona, New Mexico, and even Louisiana. Allen, who had run the kitchen for years for this Sun Dance, arrived to work. Our small group from Oklahoma and four people from Louisiana set out to find, cut, and haul fire wood to be used while sweating during purification and the dance. By the time we took the first loads back to the grounds, Allen was gone. I learned there had been a conflict, a difference of opinion. Allen was not coming back to work in the kitchen at all.

Other supporters made tea for the dancers to drink during purification and began preparing the kitchen for feeding the people. Every time we went to get a drink of tea, there was none. We were not getting enough liquid. Late in the afternoon, we stopped by the kitchen to make a few sandwiches before returning to help those still cutting wood. We asked other dancers and supporters in camp to help with the wood. The answer was always no. Some said they were tired and felt they needed to rest. I kept reminding myself that everything happening from the moment we stepped onto the Sun Dance ground was an opportunity for me to find an answer about something that had to do with my life.

We returned to load more wood. Finally, we quit for the day. When we first arrived back at camp, separate meetings were called for the men and the women. At the women's meeting, we were told that we were to be very respectful. The female Sun Dance leader said it would be good for the women dancers to wear skirts and keep ourselves, including our hair, looking as nice as possible when on the Sun Dance grounds. Then we were told to move into the women's tipi immediately. I asked, "Can we do it in the morning?"

"No. Do it now."

The meeting continued. The female Sun Dance leader said that she or a Native American elder from the reservation would be pouring the water for the women. She said that no one else was to

pour the water. I looked forward to an elder pouring water. With the meeting over, I moved everything from my tent into the tipi. I left some special items, such as gifts for others and my clothes for the feast following Sun Dance, in my tent.

After dinner, I heard the sweat was about to begin. I truly looked forward to it. We had worked hard all day, and I was dirty. When I reached the lodge, I found the sweat to be for men only. I had understood that women would be sweating separately after the Sun Dance began. I did not understand this would happen during purification. We had always sweat together during purification time before this Sun Dance. I truly felt disappointed. I listened as the man carrying rocks told another woman that they would save some rocks and the women could sweat after the men finished. Others in the lodge leaned out and said they would leave some rocks for us to sweat after they completed theirs.

The sweat lasted hours. It was late, very late when we finally saw the men coming out of the lodge. Another woman and I walked up to see if it was now time for us to sweat. I asked the man tending the fire, "How many rocks did they leave for us?"

"None. They called for them all."

I walked back to the tipi, took my sweat dress off, and got dressed. As I stepped outside to retrieve something I had left in my tent, I saw Carl coming toward the van. He said, "Susanne, that sweat was great."

I felt tired, dirty, and not happy. I had hauled wood all day. "I'm certain it was. I'm so happy you had a good sweat. I wish we could all have enjoyed it."

I was disappointed and disgusted. I turned and walked to my tent. I needed to pull balance back into me. I was quite aware that I was walking toward the Sun Dance and everything I was being shown was for me to learn from. I also knew the more balanced I could be, the more I could be open to the lessons. I had to go work on myself. I went to the fire and said a prayer and then left to sleep a good night's sleep. The women did not sweat.

The next morning, we were heading back to the woods for more fire wood. Our small work crew was joined by one other person and Gary. We all worked hard.

It seemed to me so logical that if we would all work together, everything could be done so much faster. I kept trying not to blame and not to judge. I attempted to keep my focus on what I was doing. I

knew there was a reason for everything taking place.

We cut several loads of wood. We always tried to get tea to bring back to the workers, but the tea was usually gone. About noon, some of us took a load of wood back to the Sun Dance grounds. We stopped by the kitchen to fix sandwiches for those who stayed to cut more wood. Again, there was no tea for us to drink. I knew the supporters were making great amounts of tea, but others were most likely drinking it while we were cutting wood. Once we caught the kitchen just right as we unloaded more wood and were able to take some jugs of tea back to others who were hot and thirsty.

I continued to ask those at camp to join us. Again most said they felt it was necessary to rest. What was I supposed to be learning from all of this? As we finished the last load and drove back into camp, we saw one man sitting over on the ground getting a back rub. Another one was having his hair combed. Others were sleeping. No one even came to help unload. As we unloaded the last of the wood, I heard a full-blood Indian from Oklahoma say, "These guys are causing me to feel bad about my own race. They are not doing me any good."

Some of us laughed, and I replied, "Oh well, we are through. All of us who have worked together have formed a bond and have tried to make it fun. We have all gotten to know each other better." We laughed again and let it all go.

After we unloaded, I walked towards the kitchen to get a glass of sage tea. It was late afternoon. I had been hot and sweaty all day and was certain I had not consumed enough fluid. Just then I saw our female Sun Dance leader coming toward me. She said, "Susanne, you look awful. You are always to have a skirt on when on these grounds. Your hair is a mess. This is not a respectful way to look. Do something about yourself."

A full-blood Native American from Louisiana who had been working side by side with me all day touched my arm supportively and said, "Susanne, come with me. We'll fix your hair." We walked to the women's tipi.

I wondered what was causing this female Sun Dance leader whom I had loved unconditionally and cared so much for in past years to react to me in this way. I had been working very hard all day in the heat, cutting and hauling wood. What had taken place in her day to cause this reaction? Did she not know how hard and how difficult the work was that we were doing?

Again, there was dinner and a sweat for the men. A lodge had been constructed during the day for the women, but was not ready to be used. We were told that an elder from the reservation would be coming to lead our sweat later that night, but she had not arrived yet.

While the men sweat, the women worked on prayer ties. Finally, the men's sweat was finished. The female elder had not arrived. Where was the female Sun Dance leader? We asked and learned that she had gone into town to sleep and would be back the following day.

More rocks had been put into the fire for our sweat. Finally, Kathy and I went to talk to Gary about the situation. There was no woman from the reservation available to pour water for us and the rocks were ready. After careful thought, he replied, "Kathy, you fill your pipe and pour the water tonight."

We woke the other women and finally sweat. The next day was delightful. It was the third day of purification. Everyone picked sage together. We returned to a wonderful dinner made by relatives of the family who held the Sun Dance, members of Spencer's family. This Sun Dance was being held in his memory.

Again, I was asked by the female Sun Dance leader to raise money from those in attendance. They planned to spend the money on clothes for Spencer's grandchildren to wear in a special round during the Sun Dance to honor Spencer. This money situation just kept being put in front of me. Thanks to the supporters who came with us, I did so easily and gave the money to the female Sun Dance leader. I thought, "Perhaps that is how easily I will raise my own money this year." I then made prayer ties. As I sat there, a full-blood Native American dancer attending from Prescott, Arizona, walked over to me with his little boy and gifted me a wonderful gift from his vision quest. I thanked him and hesitantly said, "Why?"

"I have been wanting to do that since last year to thank you for what you did." Then he introduced me to his adorable son. With that exchange, I knew I would always remember this man. I immediately made another prayer for him and his son.

Later that evening, we sweat in the women's lodge with the female Sun Dance leader pouring water for us. It was a good sweat. Afterwards, I worked on prayer ties until it was quite late. A question came up that needed to be asked of the female Sun Dance leader. She was not in the tipi with us. No one could find her anywhere. This would not have been a problem, but she told us in that first meeting all

rules applied to her as well as to us. We learned that she had gone into town again to sleep. I let it go. This was a part of all of it. I did as I was told, surrendering to whatever was happening.

The following morning, we prepared to bring the chosen tree to the grounds. Tree Day! It is always a highlight. We arrived at the grove of cottonwood trees. We left our cars and walked to the tree that had been previously selected. As we made prayers for the tree, the wind picked up. It continued as each person struck a blow to the tree with the ax. A large, dark cloud swirled overhead. It moved down, coming closer to us, as the tree was cut and carried back to the Sun Dance grounds. This cloud was different from any cloud I had ever seen. We all watched the clouds as they continued to darken ever deeper, swirling above us, very close to us. The cloud followed us. There was clear sky on all sides of this huge, swirling mass.

What were the Grandfathers telling us? It reminded me of the clouds seen in some of the movies about Jesus being crucified. As the tree was carried back to the land, the clouds continued. Then as the tree was laid on the ground, a torrential rain began to beat down on us as the wind blew. It was as if there was a huge crying, a cleansing taking place. Cold, wet tears covered us. We all stood around the tree with the drops beating down upon us. Watching. Waiting. What was to happen next?

We stood...wet and cold, waiting. In about a half hour, the rain stopped. The sun, the man, and the buffalo were placed in the tree. The cherry branch bundle was added. Flags and ropes were attached above the cherry bundle. With everything appropriately placed on the tree, it, too, was waiting to be raised. Then, in an instant a pink glow streaked with yellow was covering everything. The direction of the breeze also completely changed from North to South. The next moment was warm and beautiful. I was reminded how fast everything in our lives can change. This was absolutely the most dramatic event I had ever experienced while cutting, preparing, and raising a tree. With the tree in its place, we wrapped prayer ties around its trunk.

We continued to make everything ready for the dance to begin the following day until it was time for another evening sweat. A Lakota woman from the reservation, a relative of the family, poured the water for us and visited with us. It was another good purification lodge, a good sweat.

We rose at 4:30 a.m. We sweat, changed, and prepared to

dance. We moved into our line. Seven women and sixteen men began the dance. The women danced in the outer circle and the men danced in the inner circle closer to the tree. During the morning, I realized Allen was in the arbor right behind me dancing and supporting. I was glad he had come back. It was the first time he had not worked from dawn until dark at a Sun Dance. He had been given the opportunity to completely focus on prayer and supporting. There were not many others in the arbor that year. Something was different, very different. What? The first day continued. I was nauseous.

Our female Sun Dance Leader had told us not to talk in the arbor. The men visited. I watched and listened as the same one who told us not to talk did so. Was this all happening for me to see something more clearly? Again, I attempted not to judge and kept reminding myself to pull my focus back to just the tree and me. This was another opportunity for growth. Kathy became ill and had to leave the Sun Dance grounds. At the end of the day, our female Sun Dance leader and another female Sun Dancer made the decision to dance only the first day. Three were gone. Now there were only four women left.

As I walked to the tipi after dancing, I saw people coming out of my tent and then go back into it. They seemed to be staying in my tent. I wondered about everything I left in there. I did not mind if someone used it, but it would have been nice if someone...anyone...had said something to me about it. I had borrowed this tent and had tried to be very careful with it, because I wanted to return the tent in a good way to its owner. I turned this, too, over to the Grandfathers and returned my focus to the tree and this Sun Dance. Somehow this was a part of it all.

Again we rose around 4:30. It was a cold, rainy, and wet day. I kept focusing on prayer. With only four women left, each of us stood in one of the four gates of the directions. I thought my space was very appropriate for me. I stood at the North gate. The dancers who were continuing to dance had been instructed to drop where we stopped at the end of the day. In other words, we were going to sleep within the Sun Dance circle. We were all wet and extremely cold. The supporters quickly brought dry blankets to wrap around each of us and tarps to put under us. I was so grateful to have supporters at this dance. Supporters are invaluable, just as in all of life.

We had our pipes to hold onto, and I held on for dear life all night. By morning, the rain had subsided. We awoke and moved under

the arbor. The men went to sweat. The women were unable to do so, because there was no one available to pour water for us. The first round of dancing began. When a female elder arrived and found out the women did not get to sweat, she came to get us. We were allowed to have a gentle sweat during a break.

The afternoon of that day included the memorial round for Spencer. The family all went to the tree and prayed for him. At the end of the round, all dancers moved to the South gate for presentations of pipes to those praying in the arbor. While we were standing in place dancing, I saw a female elder walk up to Gary and ask to do something. Gary, who was leading us, nodded in agreement. She then came to get me and took hold of my wrist bracelet. I moved along beside her as she guided me around the circle and out to the tree to pray. As I went around, my thoughts flew back to Spencer's funeral and how it seemed to be orchestrated by him. Now, why was I being allowed to go to this tree during the memorial round for Spencer? I did not know why yet, but I was very grateful to have the opportunity to go to the tree. I prayed for Spencer, his family, and the altar that was being prepared for another Lakota elder to use. After the round was complete, I was given the opportunity to present my pipe to someone in the arbor. This was the first pipe of this year's Sun Dance to be presented by a female. I was grateful and very appreciative.

Later that day was a "Wiping Away of the Tears" ceremony. It was held for another family during the break. Inoquin and I were standing under the arbor silently watching. I heard a man's voice right behind us say, "It's all going to be O.K." I turned to see who was speaking. She turned at the same time and looked where I looked...and then she looked at me. I felt she, too, had heard. Hesitantly, she said, "Susanne, did you just hear a voice or what?"

"Yes, Inoquin, I heard it."

"What did you understand it to say?"

"It's all going to be O.K."

"I thought so. Susanne, was that Spencer's voice?"

"I don't know whose voice it was, but I guess it is all O.K....everything that is happening. I don't suppose we are to worry about all that is taking place now or maybe what is going to take place here in the future."

During one break, I moved out into the sun to become warmer. John, Carl, and some others were sitting there. A twelve-year-old male

who came in to dance with us for a few rounds asked me a question. I answered him. He asked me another. I answered. Then I looked up to see our female Sun Dance leader whom I considered my friend, but who seemed to have a great problem with me this year, come running towards me. She looked at me harshly and said loud enough for many others to hear, "Susanne, you are not to talk when you are in the arbor."

She then returned to her place where she was sitting with others close to the singers and drummers. I felt shamed. I returned to the shady spot under the arbor and lay down to think about this. Everyone else was talking...even the other women. I looked around. Why was I singled out? This reminded me of a situation in the sorority house back in my past where I was used for a scapegoat to blame, to be an example for others. I was experiencing a few very good happenings at the Sun Dance this year amidst many difficult situations. I understood some of the good ones, such as Spencer possibly or a Grandfather orchestrating who got to touch the tree during the family round. What was I to learn about these behavior outbursts from this female? I wasn't certain she even knew what was being orchestrated through her. To me, this was unlike her, so what was I to learn from this and what answer was coming to me?

Later that day, I smelled cedar beside me. I thought someone was coming around allowing us to smell cedar to give us strength. No one was there. As I realized this, I knew I was being helped. Cedar wards off negativity. Someone unseen was helping me.

On the last round of the day, I was looking at the tree. I prayed and listened. This tree was not balanced like our previous trees. It was not the same. Then my message came. "When moving from a center of love, shaming someone is not necessary. You and the other female dancers are not feeling love. You are not feeling respect. You are feeling cold. You and other female dancers want to honor and respect what you were told to do, but it has been almost impossible with the way it is all being presented to you. You are definitely in the North, Susanne. Watch all that happens this year. Remember the phoenix. You must become ashes before it all truly begins."

The day ended. We went to the lodge, and there was no one to pour water for the women. We made our decision. We discussed how we tried to follow instructions given to us which were not working. The others asked me to pour water. I agreed to do so for this sweat, but felt it would be good for each of us to share the responsibility. We

then continued talking about our new decision until we came to the agreement that when someone was not there to pour water for us, we would sweat with one of us pouring the water. We would rotate and each of us would take a turn pouring for the others. With this, love seemed to enter. Warmth was coming. I needed to remember this in November, December, and January.

The third day was much better. And, finally, the last day was warm. So, I made note. This weather was appropriate. The first day was cold, the second a little colder, the third warm, and the last one was really warm. I thought this was quite symbolic, since we move from West to North to East to South, with South being the warmest. We moved from cold to warm, from feeling very little love, to a little more love from a few.

The last day was short. As I looked at the tree during the break, I knew that something was still not right. The love was missing from this Sun Dance that had been here previously. Why? Was it because Spencer was gone? What were we all being shown? Instead of love and gentleness, there had been frustration, anger, and complications. Then I heard another message. "The Sun Dance heals many and it heals you. You are being shown that you no longer have to accept this behavior from others. It had to be this strong to teach you how to value yourself."

Perhaps this was all designed to make me look at my worth and the worth of each of us as individuals. It is time we all learn to honor and respect self and each other. We, as women, had not been honored and had not been treated right. It had not felt good to be a woman at this Sun Dance. Yet I knew there was "health and help" for each of us from an unseen source.

I knew how this ceremony had been graced with love in the past, so now what was I to do with this and with these feelings? What was I being taught? I simply asked to be shown and knew the answer would be given to me in the coming year.

During the next round, I gave thanks and blessed every situation that had taken place. I looked at Gary. Gary was strong at this Sun Dance. The love and support he gave all of us, in spite of all that had taken place, was powerful. It was so much better having him dance with us instead of him watching us from the arbor. I smiled as we moved through the last of the dance where Gary guided us in one long line across the circle. We stopped four times as we moved through the

East gate where we shook hands with those who supported us as we re-entered real life once more.

The feast was good and the giveaways were enjoyed by all. Nancy again brought with her the many toys we accumulated from Oklahoma. They were spread out for all children in attendance to pick from. The children loved this giveaway.

As quickly as possible, a friend and I loaded our belongings into her car to return home. As we drove, I noticed that I was having trouble with my throat. We stopped to get something to drink. By night, there were blisters in my mouth and on my tongue. It even felt as if they were going down into my throat. This had never happened to me following other ceremonies. We stopped to eat, but I could not swallow yet.

Finally we made the decision to stop for a heavenly shower and sleep. We headed out early in the morning, arriving in Oklahoma City by mid-afternoon. It seemed amazing to me that I got home so quickly. I picked up my car at Carl and Nancy's in the city and left for my home in Norman. Almost as soon as I entered my apartment, two friends from Pauls Valley knocked at the door. I was delighted to see them. With the blisters somewhat better, we went for dinner.

I was gentle with myself as I tried to catch up on work. Within a few days, we were back on the road to New Mexico. We had made a commitment to the people in Abiquiu to return to help them with their new sweat lodge. We were going only for the weekend.

Gary came with Carl and Nancy. John arrived with Savannah and her friends. I rode with other friends. During the days, Gary and I took the youth site seeing while the others worked. All of us from Oklahoma helped with sweat ceremonies in the evenings.

At last, with these commitments over, I was happy to be at home for a while. My daughter telephoned and asked, "How is John?"

"Fine, I guess."

"Well, how did you two handle all the trips?"

"We were polite with each other. We spoke, but did not really talk. Savannah and I had a good visit. It all felt strange, but we were both fine."

John and I continued in that manner. I attempted to break my connection with him physically, mentally, emotionally, but had no idea how to break our connection spiritually. We had no phone calls or physical contact. Every time I thought of him, I wrote and did all I could

to release it. Emotionally, I stayed balanced. I planned my life as if he would never return.

After we returned from New Mexico, I had an opportunity to visit with Gary. He said that I was becoming colder on the inside, not warmer. Now this seemed quite possible. I stood in that North gate at Sun Dance and felt alone and cold. I felt rejected by people I had known and cared about for several years. I had looked over at John and sent him love during the dance, but felt disconnected. I felt alone.

Gary then said something that really surprised me. "Susanne, you can move through this much faster if you will go talk to someone you do not trust and tell them everything."

My initial reaction was, "I trust almost everyone."

What surprised me is when it came to picking someone, I found that I completely trusted almost no one. I was thinking about this the following morning when the phone rang. It was a friend from Dallas who was visiting in Oklahoma City. She asked, "What are you doing?"

"Thinking about people I don't trust. I have been told that I am becoming colder on the inside instead of warmer. If I can tell someone I do not completely trust everything I have not wanted to say and have not said to anyone about what is going on with me, I supposedly will move through this faster. I will return to being warm on the inside."

"Susanne, I am sure you don't trust me completely. I will be right there and we will try this."

I wondered how she knew I didn't trust her completely. Had it shown? Within forty-five minutes, she was at my door. I told her everything I was feeling about masculine and feminine issues, my feelings at Sun Dance, my confusion, and about many other things that bothered me. This was difficult to do, but I did feel different on the inside following the discussion.

I realized that when a person does not trust, he or she doubts everything. I had doubted, and I had become less loving in the process. I also realized when I did not trust another person's judgment, I had become more judgmental of self rather than honoring self.

I understood more fully that I had the same issues with men at the Sun Dance that I had my whole life. The situation that was presented through the female Sun Dance leader also represented situations from my childhood where I felt helpless in situations regarding my mother.

These are situations I must change by not reacting, becoming more loving, and practicing acceptance. I knew that I could do things

differently today that I could not do as a child, for I am learning how to move from a center of love rather than a center of fear and loss. Then I remembered something Spencer said one time when we visited. "These ways will be going through some changes and will evolve into a better way."

The following week, I was having breakfast in a restaurant close by with a female friend who had supported the Sun Dance when I looked up to see a Native American walking to our table. He apparently overheard something we said as he walked by our table. He could not have heard much. He came from an empty room at the back of the restaurant that had many windows. I had been facing the windows and had seen no one in that room, yet that is the direction from which he came. Our table was out of his way if he were simply leaving the restaurant. He apparently had briskly walked by our table and then returned to say, "Excuse me. Did I just hear you say the word Sun Dance?"

I looked up to see familiar warm dark eyes peering down at us. He had a beautiful smile, the kind that could be used on a commercial. His hair was jet black and long.

We both looked at him. I finally said, "Yes."

He continued. "My whole family Sun Dances. Be careful. The intercessor is not God. There is only one God. You listen. You talk to God. You find your answers." Then he continued talking to us about how medicine could be used in the wrong way and how spirituality could be handled in the wrong way. He turned and left. This was an amazingly unusual occurrence. Was this my answer? After I absorbed his words, I jumped up and quickly went outside to catch him. He was standing in front of the restaurant as if he were waiting for a ride. I said, "Excuse me, but who are you?"

He introduced himself and said he did windows at the restaurant and was there quite often. He said he would probably see us again soon. A few days later, I went back to the restaurant to ask the manager about him. They said they knew nothing about someone doing windows recently. With that I knew I had received a message. Was it Spotted Eagle Feather Man in physical form?

On my way home, I remembered my dream where the elderly woman told me to wear the yellow and purple blouse. It was the dream where I was accepted. I recalled the elderly man in the center and the woman saying that I would know something after the next Sun Dance.

I had worn either the yellow and purple string or the cloth swatches until the past Sun Dance. I decided to again do so until I received my complete answer.

SPIRIT'S PERFECT TIMING

By mid-July, I was back to a normal schedule. I was preparing to better organize my time and planning to focus only on my work for a while. I was asked to be a presenter for a meeting in the City. I was on the way to the meeting when I made the decision to stop by a friend's house. She had a beauty parlor in her home and I thought she could help me be a little more presentable before the meeting.

When I stopped by, she asked me about Sun Dance. I began describing to her how dehydrated I must have become and told her my throat and tongue were just now feeling better. She looked at me funny and said, "What you just described is what Josh has wrong with him. That is one of his symptoms."

Josh, then fourteen, was her son. He had camped and spent time with us often during the previous years, but I had not seen him for months. She looked more concerned and said, "Susanne, Josh has been sick. I am worried. I took him to a doctor who says he is just releasing toxins. Would you look at him if he will let you see him?"

"Certainly."

I watched as she disappeared into another part of the house. In a few minutes, she returned. "He wants to see you. He hasn't wanted to see anyone."

We opened the door and I went into the room. Josh held out his hand to take mine and gave me a weak smile. I said, "Josh, I understand you haven't been accepting visitors. How did I get through that door? Thank you for letting me in."

"Susanne, I am so sick. I'm scared. Can you help me? I don't want to die. Am I going to die?"

"Well, I certainly hope not. Josh, do you want us to pray, is that why you let me in?"

"Yes." We all three prayed.

"Thank you, Susanne. Please help me."

I assured him that I would try to help and explained that I had

to leave for a meeting. As we closed the door, my friend looked at me and said, "What do you think?"

She had a horrible look in her eye. "Is he dying? I don't know what to do. I haven't been able to work. I have done the best I can. We have given him everything the doctor said and more. I owe this doctor so much and have no insurance. I don't know where to turn next."

"What is the doctor saying?"

"He says that Josh is detoxifying and that is why he looks this way. He says he is better."

"O.K. I will say prayers for both of you. I'm already late, so I have to leave."

I said nothing more. I left and went to do my presentation. Was I to leave this alone or not? I knew that smell. I knew that look. Josh was dying. This vibrant young man was leaving us, and he was in pain.

I had made a vow to bring my focus back to me. There was not anyone to look after me, but me. How would I survive if I got involved? I knew I must pay my bills. I had gone through this with Don. Was I to go through it again with Josh? Why?

After tossing and turning and not sleeping all night, I rose the following morning and telephoned a friend of mine who worked for a doctor in Norman. I then explained what I had seen in that bedroom in Oklahoma City and asked if the doctor she worked for could help? I explained the mother had no insurance and no money. She, being a single mother, had not been able to work in the previous months while taking care of Josh. My friend left the phone and returned to say, "Can you come now and meet with our office manager and tell her your story?"

"Yes."

I went immediately. The doctor agreed to see Josh that evening. He also agreed to take care of this young man for as long as necessary, doing any tests he could there, if he could do it at his office. I told them I felt the only thing that he could do would be to refer him to Children's Hospital. I was grateful for this kind office staff. I telephoned my friend.

"Hi, I do not know if you are going to want to do this or not, but there is a doctor who is willing to see Josh free. He is a good doctor and he will be able to give you a second opinion. He can see Josh at 7:30 tonight. Do you want this appointment?"

"I have scheduled myself to work tonight. This is the first day I

have worked in two months. I have to work.”

I listened and gently responded. “I know how it is when a situation is difficult. Allow this to sink in and then make your decision. I found hasty decisions in my situation were not good at times. Think about this and I will telephone you in thirty minutes or so.”

In a few minutes, the phone rang. “Susanne, I prayed for a miracle last night, and this is the miracle. I don’t know what is happening to me. Yes, we want to come.”

I thought, “This is great. Josh is going to be helped, and now I have done my part. I can let this go and get back to work. I’ve done this before. Do I need to watch this again?”

She continued, “I don’t know where the doctor’s office is. Can we please swing by there and pick you up? I may need some help getting Josh into the office. Please go with me.”

I hesitated and then thought to myself O.K., I can do this. I can work the rest of the day and be ready when they come by. I then responded, “O.K., come by about 7:00. I’ll be ready.”

The doctor took a look at Josh. He wanted to speak with Josh’s mother alone and asked me to stay with him while they visited. As soon as they left us, Josh took my hand and put it over his heart and said, “Feel.”

His heart was racing. “Susanne, please don’t let me die.”

“Josh, we will do everything possible to get you better.”

“I want to go home with you when we are finished and stay with you. Can I?”

I looked at Josh and said, “What are you talking about? You have never stayed with me.”

“I know, but I want to. I like your apartment.”

I knew he had only been in my apartment once. “What do you feel there?”

“Peace.”

I wondered what God was doing with all of this. What was happening here. I replied, “Josh, let’s wait and see what happens next.”

Then the door opened. The doctor and Josh’s mother returned to the room. The doctor told Josh he was going to Children’s Hospital. Josh began to have big tears roll down his cheeks.

We left. My friend was a nervous wreck. She was panicking on the inside. I remembered that feeling. You attempt to look strong and try to control it on the outside while you fall apart on the inside.

I offered to go with them to the hospital. She first said, “No, you have done enough.”

Then she quickly said, “Would you?”

I did not hesitate. “Yes.”

I went with them to Children’s Hospital in Oklahoma City, found a ride home, and thought I would get back to work. The following day, Savannah telephoned. She was in Pauls Valley with John and wanted to come spend the night and go see Josh. I wanted to see her, so that sounded great to me. John and Savannah met me halfway in Purcell. He joked. “It is hard enough sharing visitation time with an ex-wife. I never thought I’d have to work out a child visitation schedule with an ex-girlfriend.”

Savannah and I laughed, and she climbed into my car. We were all O.K. with this, and I knew it. When we reached the hospital, the doctor was in Josh’s room. We waited. When the doctor left, we went into his room. As I entered, his mother said that she would be back in a minute and left. Josh looked at me and said, “Susanne, I have leukemia. They are going to begin chemotherapy right now.”

Through tears, he again said, “Susanne, I don’t want to die, please do not let me die. Do something.”

I did the only thing that came to mind. I took hold of Josh’s hand and held it out in front of him. I said, “Josh, look at your hand. Do you see it?”

“Yes.”

“Imagine yourself standing in your hand. The hand is holding you, do you have that in your mind yet?”

“Yes.”

“Now imagine this is God’s hand. God is holding you in his hand. There are going to be some frightening things happening to you over the next few weeks. Every time you become scared, remember this. God is holding you in His hand. He has you safely in His hand. You are going to be fine, no matter what happens.”

That is all I could think of to say to this beautiful blond hair, blue eyed young man who recently won a Gold Medal for figure skating. Savannah and I left after she had a visit with Josh and after I visited with his mother. I knew then I was in this for a reason, and the reason was for the highest good of all of us, including me. What happened in the next few weeks looked gruesome. I kept remembering his spirit was fine as I watched. I kept talking to his Spirit. Several nights we

sang to him all night in the intensive care unit. A peace permeated the room when we did this. We sang Lakota prayer songs and church hymns he had loved. Sometimes his friends took turns singing some of their favorite popular songs.

Josh asked me questions. I talked to Josh about what was happening, about the other side. He said he was concerned about his mother being O.K.. here, and we both assured him she would be fine. I felt he was healing something with me as we helped each other through this. I later realized two healings were taking place.

This was the final release of a misunderstanding I had long carried around. At last, I completely understood that I have no control over life or death. God does. I can control nothing. I had no control over Josh's life or death, nor my mother's, nor Don's. I could only pray for "health and help" and for the highest good of all concerned. The decisions lay with Josh and God. This released me to be me. I was free of a burden I had carried since age four.

Healing can come about in many ways. I felt Josh was also somehow healing the way I dealt with the masculine part of myself, the hurt masculine within me. Perhaps this was a farewell to the way I had chosen masculine men who do not validate my feminine. Perhaps the nurturing and compassion I felt during this experience with Josh was also a farewell to my refusal to validate my feminine side.

Josh died on an early August morning. He had a great amount of love from family and friends surrounding him. We stood and watched the life support monitor stop. For the first time, I saw the spirit as it left the body. After being up all night, I went home. As I entered my apartment, the phone rang. I heard, "Susanne, the funeral home will not pick up Josh's body until \$1500 is raised. Can you call his family and friends and raise that? They want the money up front."

I got on the telephone and did so. Then I received a telephone call from my stepmother. They were taking my father to the hospital. I showered and went back to Oklahoma City. After I went to see Daddy, I stopped to see Josh's mother. She asked me to do the Memorial Service for Josh. At first, I balked. I hesitated because I was not a preacher. Then she and Nancy convinced me that I could do it. I knew, however, that to have a preacher was going to cost more money and I was tired of raising money.

More than two hundred people came to the gardens of Will Rogers Park for Josh's service. I began my first memorial service. I

told no one my name. I did not want to get my ego involved. I simply began. I picked up three roses on the way to the park. One was a tightly formed bud, one was a rose partially open, and one was a rose opened completely.

There were many young people who were going to be present for the service who felt their prayers were not answered. I wanted them to understand that prayers are answered, sometimes in ways that we do not immediately understand.

With Josh having two spiritual ways on his path, we had a prayer by a member of the Baptist Church. I asked John to make a prayer in Lakota. I asked two friends who knew Josh well to speak. Carl, who was a next door neighbor and much like a grandfather to Josh, spoke. A woman, who was like a grandmother to him, followed Carl. I then used one rose to show how closed and judgmental we can be here on this earth. I explained how we have the opportunity to open and love freely, but sometimes become riddled with fear as we have the same lessons coming over and over with no understanding of the lesson. Josh openly loved, accepted others as they were, and was always concerned about others. I mentioned that perhaps we were still here, because we had more lessons to learn. I suggested we look around at each other, for some of us might be slow learners. It is up to each of us to find the answers to our lessons here. I then used a rose partially opened to show how sometimes we only half commit. Josh was young, but he knew how to commit. He disciplined himself, committing himself. He had a gold medal for skating. This showed us how committed he could be. Do we know commitment? Then I used the fully opened rose to talk about Josh. He lived a full life in a short time. We each have the opportunity to live a full life if we choose. It is up to us. God will help, but we have to do our part.

After reading the poem "Safely Home," the same one I had read at Carol's funeral earlier that year, I asked all two hundred of those in attendance to make a circle. Nancy orchestrated the music, and we gave helium balloons to each person. Together, we visualized the releasing of Josh's spirit with the releasing of the balloons. I thought the balloons would all go straight up into the sky. They all grouped into a cluster and looked as if Josh were pulling them right along with him.

I felt good, and many others seemed to feel better also. Afterwards we had coffee and cookies while people shared stories and looked at the pictures of meaningful events in Josh's life displayed on

several tables.

I left and returned to the hospital to give my complete attention to my father. The doctors were about to decide to move him back to the nursing home, because they felt there was nothing left more they could do to help him. He was dying.

Daddy was a completely different situation for me to move through. He died as my father when his thinking became completely confused. I had already gone through one stage of releasing him with his first step in that direction. That first step occurred when he entered Willow View Mental Health facility and then moved to the nursing home. He was in his eighties and his thinking had not been exactly right for several years. They said he had Alzheimer's.

At times throughout the previous few years, he had told me this was all my fault. I had hoped at those times that his thinking was not clear. Now I sat there looking at my own father dying and was feeling angry. Why? Was I mad he was dying? What was this feeling?

Then one afternoon my aunt came by with a young cousin. Daddy looked at this little boy and smiled such a sweet smile. Then my aunt said, "Look at that smile. He always has liked little kids so much. He's always been that way, hasn't he?"

As she said those words, she turned to look at me for my response. She was sincere. I was about to cry and excused myself, saying I needed to get back to Norman and would return later.

I left. Tears were about to overflow. I wanted to scream, "No, he did not like little children so much. He did not know how to play with me and he did not know how to play with my children."

I held my tongue. I wondered what was wrong with me. I was not feeling the same compassion I felt with Josh. This was my father. Why was I so angry? I couldn't even talk to him appropriately.

I drove past Norman and went directly to Pauls Valley. I knew where I wanted to go...straight to the land that had held my Dad's home. I sat under a tree and wrote him a letter. I vented my anger, my feelings, and my frustrations about the past. I then shared my happiness and my appreciation for the good parts of him.

I left that home site and went to my mother's childhood home. I sat on the lawn of the house where I was taken after I was born. I wrote him another letter about my feelings. Then I returned to Oklahoma City to the nursing home.

The anger left. I felt different. I was able to talk to him with love

and compassion. I was able to share things with his spirit that I knew were heard. I was then able to support him much better through the rest of the process. I loved him. In a few days, my father died. His wife and I were with him at the time of his death. We both commented about how we could see his spirit move from his body. His whole physical body changed in one moment.

My closest friends attended the funeral. I was so surprised to see them there. Many did not even know Daddy. John had come by the nursing home to take me to lunch one day. Then he came to the funeral and to the graveside ceremony in Pauls Valley afterwards. I was very appreciative.

The morning following my father's funeral, I wrote in my journal, "I know my father is now fine. There are other answers I would like to receive. Is all of this death around me to move me through the last bit of understanding? Is this the last bit of the fire I am to move through to complete the ashes? Is this all that must happen as I move from South back to the West to begin again? Is complete healing taking place? Now is the phoenix going to begin to be able to rise? Will doors open that have been previously closed, or is there more?"

LETTING GO IN FOUR WAYS

It seemed I was finally being given some space to focus on my seminars. Through the month of October, I spoke for some large corporations. During this time, I had a dream about a hidden choir singing. It was beautiful. The choir was filled with family members who had passed to the other side. There was a light shining on every face. I understood. I was receiving lots of support from someplace else. A hidden choir was helping to orchestrate the music for my life, so I could gain the energy to make it through my field. Singing and music has always given me energy. I was not alone.

John and I saw each other at some of the sweats and at some functions. Sometimes I was there, and he was not. Sometimes he was there, and I was not. I focused on my work. I had no desire to meet anyone else or to even go to places where I might. I was content doing everything alone. I knew I was going to be fine if he never came back. I learned he was seeing someone else. This may have been one of the women I saw him with in my dreams. I continued forward.

John came to bring me a care package once when I wasn't feeling well and could not go to a sweat. Another time he came when Boston and Savannah were visiting. I enjoyed these rare appearances. We kept it cordial and light.

I began to awaken every day with the Morning Star. I could see it from my bedroom window. I felt it was attempting to deliver me a message. "What?" I asked aloud, "Are you going to help me move from the dark to the light now?"

At the end of October, Abe invited me to participate in a ceremony for his healing. Abe was half Ponca and half Osage. He had asked a Lakota medicine man to perform the ceremony. As I accepted his invitation, I gave a prayer of thanks for the opportunity.

During that ceremony, the Grandfathers asked me through this medicine man "Why are you in pain? What is causing it?"

I was quiet. They said, "Answer us."

I did so. "I believe it has something to do with my need to let go of two masculine entities."

"Say their names."

"One is my father who died recently. I have been working out some issues surrounding our relationship."

"Your father is fine with what you have done."

"And the other one? Say the name out loud."

I squirmed. How could I do this with John sitting across the room from me? I then heard the Grandfather sternly say, "You must say it out loud. Remember you are being protected when you say it. You must say it. We are waiting."

"John Blake."

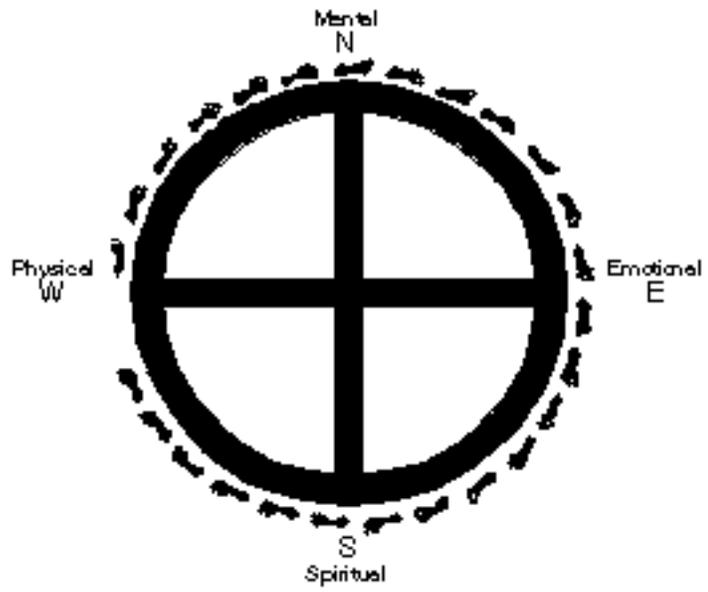
"Good. You must let go completely. You know that what you free will come back if it is to be."

"You keep waking to the morning star which welcomes the day. It is the star that brings the light. It represents the Star of David, the Star of Sacrifice. You need not make a sacrifice now. You have sacrificed enough. I see a little blue Volkswagen and a big yellow bus. There is no driver in the big yellow bus which will carry many people. Right now, it is important to keep it simple. The blue Volkswagen is good. The bus will be ready later."

Everyone in the room received answers from the Grandfathers. I listened as I heard John provided with many of his answers. One included, "Go tell the one you love that you do love her and have no fear of rejection."

I went home and wrote, letting go. I also went through the house to see if there was any other way I could let go. I had put away all photographs of John a long time before. Now I noticed other items that I could also remove. I did so for I knew it was important to let go completely.

Several weeks went by...working...enjoying. All seemed good in my life. A person from an organization that conducts training programs offered me the opportunity to work with them. Although I liked the people involved, I knew I was hesitating, because I did not agree with the material. I could no longer do something against my own values.



By learning to let go, with the tranquility of peace and security within, I was stepping towards a new life.

WARM THOUGHTS AND LOVE RE-ENTER

Just as dreams had given me notice to step back from my situation, they began to bring a warmth back into me for John. Why was I dreaming about him repeatedly?

On a beautiful Saturday evening, November 13, I returned from a friends' home just as the phone rang. I answered. While I was talking, my call-waiting interrupted us. It was John. He was in Norman and wanted to know if I wanted to get a bite to eat. He said he would have come by, but decided to go to the pay phone by the cafeteria a few blocks away to see if it was going to be all right.

I was starved and gratefully said, "Yes, I would love to eat with you. I will meet you in just a minute."

I felt that by keeping it casual, it would be better. I went to meet him outside the cafeteria a few blocks from my apartment. As I walked towards him, I said, "John, did you want to eat here?"

"Not really, do you?"

"No."

"Susanne, would you like me to follow you home, so we will be in one car?"

I agreed. As he followed me home, I wondered what this evening was going to hold for us. He drove by the movies and asked if I wanted to see one before we went to eat, even though we both had professed to be starved. I said "Yes." After the movie, we went to eat Chinese food. During the meal, we visited lightly, catching up on the children, my sister, my family, his brothers and sister, his mother, his family.

Then we began to discuss our relationship. As they began to close the restaurant, we moved to another one for dessert. It was during this conversation that John began to tell me how he allowed the Grandfathers and God to orchestrate his life.

I heard a voice in my head saying, "You have nothing to lose, go ahead."

I challenged him. "You say you do this, but you do not."

As I was doing it, I thought to myself, "What are you doing, Susanne?"

I heard another voice in my head saying "You have nothing to lose, go ahead."

John looked surprised. "What are you talking about, Susanne?"

"What have you done with the last ceremony?"

"A great deal."

"Did I hear the Grandfathers say to you to go tell the one you loved that you did so and have no fear of rejection?"

"Yes."

"Who did you go tell? Have you already found someone to replace me?"

"Well, I couldn't come tell you that I loved you. You told me not to ever come back."

I was stunned, so surprised that I just looked at him and asked him what he had heard me say with that pipe between us. He told me. He had not heard what I thought I said. Obviously, it was what he was to hear or what I was to say at that time for both of us. I re-explained myself, sharing with him that I had said, "You are welcome back any time you are ready to open and love completely."

I again opened my arms to show him what I meant. As I did so, my son walked up to the table. Jet seemed delighted to see us sitting together. We asked him. "Jet, you are pretty good with this. With all you have been watching with the two of us, how would you describe what happened with our relationship?"

He looked at both of us and said quietly, "It is really simple. There were two birds caged. The only thing that happened is one of them pushed the door open and flew out. Now the other one needs to find out how to open the door to fly out."

John and I both thanked Jet and he went on to do whatever he had to do. We exchanged a few more words and decided to leave. It was a little after midnight and John had to go back to Pauls Valley. John paid and we stepped outside to find a gentle mist falling from the dark sky.

We got into his van. He turned the key and then turned on the headlights. Last of all, he turned on the windshield wipers. They did not work. He tried repeatedly. They did not come on. He said, "Oh well, the mist doesn't seem to be very heavy."

"You will most likely make it back fine to Pauls Valley, John. It

is only a light mist.”

Within a block, we had to stop three times for him to wipe off the window to be able to see. We pulled under the canopy of the nearest filling station. John stepped out and raised the hood. While he was not in earshot, I laughed aloud and said, “O.K., what are you doing to me here? What are you showing me?”

I then opened my door and got out to look under the hood. I wanted to see what John was doing under there. He was jiggling some wires. Then, with both of our heads under the hood, all the lights went off at the station. It became pitch dark. The filling station manager had seen us out there and did not evidently care about our problem. This time I looked at John and laughed aloud. He joined me and, looking down at me, said, “Susanne, what do you think we are being shown now? I hate to ask this, but can I sleep on your couch? I don't think I can make it home without windshield wipers.”

I said, “Yes.” He came home with me. Our visiting continued and we had a delightful time. He left the following morning to return to Pauls Valley. I thought that was it.

Thanksgiving day came and was quite enjoyable. I went to my aunt and uncle's house for my noon Thanksgiving and to my son's home for an evening meal. A few nights later, I dreamed about a man telling me about the medicine wheel. Then I had multiple dreams with John playing various parts in them.

I awoke Sunday morning, knowing I was to telephone him. I did so and told him I was coming to an Open House in Pauls Valley. He suggested I come as soon as possible, because he also wanted to share something with me.

I met him and we bought sandwiches to take to the park. I was drinking my coke and looked down to find an Iktome, a spider, in my coke. How did it get there? It climbed down the ice further into the cup. I watched it.

Then I told John I had to leave in order to be at the Open House on time. He had to leave also to pour water at a sweat. Before we left, he said, “Susanne, look how we are sitting. I have my back to you and you are sitting facing me.”

I looked. I had not noticed. We were sitting on two corners of a square ledge. He did have his back to me. I was sitting on the other side of the ledge, but had my body turned to face him. He continued, “That is how I have handled our relationship. I see that now. I have a

suggestion. Would you like to watch the lunar eclipse with me tonight? It is a total eclipse and the last one we will see in our lifetime. Perhaps with the earth between the sun and the moon, we can hear each other.”

“I’d love to watch the eclipse with you.”

I visited with relatives in Pauls Valley and returned home. John arrived about 8:30. The eclipse was not to begin until 9:30, so we barely talked from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. We went to Denny’s Restaurant and ate. Each of us had a pad and pencil. At 9:30, we began. First John began and told me what he had liked and disliked about our past relationship and me. I stayed open and listened, making notes.

Then it was my turn. I told him what I liked and disliked about our relationship in the past. He took notes. In about an hour, John had a breakthrough. “Susanne, I see it clearly now. I have been rigid in our relationship. Do you know what happens to someone who is rigid? They die alone. People do not want to be around them. I have to take a look at this.” In other words, we were both still willing to look at ourselves.

“Susanne, there are some things I must tell you. I have been seeing someone else occasionally.”

“I know.”

“You know?”

I smiled. “Yes, I know.”

We left to go watch the eclipse and continued talking. By the end of the evening, John said, “I know what I feel about you and about what we have said tonight. I am willing to give this another try. What about you?”

With laughter, I replied, “I know about Libra’s. Let’s wait three days and see if you still feel the same. I also want time to think about this. Let’s seriously think and not talk for three more days.”

Three days later, on Wednesday, December 1st, John picked me up for dinner. At dinner, I gave him a present. I had taken him two doves from a Sand dollar to carry with him to an important meeting. He had also brought me a present. He held out a key saying, “This is a key to my house and a key to my heart. Now you have it. Do you want it?”

I took it and set it down by my plate. John continued, “Susanne, I want to set all fears aside and see what it feels like to just love you, love you openly.”

I wanted to do this also, but could it really be? I picked up the

key and said, "I want to try this again also."

When I returned home, I thought, "I am forever amazed with it all. The Sun Dance showed me that I would become warmer in November, December, and January. When I learned how to value myself more and take care of myself in a better way, warmth returned in me. My lessons had come at Sun Dance and all that followed Sun Dance to make me stand up and claim a new energy of value for myself as well as others."

Friends and relatives were all thrilled that John and I were seeing each other again. It was obvious I was in a relationship with a completely different man. This man named John was exuding a new strength. He had a new energy about him. It was noticeable to everyone, not just to me. He only put me "up." His way of joking had changed. His way of doing everything had changed. He surprised me at every turn with the way he treated me and with what he said.

Shortly after I began seeing John, I received a telephone call. "Susanne, do you remember Judy, Carol's friend in Pauls Valley?"

Certainly I remembered her. I listened and learned that she was killed in a car wreck while traveling to see one of her home-bound patients.

I felt stunned. What was this? Carol had died at age 51 earlier this year. Now one of her best friends, Judy, was dead. I went to see Judy's mother. She asked me to read the poem Julia had me read for Carol's funeral. For the third time in a year, I read "Safely Home" at a funeral.

While doing this, I felt a lump surfacing in my throat. I could just imagine Carol and Judy looking down on us as I read this poem again. After completing the poem and returning to my seat, I sent them love and asked them to help their families.

I traveled to Palm Springs and San Francisco for the Christmas holidays. The trip was my Christmas present from my sister and brother-in-law. We had a delightful time. John and I visited by phone. Then the night before I left their home, I had a vivid dream that included a unique room. A special event was to take place in that room.

The following morning, I said my good-bye's and flew to San Francisco. My daughter picked me up and we went to see the house where she lived. When I opened her bedroom door, I saw the room I had seen the previous night in my dream. It was her room, in detail. I knew our visit was to be very good, and my entire trip was wonderful.

When I boarded the airplane, I was happy. John, Boston, and Savannah were going to meet me at the airport. It was a new beginning. I had met each of them at the airport so many other times. Now they were coming to pick me up at the airport. Boston and Savannah always came to see me on their visits home during the six months John and I were not seeing each other. This would be the first time we would be together as a unit again. This time we all knew we were becoming family. I anticipated the happiness.

New Year's Eve arrived. Gary came for the weekend, as well as other friends. While Gary was here, he made a tape for me to play to the others. It shared with us information about the upcoming Sun Dance. According to what Gary said on the tape, it seemed the family had made the decision to allow only Native Americans to dance. I listened calmly, knowing a different plan for me was about to unfold?

Every person who entered my apartment and listened to that tape became sad and frustrated. The tape prepared each one for a change, and most do not like change.

People simply kept coming to my small apartment to stay. I just surrendered to a revolving door. It was mid January before I was able to settle down to make a living again. Surprises and love came as I once more attempted to focus on work. Phil and Judy, my cousins, grew tired of my not being able to find out what was wrong with my car. In fact, Phil took my keys from me and set out himself to gain a diagnosis and repair my cars' problem. That was a great gift.

A friend telephoned and asked me to help her prepare for marriage by pouring water for four sweats. Old friends began cropping up in my life. One was Lance. He came from Tennessee and shook me by the shoulders asking me, "Why aren't you presenting more seminars than you are presently doing? You are worth so much more! What are you doing?"

I, too, wondered about me. I felt certain that a plan was unfolding. Sometimes I, too, became impatient. I was tired of living on very little. I knew the doors would open for me at the right time. I simply had to keep doing my part, waiting for that time to come.

I had patiently waited for my fifty-third year. There seems to be something magical about the age fifty-three. I had read about others who began their most magnificent careers about that age, such as Ray Crock who began MacDonald's. The Colonel, the Kentucky Fried Chicken King, was even older. I had always said something was going

to happen when I was fifty-three that would begin to help me make a difference in my life. Would this, too, be a self-fulfilling prophecy? On January 23, 1994, I turned 53. With telephone calls and a book on Angels from John, lunches and breakfasts with friends for a week, it was a grand birthday.

My car kept going in and out of the service centers. I knew this was to slow me down and allow me to think about what I wanted and did not want in my life. As the year continued, other situations occurred to make me look at my energy and my boundary issue. How does one reclaim her own energy and keep it? What boundaries did I need to set?

I ran a business out of my apartment. As much as I love people, I knew that I could not complete projects to help me move forward in my career if I continued to allow friends to invade my apartment, my home. Now how would I explain my need to focus on my projects to these people that continually visited me? They all believed they were the only ones who came and did this. I love and enjoy them, but I knew the time was coming when I must set some boundaries for myself.

I could not write with anyone else in my apartment. It was simply too small. Neither could I run an effective business with others staying in my apartment. I could not comfortably contact others about seminars and do proper follow-ups with people coming in and out or leaving for a day, for a couple of days, for a week and then returning. It was impossible.

Thank goodness for the weekends that continued to be wonderful with John. We were developing a foundation to come back to when we wanted to re-energize. Our love and respect for each other could be felt and seen. It radiated out to those around us. We supported each other. Instead of talking to others, I again found myself talking to him about everything. How different!

Immediately after I made the decision to set a boundary for myself to form better habits, new situations just kept occurring. A friend came to my apartment, got sick, and ended up staying with me. She was so sick that she could not leave.

Gary's personal problems accelerated. He kept coming through Norman and touching base here as his troubles increased. He could not be helped by anyone, but himself.

Every situation involved friends who had helped me in my life. I just kept looking at how to handle all of this and what was happening.

It seemed so simple to set a boundary, and yet it was so difficult. I continued to work as much as possible. I also continued to spend time with John when we could do so.

I surrendered to all the situations and watched my life as the year unfolded. It was a very different year from the previous one. In Mid-March several people came to present pipes to both John and me to do their vision quests. This would be the first time for the two of us to put people on the hill at the same time. Previously, Carl had always poured water when I put people on the hill. Now John and I would be doing it together and John would pour the water. I knew it was going to be good.

I again attempted to set a new boundary for myself by establishing new work hours. This helped me feel as if I were going forward just a little. Some miscommunications were taking place. I realized friends were twisting my words. I was so concerned about this that I became very quiet and observed much more than I talked.

Kathy returned from a year's trip overseas where she studied how people around the world pray. She shared her stories and pictures with us while she stayed with me for a short visit. We discussed feelings about what we had learned and seen on our paths.

During that visit, it became clear to me that I was not the only woman that had a difficult time after the previous Sun Dance. Every participant I knew was learning in a very different way something about their own energy. I shared with Kathy my feelings and my decision not to try to dance at the next Sun Dance. I was going to respect the family's desire to have only Native Americans dancing. All answers from within showed me that I was not to go to other dances. I only knew that I was to keep allowing everything to unfold in its own time. The answers were coming.

I did not know how big the answer would be. Gary and his new partner telephoned and asked that I pick them up at the airport. They told me another couple had invited them to come help at their lodge. The other couple was paying for them to fly to Oklahoma, so they were also coming to the vision quest. I wondered how they could be both places, but felt that was not my problem.

I was happy Gary could attend. I thought it would be fascinating to have him come to this ceremony. This would be an opportunity for him to see how much he had brought to us. It would be his first time to simply sit back and watch. He could see what we had learned from his

teachings and from the many times we helped him place people “on the hill.” Gary had accepted many pipes helping many people. John and I had helped him put up hundreds of people for vision quests in the past.

For the previous two years, we had all been participating without him. He had become ill and was unable to fulfill his commitments or to participate due to personal problems. We continually helped to complete those commitments in a good way. Now he would have the opportunity to see how well we were all doing here in Oklahoma, how well we all were working together as a family. When one of us put someone up, we supported each other in the effort. We had all learned to work as a committee or as a family in doing these vision quests. I wanted him to see how we were doing. At the same time, I hoped we met his expectations.

I again traveled to the airport to pick up Gary and his friend. We retrieved their baggage and drove towards Norman, stopping to eat. We then made one last stop at my apartment in Norman before going to the land to prepare for the quest. The energies felt strange in the car as we drove. As we entered the gates of the land upon which these vision quests would be taking place, I knew that every step and every word was again being carefully orchestrated. I planned to listen.

Gary immediately began to give directions to his female friend and me. Others began to arrive. The woman I was placing on the hill looked concerned when she arrived and saw what was happening. I saw her concern and gently reminded her, “No matter what happens, stay balanced. Gary is here. I don’t know what is happening. I know you did not present the pipe to him; however, he seems to be taking charge. I have no idea what will take place in the lodge before you go up, but you just work on staying balanced. The more balanced you are as you walk toward your spot, the better your vision quest will be.”

Normally, I would have honored this man by turning everything over to him, but I understood that this woman presented her pipe to me. Through this sacred pipe, I had made a commitment to her.

The man who presented John a pipe did so, because he wanted John to help with his vision quest, to pray for him. When a person presents a pipe and it is accepted, a connection is made between the one presenting the pipe and the one receiving it. The Grandfathers and all that is God work through the one to whom the pipe is presented.

How could Gary be doing what he was doing after all he had

taught us about this? First he said to me, "There will be an all women's sweat first for the woman and then an all men's sweat for the man going up. Go tell the others."

"Fine." I went and told all the women to change clothes and explained to the men what was happening. We began to prepare to take the woman up. After I changed clothes and headed for the lodge, I saw Gary had moved into the lodge and was filling his pipe, preparing to sweat. I went to the door of the lodge and asked "Gary, what are you doing? I thought we were to have only women sweat this time."

"No. We're going to have everyone sweat together for this woman."

As I walked back up the hill, I felt confused. One minute it was one way, and in the next instant, the decision changed. I recalled my feelings at the previous Sun Dance...the confusion and the changes. I told the women and men, "There has been a change in plans. Everyone needs to prepare to sweat."

I listened intently for my own answers. How could I honor Gary and honor my commitment to this woman? We entered the lodge. Gary poured the water and guided the sweat. He began every song, and all were new to us even though we had learned perhaps fifty Lakota songs. This was not like Gary at all. It felt cold in the lodge instead of warm. I felt separation. He prayed and sang some more. Then he opened the door. The sweat was over. We all got out and prepared to take the woman to the space she had chosen. Gary did not even give me an opportunity to speak or pray for this woman I was putting up. This seemed to be a serious breach of protocol.

We all dressed and returned to the lodge. Gary motioned for all of us to take the woman to her chosen area. He stayed behind. I stayed balanced. Her ties became a little tangled, but we were able to straighten them. I knew why. It was the confusion. We prayed and sang for her and left, returning to the lodge for the next sweat.

We all went back into the lodge and prepared the man for going on the hill. Gary again did the same thing. I sat in the lodge and asked myself, "What is happening here? Is Gary going to allow John to pray for his person?"

I checked my feelings. I felt separation, cold, and devalued. Something was over. Something was dying. It was ending. I could feel it in the lodge. Why? Gary crawled back into the lodge to pour water for John's man who had presented John the pipe. After singing,

Gary asked John to pray for the man he was placing on the hill. I attempted to remain balanced and to practice acceptance of the situation. We placed the other person on the hill and his prayer ties also became a little tangled...confusion. We got them straightened out and completed the prayers and singing. We all returned to camp.

I felt as if we were all caught in Iktome's web and we would be moved to the outside of the web as we resolved what was truly happening here. I kept attempting to focus on what was being orchestrated.

With both people on the hill, Gary asked for my car and said he was going to my apartment to spend the night. I gave him the keys and he left. The rest of us remained to pray for those on the hill.

The night was cold, but I knew the questors were fine. Everything felt very calm. The next morning, discussions began. We discussed about the masculine and the feminine. The women and I were discussing with several of the men. Men are logical. They think. Women are emotional. They feel. It was perfect. The longer we visited that morning, the more logical the men became and the more emotional and misunderstood we felt.

The discussion continued to be demonstrative. The men laughed at us because we were getting too close to some uncomfortable issues. When they laughed, we felt invalidated. Our feelings were hurt. They became more frustrated, because we did not understand their logic.

What was best of all was that every person involved in this discussion attempted to come to some conclusions about reactions we were having. We all tried to learn something from what took place. Throughout the morning, we each received answers which we shared with each other later that day. All of us came to a pretty amazing conclusion.

We decided that when there is a difficult discussion between the masculine and the feminine, men walk away thinking there is no way to get her to understand. Women walk away from the discussion feeling no closure and feeling no validation. We all agreed this can be solved and will be resolved as we each gain more balance within.

Gary returned in the afternoon and the couple who had wanted Gary's help and paid his way there soon came to get him. The afternoon was then spent preparing two other women for their quests. All went well. It was a better night and it felt good.

The next morning, I rose early and several of us prepared the lodge for the sweat to honor the woman's return from the hill. We cleaned out the lodge and built up the fire. Others placed sage around the pit. The lodge was ready. We were gathering to bring back the first woman just as Gary and his friend arrived. He asked me what was happening, and I told him we were ready to go for the first woman. He then asked, "Are you going to have a morning sweat before getting her?"

"No, we're going now."

I started up the hill and looked back to see Gary crawling into the lodge and inviting any others who wished to join him to do so. Many who overheard our exchange did not go into the lodge. A few who had not been there to see all that had taken place during this vision quest did get inside the lodge to sweat. I could not believe what was taking place now. Gary was undermining my decision and my authority.

Again, I felt as if what I did and said did not matter. I no longer felt balanced. I felt hurt and anger. We could not go get the woman on the hill because the sweat lodge was being used by Gary. I went to my pipe for an answer. Others saw me filling it and came to sit down to share. We prayed to bless the entire situation. Sadness surfaced in several of us. However, by the time the pipe was completed, I again felt an inner strength, calmness, and balance re-entering.

We waited for the sweat to be finished. It lasted several hours. As quickly as I saw them coming out of the lodge, I went down to begin preparing for the next sweat. The stones in the pit were still warm, but I gently removed them and cleaned the pit. Then I saw my healing stone that I left in the lodge to be used in all the sweats. It was a natural rock in the shape of a perfect heart. It was quartz. I saw that it had split in half. I took it out and walked towards Gary. I handed it to him and said, "My heart rock is broken."

His friend looked at me and said, "Why?"

I replied as I walked back to the lodge, "Maybe because my heart is broken."

Then I turned around and walked back to Gary. I wondered what I was going to say, but it came through me as, "Look, I do not understand what has happened from the time you arrived. It has never been like this. What is happening?"

He replied, "You will understand more when the woman comes down. I think it is time for a woman's sweat, don't you?"

"Yes."

We left to bring back the woman. The sweat was excellent. She looked radiant. We shared her first meal with her, her feast. Then she began packing her car to return to her family who had not come to support her. While she was preparing to go, I began completing some final tasks with a young girl preparing to go on the hill.

As Annie and I worked, I thought about the day this young lady presented me the pipe. I had been very hesitant, but we discussed this commitment and after she listened, she still wanted to do it. I was glad I had accepted that pipe, for I felt an overwhelming joy while helping her prepare. I had been hesitant because she was only nine. I was very gentle with her and yet hard on her. She purified in the strictest of ways, made all of her prayer ties, and gathered her own rocks. She did everything an adult would do as she walked towards her vision quest.

We took her to her space early in the day. We were to pick her up at dusk. As we placed her on the hill, beautiful clouds formed above us. The Grandfathers joined us. They seemed to roar in a gentle way. As they rumbled, I knew they were talking to this young one and to us while we put her up. They sounded as if they were pleased and were praying and singing for her. We turned and walked away, leaving her alone. I knew she was going to be fine. She remained in her space during the entire storm. At dusk, we went to bring her back to the lodge.

We all entered the lodge with her. Her statements following her first vision quest were priceless. I felt honored to have had this young lady ask me for my assistance. I listened in the lodge as one woman asked, "You were out there in a storm. Do you feel stronger now because of what you have done?"

She was quiet. I could not see her face in the dark, but I knew she was formulating her answer. Then she replied in the honesty of a youth, "I've only been back about ten minutes. How do I know how strong I feel?"

We finished her sweat and visited quickly before the storm became stronger. Then we all quickly went to our beds. The following morning, the others returned from the hill. These vision quests were finished. Everyone returning shared their feasts with us and we all packed to leave. Gary left with the ones who had brought him to Oklahoma to assist them. They took him to the airport the next morning. Everything seemed all right at that point. I planned to talk to him about my feelings and gain more understandings about what had taken place,

but I did not want to do so until after the four days following the vision quest were complete.

To my surprise, one of the women who went on the hill telephoned me and told me that she had called Gary to tell him about a dream she had on her quest. She said he had supported her in answers she received in her dream.

However, a few hours later, Gary telephoned me about their conversation and stated that he could no longer be our teacher. He could no longer support us with his family on the reservation. He was cutting us loose. He told me that he had just accepted a pipe for a man to come to Sun Dance. He asked that I tell the man not to come, because he would not be allowed to dance. Then he said that he hoped to see us at Sun Dance.

I knew the Gary on the telephone was angry, hurt, and tired. He was coming from a point of blame and resentment. This was not the Gary I had known. I had watched Gary for years, and I knew this angry Gary would be gone quickly. He would return to the Gary of unconditional love as he got better.

At the same time, I also knew that he was right. He needed to walk away. It was time. I agreed. He said that he would no longer take any responsibility for vision quests being conducted by us. I said, "I understand, but do you understand that none of us ever expected you to take any responsibility for what we did, even when you asked us to finish your commitments and we did so?"

I was fine with what was said, for the Gary in the past had repeatedly said, "Do everything you are doing and do it in a very good way. Help each other and it will be O.K."

We had done the best we could. I shared with him, "Remember this before you hang up. Each of us will always love you and appreciate you."

Before I could say good-bye, he hung up the phone. I sat staring at the phone thinking about the theme of this entire vision quest. There seemed to be several themes. People were facing issues in lives head on and valuing self. There seemed to be miscommunications taking place, misunderstandings. This was similar to Sun Dance. I wondered why the Sun Dance leader had played her role in the way she had, and I wondered why Gary had to play his role. I knew part of it was about releasing this to become me. A growing frustration was taking place inside me as the year moved forward.

I had both negative and positive feelings about everything. I felt like, "What now?" With the congestion gone in my car, my body acquired a congestion in the lungs. I was being forced to slow down. I began working on myself with prayers and my own nutritional products. Finally, I had to turn to a round of mild antibiotics. I went to yoga and used the energy shown to me by my yoga teacher to move everything up and out of the body.

It got much better, but the end of the problem in the lungs just kept hanging on. One day I actually gave up doing anything, no work at all. I simply sat and stared at the walls. As I sat there thinking, I spiraled downwards. I felt frustrated about every part of my life. John telephoned and said, "Susanne, how are you?"

"I am sad."

"Sad?"

I rarely said I was sad to John or anyone. "Yes."

"Well, tell me about it."

I began. I told him about my frustration over how I handled my life, how I wanted my book to be finished, how I wanted my seminars to take off, and then I added, "I am also frustrated about us. I wonder if we are just supposed to be best friends or something?"

I heard the chair in his office creak and then he said, "Susanne, I think I am about through here for the day. Why don't you see what is playing in Norman. You sound like you need a good, funny movie. I'll be right there. Are you dressed?"

"Yes."

"O.K., I will be right there."

In a short while, we were in the movies, a funny one. Afterwards we went to eat. Then we returned to my apartment. When John sat down, he said, "O.K., tell me what you are sad about."

I was now in a better frame of mind, but I was still frustrated. As I talked, John listened. Then I came to the part about us maybe being intended by the Grandfathers and God to be just good friends. He smiled and looked at me. He said, "Do you have to make a decision about this tonight?"

"No. I don't believe I am in any condition to make any decision about anything tonight."

"Fine. Susanne, there is going to be another eclipse, a total eclipse of the sun, on May 10th. I have marked my calendar. I want to watch the eclipse with you. Can you wait until after then to make that

decision?”

“Yes, but Dawn will be here that week.”

“Well, maybe she can watch the eclipse with Jet.”

“Perhaps.”

I woke up the next day feeling better. I decided to trust more. Just trust. I also made the decision to begin doing more again. I began to pull together and integrate everything into seminars that would help people and businesses. I drew paradigms in a new way, dividing the paradigm into four sections, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. I thought about the four virtues again, applying them to businesses and people...bravery, wisdom, fortitude, and generosity. New ideas and how to present them were coming rapidly.

I kept remembering, “Trust and trust again. Step forward in life and have no fear.” I felt protected and at peace finally with the fact that we, as a group, had been released. I was at peace with my decisions. I knew the Sun Dance had told me that I must stand on my own and take care of myself. I would have the help necessary from the other side. A new energy entered me when John was gone, and now a new energy would enter with Gary’s departure. In the past, I would have kept trying to control the situation instead of allowing it to unfold naturally.

A teacher comes and a teacher goes. I knew the day would eventually come when Gary would no longer be with us. He had told us this himself. He had told me again following my second quest that he would not be around someday .

Mother’s Day came. It was a good weekend. We went to a wedding for friends who work with the prison system. It was held within the walls of a federal prison in conjunction with a pow-wow. In a give-away, I received a beautiful unexpected gift from a man named Jerry. The gift was a piece of leather with a buffalo tooled on it. As I left the prison taking the gift with me, I somehow felt I, too, was being freed.

John spent Mother’s Day with me. Dawn flew in from San Francisco late in the afternoon. After John left, Dawn and I went to eat. It was a good weekend.

Tuesday, May 10th arrived. Dawn was at home with me, and I simply could not tell her to go watch the eclipse with someone else. She knew John and I were going to be watching the eclipse and seemed to look forward to sharing the experience with us. John arrived. I called him to the bedroom and said, “John, I just couldn’t tell Dawn to leave, but I will if you want me to do so.”

“No, she is part of the package.”

We left and traveled towards Oklahoma City to have lunch in a restaurant where we could sit on the patio and watch the eclipse. John and I had been getting along so well. I knew there was little need for discussion that day. I sat across from John. Dawn sat between us.

Just as the eclipse reached its peak, John passed a present across the table to me. It was a box. I opened it to find a satin bag inside. Inside that satin bag was a ring. It had sun rays of gold surrounding a large black star sapphire. I was stunned.

It fit. John watched as I put it on. I said, “Where did you get this? John, I am stunned. I have never seen a ring like this. I love it.”

“Good. I have been working with a jeweler on it for several months. We ordered in all sorts of jewels. Nothing worked. Some rings we designed even looked awful. We almost did not know what to do until I remembered this black star sapphire. I bought it in 1969 in Thailand. I had a tie tack made for my dad. He is the only one who ever wore it. After he died, my mother returned the tie tack to me, but I saved it. For what, I did not know. I had almost forgotten about it, but then I remembered, and it was perfect. It represents the moon crossing the sun.”

I added, “And, of course, it is perfect, because this ring represents the sun, the moon, and the star.”

I tried it on all of my fingers. It only fit the fourth finger of my left hand. I smiled as I said “John, it only fits this finger. What do you intend this ring to be?”

John responded, “Let’s call it a practice ring.”

“Sounds good to me.”

Joy was in the air. We left the restaurant. The following day Dawn left, and I went to Pauls Valley. It was a magical weekend with both of us opening up to each other.

The next week John presented a pipe to Carl to do a four-day vision quest. This time he wanted to go to Northern New Mexico to a remote mountain called Pedernal “flint.” Something was happening inside me. I was not certain what. Every time I thought of John doing this four-day vision quest, tears surfaced if I said the words. If I did not say the words “four days,” I could move through the discussions without the tears surfacing.

A four-day vision quest is very difficult. It is generally only done when a person wants to have a death of something or wants to

become a medicine person. I knew John wanted the death of everything that was negative about the past, so he could move forward to a new life. I also knew he wanted to be on the hill during the time we would all normally be Sun Dancing in South Dakota.

A woman presented a pipe to me to do a vision quest. I accepted it.

Time passed, and I again had pressure applied to me to do what others wanted me to do rather than what I knew I was to do. Miscommunications again took place. I attempted to listen for the Grandfathers' guidance in each situation. I listened and did what I felt was right, knowing some people were angry with me.

When the woman arrived to go on the hill, I learned that she, too, was experiencing some anger about miscommunications and pressure surrounded her as she walked towards her first quest. By the time she was placed on the hill, however, all seemed in harmony and everything seemed good.

More and more, I was understanding the commitment one takes on when accepting a pipe and placing someone on the hill. Once that pipe is accepted, the one receiving the pipe moves through his or her greatest fears also. Issues seem to appear for the person accepting the pipe that are similar to the issues of the person to be placed on the hill. The sharing of issues gives a greater understanding to the one accepting the pipe and more answers to the one presenting the pipe. This assists with any healing that is necessary.

I was learning more each time I accepted a pipe. There is a much greater connection between the one preparing for the vision quest and the one placing the questor on the hill than I ever dreamed to be possible. An energy connection is made. Once the pipe is set down at the end of the quest, the responsibility of the quest ends for the one that accepted the pipe. The space where that energy has been held is gone. The person who received the pipe for the quest feels that empty space inside for a few days until new energy fills the area.

As June approached, so did people. It seemed people were visiting almost every weekend in my apartment again. Then finally John and I had a few weekends alone before going to San Antonio for Boston's high school graduation. After that short, delightful trip, we returned home to complete work before going to New Mexico.

There was much to do to be able to get away for John's quest in New Mexico. I did what I could to prepare and arranged for my work

to continue with the help of a cousin. Another couple was going to be traveling with us. We were all excited.

With chaos and friends' medical problems surrounding us, work continued. One friend had a ruptured appendix. Another had a ruptured disc. My son was also having small problems with his health. John and I both knew more about what some of our prayers would be on his vision quest, health and help for these three.

Three days before I left, I had an unusually vivid dream. In the dream, I was moving to Pauls Valley. I was moving what I needed the most...my computer, a few clothes, and a telephone. I took the back road and when I came to Paoli, I became hungry. I stopped to eat. People were packed into the restaurant. I walked completely around the semi-circle of booths. An older man stuck his finger out and touched me as I went by, but I continued walking. All seats were filled, so I returned to the booth with the man who touched my arm and asked to join him. He began talking to me about some places close by that it might be good to see. He offered to take me to see them. I told him that I would love to go, but that I needed to be in Pauls Valley by one o'clock for a beauty appointment with Linda. He said that was no problem. Another couple was listening and asked if they could join us. We looked at each other and agreed.

He took us to see the countryside in his pick-up. Suddenly, I realized it was almost one o'clock and asked if he could let me run into the school house he was showing us to telephone Linda that I was running late.

"Certainly."

He pulled to a stop. I went inside and found the office. A young lady was sitting at the front desk. I asked to use the phone and her directory. I telephoned the beauty parlor and left a message for Linda, saying I was running a little late but would be there. Just as I tuned to leave, someone told me the children wanted to sing for me before I left. They happily filed out of a nearby room, lined up, and began singing beautifully. Then I looked up to see a lady in a nurse's uniform leaning forward over a desk looking at her paperwork. I saw her side view and then looked closer. I realized it was Judy, the one for whom I had read "Safely Home." She turned and smiled. She was so pretty and so gentle...even radiant. She said that she was glad I recognized her. I told her I had an appointment with Linda and had to leave.

Before I could go to my beauty appointment, I had to make one more stop to put my belongings in a room. I opened the door to the room. The left wall was solid glass windows. The back wall was glass halfway down. There were bamboo curtains over the glass windows to pull closed, if necessary, when the rain came. There was one bed and one table. Just then the phone rang. It was someone from Western Oklahoma wanting to know if it was raining there. I looked up and noticed a few drops of rain were beginning to fall. I hung up to close the bamboo curtains.

Then I headed to the beauty shop to see "Linda." As I entered the front door, Judy was there. How did she beat me there? She came out of the back room to greet me, taking me past other people and into the back room from which she came. Many young people came through the back door and then my cousin, Carol, for whom I had initially read, "Safely Home" entered. She looked so happy. She danced with some of the children coming through this back area. I asked her "What are you doing here?"

She laughed and said, "What are you doing here?"

"I am moving to Pauls Valley. I have to go back to Norman and get some more things."

Carol smiled. "I will go with you."

I told Carol I would be back to get her and walked back through the beauty shop to the door. End of Dream. I woke up.

I worked all morning and at noon, I went to lunch with my cousins, Margaret and Judy. I asked them, "Did Carol and Judy have a friend named Linda?"

They both thought. Then Margaret said, "Carol and Judy used to run around with someone named Linda who was a beautician. She was the first of the three to die. I believe she had cancer." I then shared my dream with them.

A few days later, John and I traveled with another couple through Western Oklahoma and on to Taos, New Mexico. On the way, I shared my dream with John and the couple. I thought it was interesting that John was guiding us on this excursion, just as the man in the dream had guided myself and another couple. We arrived at a motel named the Laughing Horse Inn. Looking at it from the outside, the couple and I had doubts. Upon entering the door, it was wonderful. The man showed us several rooms and then he suggested we might want to see the penthouse, explaining that it could sleep six when necessary. I

quickly agreed.

As we went into the penthouse, I opened a door. There was the room in my dream. "John, we have to stay here."

"Why?"

"Look."

"Susanne, it is the exact room you described. You're right. We have to stay here."

We checked in. The following day we left for the vision quest. Purification time seemed heavy in the sweat lodge. At last the time came. John was going up on Pedernal. It was a forty-five minute drive to the base of the mountain from our campsite and a hard and difficult climb over loose shale for another hour, but the nine of us made it.

When we came back, I made 600 prayer ties. A falcon came to visit. The light beings came. Looking into the fire Thursday night, I saw a deer, angels, hands, healing hands. Many images could be seen.

This place in New Mexico close to Abiquiu was enchanting. I could hear bears. I could not wait for the days and nights to pass to bring John back. I understood deep within the seriousness and pain of this quest. I knew the death of something was taking place. One day I was as irritable as could be. Tears trickled down my face off and on all that day. Was I truly crying for a vision for this man or was I grieving the loss for the birth? I did not know nor did it matter. I simply knew something very important was happening. Old deep things must be removed from both of us for love to flow in. It was a part of moving from the dark to the light. I made prayer ties and allowed all feelings to flow. I sensed that my grieving might be of my own death of that last bit in me from the past, so that I might go forward in a completely new way also.

At first light, I was up. We all got ready to bring John back to the lodge. We climbed fast and high. I was climbing much better after being there for over a week. When we reached him, he looked wonderful, but at the same time I was worried for he looked bent over and gaunt. He had been without food or water for four days during a record breaking heat wave. We followed him down the mountain. He was weak.

He reached over and touched me once. I appreciated it. Carl just smiled. When we reached the lodge, everyone stood as he passed. He entered the lodge. He told his story about what happened from the

time he left the lodge until we came to get him. A change of energy had taken place for John, and we could all see it.

With this quest, I felt we had both shed a part of the past. It was as if the ghost of our past had been removed. We were seeing each other with more love than was imaginable.

We all broke camp and prepared to leave. John talked non-stop all the way home. He was as "wakan" as could be, and I tried to remember that. I drove all the way. We laughed and visited and shared, stopping at a wonderful hotel on the way home to shower and sleep.

During the first weekend in July, John asked me. "Susanne, do you need another ring for an engagement ring?"

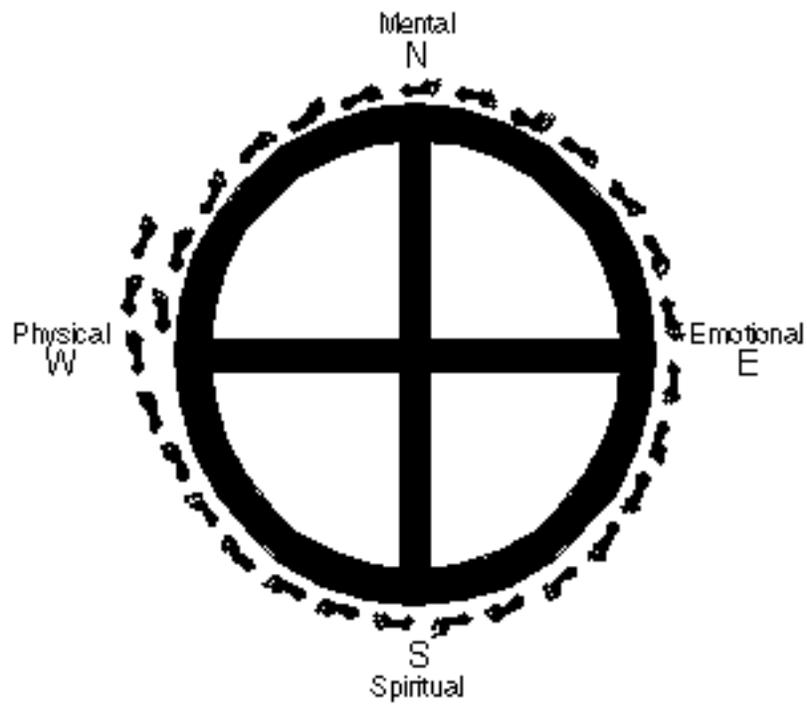
I looked at my ring. "No. I can't imagine a better ring."

"Good. Then let's be officially engaged, want to?"

"Yes. Let's tell our children first before we tell anyone else."

We waited a few weeks until I could wait no longer and told my children. I thought Savannah was never coming to Oklahoma. We wanted to see Savannah's face when we told her. We decided to telephone Boston who was in school in New York and share the news with him. Jet, Dawn, and Boston were older. Each one was excited in their own way. They wanted each other for brothers and sisters. They had all wanted this for a long time. Then a man to whom I sent my book telephoned. He said it had possibilities, but I needed to rewrite it. I felt like a child receiving a "C" instead of an "A," but was happy I did not get an "F."

Requests for seminars came in. The beginning was beginning. A teacher appeared when I needed him and remained until it was time for him to go. The Grandfathers orchestrated it all. I am not certain Gary even understood how he was worked through so perfectly for the highest good of all concerned. He stayed until we were prepared for his leaving. He remained until I developed a new inner strength, my own energy, so I could begin. I had been prepared and now it was time. I also knew where my yellow and purple patches were leading me. They were taking me to a different Sun Dance. At fifty-three, it was all beginning.



When you reach this point, the doors open to a new life of peaceful harmony.

A PATH TO GOD

As I walk my path, I have come to believe that all roads lead to one God and we are all, consciously or unconsciously, moving back towards that God. I have absolutely no difficulty with understanding that God and Wakan Tanka are the same. God makes his presence known to each of us in a form that we can best accept and understand.

My path is not anyone else's and another's path is not mine. Each of us finds our own path back to God, and all paths lead to God through prayer. Everything always goes back to prayer. No matter what religion or spiritual way we take, we are all headed towards the same God.

I believe God agrees with Abe Conklin, a native American whom The Smithsonian Institute honored for his saying, "All Roads Are Good." As long as each individual attempts to walk in a direction towards God, there will be growth, and this is good. Sometimes we may fall, but we can stand back up and continue the walk. Each life is created and orchestrated as perfectly as the leaves on a tree, as perfectly as the feathers on each bird. Look around. With our assets and our flaws, we are still perfect. We are learning what we need to learn at this time.

Through a physical birth, I received my opportunity to move through my sixteen lessons to find my sixteen truths. However, this is a choice. I knew I could choose to go back and remain on the first medicine wheel. I could go round and round over and over for the rest of my life or I could take responsibility for my healing. I could then move around the entire medicine wheel while here on this earth in this lifetime.

All I had to do was be open and willing to ask for help in finding my answers, opening to how the answers might present themselves. A path to move closer to God opened for me, just as it will for anyone who asks. It is an individualized path, one of surrendering and allowing the Great Spirit God to take over your life. I was given a path which gifted me with the opportunity to become less attached to what I no longer

needed, so my eyes would open and I could become better able to see. Today there is greater acceptance of self and others. Growth takes place. A security and inner peace beyond all understanding has resulted.

Many people ask me if Jesus is involved in this way. Since starting this path, I've seen the representation of Jesus Christ in all parts of this path. It makes me wonder what happened in those lost years we know nothing about. During sweats, many pray through Jesus Christ. We all understand there is only one God.

When someone who loves Jesus chooses this pathway, they cannot keep from thinking about Him as they walk to their spot to quest for a vision. You understand and know a little of you will die while you are "on the hill." As you walk up the hill with people following you in silence, you feel the suffering of Jesus and compassion for Him as He carried His cross. You realize that you also will return to those following you as a new person. It is a tiny bit of the resurrection.

Jesus found answers by spending time alone in nature, fasting, and praying. Moses and others have done the same. They returned to the people with truths. Many, in this way, find their answers through time alone, fasting, and prayer. This is exactly what a vision quest is all about. During a quest, dreams and visions come, bringing understanding and answers. I know that answers were received in dreams and visions in the Bible, just as those questing today have the opportunity to receive.

Representations of Christ and how He gave himself so we might live are easily seen at the Sun Dance. The tree gives its life so others might live. The Dancers raise their hands and hearts up to the tree, allowing the healing energy to enter. Followers raised their hands and hearts up to Christ. Some are attached to the tree through their ropes. This attachment to the tree reminds everyone of Christ's crucifixion. The Sun Dancers give of their flesh so others might receive healing and have new life.

As you focus on the tree and pray for four days from sunrise to sunset, the choke cherry branches placed across the tree have an uncanny similarity to the Cross. Christ was hung by nails driven through His body. The handmade sage adornments around the head, wrists, and ankles are reminders of wounds He sustained. Not touching oneself with the hands is a tiny reminder of Christ's restrictions as He hung on the cross.

When I attend a purification sweat, I see many reminders and symbols of the Holy Trinity. The lodge represents God's creation of the Universe. Christ is represented by the altar, and the fire symbolizes the eternal flame of the Holy Spirit. I now consider myself a Christian who carries a pipe for the people, all people.

Some on the reservation feel the pipe only belongs to the Native Americans. Yet, there are others who are changing. They are opening and sharing, understanding "the pipe will take care of itself."

They teach and they understand how these ways can help heal the world. For many walking this way, the four colors...black, red, yellow, white...have come to also represent the people of four colors. This also includes any mixtures thereof. I have seen pipe carriers of all colors coming to learn their truth from this path. This will bring health and help to the world.

It is time we learn to accept diversity and appreciate our differences and similarities rather than resist and fight against each other. We often stereotype people according to what we have been taught.

Before a Lakota medicine man mysteriously entered my life, the world of the Native American was foreign to me. I had my myths and my stereotypes presented to me. The more I learn, the less I know. I have only my experiences and my perceptions.

We all deal with myths about the White Man, the Native American, the Oriental, the Russian, the Afro-American. We stereotype gays and lesbians. We stereotype Catholics and Jews, males and females, etc. These stereotypes are generally handed down to us by others. Then, perhaps, one or two incidences take place that tend to confirm what we have been taught. We say, "I definitely believe that now."

Of course, what we expect usually happens, but we often fail to see why something happens. It seldom occurs to us that our own energy tends to cause exactly what we expected. With time, perhaps we can release these old stereotypes, join hands, and accept and be accepted as we are, where we are.

We have an opportunity today to truly learn about each other, to understand and to love each other. Just as I have made mistakes in my life, entire cultures and religions have and continue to make mistakes. This is a time for healing those differences and separations and for moving into a different future.

I feel there is a time coming soon when it will look as if everything is falling apart. We must be ready to accept and help others understand it is “falling together,” not apart. A new way of life is coming to each of us.

My greatest transformation has been a progression stemming out of my vision quests. My first one brought answers about my life and how I am related to everyone and everything else that God created. It confirmed my hopes and beliefs that there is much more help available to each of us than we could ever imagine. A much larger picture than I ever dreamed possible has been shown to me. When sought, a path appears.

The lessons of my second quest were completely different, because I was different. The Grandfathers gifted me with an inheritance. The parts of my medicine wheel that I needed to repair were shown to me. I saw the doors of my temple opening inward, just as I was going more inward and finding my truths. I became more connected to the earth during that year. I developed a closer relationship to the ants, the spiders, the weather, the trees and the plants, to everything that stood out and made its presence known during that hanbleceya. Closings were difficult during the following year, but the closings and answers were part of becoming more real, more me, the “Me” God sent to this earth.

On the third quest, I grieved the closings that had taken place and realized I had to face my fear of aloneness, a fear I had not been able to face before. Iktome showed me that more closings were necessary.

With the fourth one came a new birth. To have new birth, I had to walk through the fire in a new way. Everything had to turn to ashes for the new life to grow. Each quest presented to me what I was ready to accept. I had to be prepared for the birth to take place. It could not happen until I was ready. God knew when the time was right and what I must move through before I could handle a quest where I could stand facing into the storm with joy.

More answers are coming, and I will understand more in the future. It will continue. I plan to give and to receive, to learn and to share. I am grateful for my parents, for my family, for all who supported me in my past, for all who support me today, and for all of those who will be coming into my life in the future. I am thankful to have the opportunity to support others in a much healthier way than in the past.

On my walk, I hope to help others come to a greater understanding of acceptance and love. I want to assist them in gaining an inner security that brings more than anything external can possibly bring.

We can each receive truth, our own truth. It won't necessarily be our parents' truth, our family's truth, or our friends' truth. We can release fears. We can transform from a caterpillar to a butterfly, then to an eagle, and to a phoenix. We can soar. When one person achieves this gift, that one person can help many others through the process. It takes bravery, wisdom, fortitude, and generosity.

Instead of reading, discussing, and hearing about the Bible and its lessons, this has been and is an opportunity for me to walk into the pages of the Bible, seeing and understanding it from another view. This opportunity was offered to me, and I am thrilled I've been able to experience it. It is so very good. It is an "experiential" way.

Every face I see brings with it a part of God. It is that Spirit Within that shines through each one. When we each shed our physical selves, we are all spirit. Perhaps we are even like the light beings I see in the sky.

The real problem is not about Native American/Anglo, African-American/Anglo, or Non-Christian/Christian. It is about fear and our own uncomfortable feelings. By releasing fear, love can flow through. Skin color difference and religious differences will be accepted and someday understood.

How easy it all seems, but yet so difficult. Can I match my actions to my own words and live a life of love? How easy is it to be completely honest and truthful in my statements and my actions?

I say that I want to do as I have learned. I want to give my best in every situation, just as the Native Americans do in giveaways. When the time to do so arises, will I follow through? My intent is good.

By regaining my energy, I have gained the inner strength to not accept put downs, to not accept emotional abuse, to see and understand manipulation and to not accept that, either. I no longer place myself in situations that are inappropriate for me, no matter what guilt is placed upon me. It does not mean I do not care about people, places, and all that is involved. It only means that as I have regained me, I am much more careful with myself.

In making decisions, I walk to my center where I feel a connection to find the answer. If I have confusion about the answer, I

ask for assistance and wait for the truth to be shown. If there is great frustration and confusion, I know my answer is “no.”

In other words, I now listen. I have stopped doing the talking. Life is happier and much easier. Certainly there are difficulties, but beneath the surface is that security and the tranquillity of peace within.

Each moment has more meaning and is sacred. Everything is sacred. I understand that we are all trying to live life the best we know how. Every step taken is providing the negative and positive in life, so that we might learn from it.

I watch my words and my thoughts. We never know when the last moment might be. What I think and what I say goes into the earth and comes back to me. If I remain resentful toward someone, it comes back to me. If I remain angry with someone, it also comes back to me. The words I say about others come back to me.

When a healing is desired physically or emotionally, it can be received. Those who want it can have it. I have learned that I must ask for a healing if I want one. A healing may be given, but it will not be received if it is not desired. The healing will possibly come in a form not understood immediately. Whole cultures can also be healed.

As I am writing this book, a beautiful white buffalo calf has been born, a female. Many are traveling with their pipes to Wisconsin to visit it and to pray. Some are leaving prayer ties or other offerings. A few elders have even said that this could be a sign of the Anglo and the Native American finally realizing that they are here for the same purpose and can begin praying together, letting go of past difficulties. Others do not agree. Perhaps as we all begin to understand each other and other cultures, and to take from each what is good, we can then have the opportunity to heal the earth. I have the opportunity today to live life to the fullest in whatever situation I am placed. I have the opportunity to practice what I have been taught. If I fall down, I hope to stand up and move forward again, releasing resentments towards others as they arise while I walk this road that has allowed so much love to flow into me. I hope the love I feel for all as I write this flows right through and into you.

We are all related. Mitakuye Oyasin.