

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE IN SEARCH OF FEARLESSNESS PROJECT: A Unique Adult Learning, Transformative & Healing Experiment

-R. Michael Fisher (formerly Robert)
© 2006

Prophecies Of Transformation

Merlin's¹ Second Return [MSR] is a gesture of enabling and weaving powers, brought forth after madness; two she's, great shadowy sisters, phases, arranging the next challenge to civilizing forces.

In Search of Fearlessness [ISOF] is a community of people from diverse backgrounds dedicated to "*learning to live and love beyond fear and coping.*"²

The Spirit Lives On: ISOF (Calgary) Remembered 1989-1999

That was the standard way they spoke of themselves in the mid-1990's, at least in public documents. Each of the concepts "search," "fearlessness," "community," "learning" "live," "love," "fear," "coping" were foundational in the radical philosophy, theory and practice of everything they did and stood for. Each concept was revised from the "normal" understanding that their so-called civilized upbringing had taught them in a "coping culture." They knew something fundamentally was 'wrong' with their world.

He is Merlin. "Therefore shall the mountains be levelled as the valleys, and the rivers of the valleys shall run with blood."

We know your fate dear Merlin, take two goddesses by the hands. Not far from eternal springs shall you recover and heal your grief and madness. We call and you are called a second time, with new maps and new communities. Unravelling and spun again, our task is done. *The Guardian* is only left, now to proclaim your eternal passage across the threshold of the 'fear' barrier³:

My threshold is constructed out of every feeling of fear to which you are still accessible, out of every shrinking from the power which will take over to itself the complete responsibility for all your deeds and thoughts. So long as you have still any fear of that self-government of your fate, all that belongs to this threshold has not yet been built into it... seek not, then, to pass my threshold until you feel yourself liberated

¹ All references to the magical, mythical, psychological and mystical life of Merlin come from R. J. Stewart (1986).

² Taken from a letter c.1994 by Robert M. Fisher and Tim Buckler, as a promotional letter to expand ISOF's work and business into the wider Calgary community.

³ This term I created early in the ISOF Project theory, and have written much about, which will appear later in this text. In my doctoral research (Fisher, 2003) I utilize the sociophenomenological research of Fiona Mackie (1985) and her notion of the "fear barrier" in everyday perception. This current book on ISOF will discuss these concepts in detail in later chapters. 'Fear' (with inverted commas) is a conception that goes beyond our 'normal' (psychological) meaning of the term fear (again, to be illuminated later in this book).

*from all fear, ready for the highest responsibility.*⁴

Their community, a conscious community,⁵ was dedicated to birthing a *healing culture* out of the violent shambles of a *coping culture* that had left everyone wounded and fear-filled to the core of their being. They had a male visionary-leader, named Robert M. Fisher (Merlin) and two women whom had been attracted to ignite and nurture his powers and create a sacred place for people in his 'new' revolution of ideas on their way to learned action.

Merlin represents an ancient pagan method of insight and inner growth, while Jesus represents similar themes but upon a higher level.... Merlin berates worldly powers (in *The Prophecies*)/Jesus berates worldly aspirations. There is no implication that Merlin was contrived as a false imitation of Christ, but that the major themes of both are drawn from an enduring tradition with recognisable elements that relate to human inner or spiritual growth. Merlin acts in both *The Prophecies* and the *Vita* as the epitome of the Western prophetic consciousness in action. He teaches through example and through symbols of insight, rather than through direct or intellectual exposition. Towards the close of his life, Merlin grows beyond prophetic powers and retires to the woods for spiritual contemplation.... Merlin also commands certain cosmic or transcendent powers of vision; these are the ultimate end of prophecy rather than mere far-sight or prediction. In this role he is intimately connected to a female divinity, who appears as either a guiding or enabling figure (Minerva) or a weaving power who both assembles and unravels the solar system (Ariadne). (Stewart, 1986, pp. 197-198)

These were new times, intellectual times, and the 'word and pen became his sword.' The very meaning of "Reality" was a battle of political inevitability. He knew it was an ancient spiritual revolt of "strife or polar relationships"⁶ that streamed throughout all human time. It's blood-stained roots were familiar to him.

This nascent community called themselves *In Search of Fearlessness*. A curious title, that was a verb not a noun, an action not a thing. As leaders today must do, he wrote (in an unpublished document) of the origin of this phrase of challenging words:

The title *In Search of Fearlessness* was a take off beyond the "In Search of Excellence"⁷ campaign in the 80's. Our project was the next step further into the realm of how we live our everyday lives in the context of all the oppressive forces based on fear that have become "normalized" in our modernist culture. We would not call ourselves "new age" as much of it is still embedded in fear-based thinking. ISOF is a totally empowering response to the "World Age" of the 90's. (Fisher, 1990, p. 3)

"Excellence," for Robert, was not critical enough of the core assumptions of the worldview of the "*coping culture*." He saw "excellence" as an attempt to improve the quality of human work but it

⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *The Guardian Proclaims His Significance*, cited in Stewart (1986, p. 89).

⁵ There are many names for alternative, radical, and/or conscious communities. I am not referring to the 'normal' everyday communities in which we all live (from 2 or more gathering). Conscious communities require some form of intense healing and truthing processes, aiming toward growthful authentic relationships with a spiritual and/or social justice and action component. We relied heavily on "community-building" theory and practices of Scott Peck (1988) and the now defunct organization The Foundation for Community Encouragement at <http://www.fce-community.org/>

⁶ According to Stewart's (1986) study of Merlin (in its various versions historically), they all share a common set of aims and methods: "... they are impelled to their insight through matters of strife or polar relationships (fighting dragons or fighting armies or personal conflicts within the consciousness).... This central issue of transformation through polarised energies is dealt with fully in our analyses of *The Prophecies* and of the *Vita*" (p. 198).

⁷ See Peters & Waterman (1988), business guru's who made this a famous term in their book *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-run Companies*.

only taught people how to *cope* better and better. The source of that which was ‘wrong’ with the world was not a lack of “excellence” *per se* but something much more frightening. These bi-polar cultural formations, *coping culture* and *healing culture* were absolutely incompatible, and paradoxically, hopelessly intertwined. There was so much to learn of their different impacts and their contradictory worldviews, theories, values, languages, meanings, identities, habits, and practices.

“Merlin meets two women: one lush and bright, the other thoughtful and dark. They emerge from a thorny pathway to greet him.”

We shall not leave your side Merlin nor your tasks. You have been cured to begin again, that which you must. Our work begins, shall we.

“While they were doing these things a rumor ran all about that a new fountain had broken out in the woods of Celidon, and that drinking from it had cured a man who had for a long time been suffering from madness and had lived in these same woods after the manner of the wild beasts.”

“Her eyes shone bright, as the stars at night, No diamonds could shine so.”⁸ In the pool of darkness came Merlin’s insight: In the name of the goddess, I, Merlin have come to see that a coping culture which makes us forget the natural healing processes, is analagous to, if not equivalent to, a “Phallocratic Reality” or “field of vision of man’s arrogant eye.”⁹ I’ve seen it destroy entire armies—that ‘evil eye.’ Do not underestimate its powers, yet, do not overestimate them either.

Feminist author-critic, Marilyn Frye (1983) in *The Politics of Reality*, spoke of the fundamental struggle and terror within the woman’s liberation movement. Analogously, this introduces the vast experience the In Search of Fearlessness Community would come to know too. A *coping culture of fear* spawns a powerful evil and “arrogant eye” and de-limits the potential imaginary of the people for healing and further liberation. Frye wrote,

That eye gives all things meaning by connecting all things to each other by way of their references to one point—Man. We fear that if we are not in that web of meaning there will be no meaning: our work will be meaningless, our lives of no value, our accomplishments empty, our identities illusory. The reason for this dread, I suggest, is that for most of us, including the exceptional, a woman existing outside the field of a man’s arrogant eye is really inconceivable. This is a terrible disability. If we have no intuition of ourselves as independent, unmediated beings in the world, then we cannot conceive ourselves surviving our liberation; for what our liberation will do is dissolve the structures and dismantle the mechanisms by which Woman is mediated by Man. If we cannot imagine ourselves surviving this, we certainly will not make it happen. There probably is really no distinction, in the end, between imagination and courage. We can’t imagine what we can’t face, and we can’t face what we can’t imagine. To break out of the structures of the arrogant eye we have to dare to rely on ourselves to make meaning and we have to imagine ourselves beings capable of that: capable of weaving the web of meaning which will hold us in some kind of

⁸ From a “Traditional folk song” (cited in Stewart, 1986, p. 43).

⁹ “All eyes, all attention, all attachment must be focused on the play, which is Phallocratic Reality. Any notice of stagehands [females] must be oblique and filtered through interest in the [male] play. Anything which threatens the fixation of attention on the play threatens a cataclysmic dissolution of Reality into Chaos.... The ever-present potential for cosmological disaster lies with the background.... It therefore is part of the vocation of phallocratic loyalists to police *attention*.... phallocratic loyalists are motivated to forbid conceiving” (Frye, 1983, p. 170).

intelligibility.... We have correctly intuited that the making of meaning is social and requires a certain community of perception. We also are individually timid and want “support.” (pp. 80-81)

Such a poignant quote could apply to anyone, or any group of the oppressed, which knows they must courageously make their own meaning, with their own language, and their own education (as Paulo Freire¹⁰ taught), which is not dictated by the oppressive society and the “arrogant eye” of the so-called ‘normal.’ The “community” written about in this book is one that struggled, and still struggles, with everything Marilyn Frye wrote about—it is a community in rebellion against a politics of “reality” which places the *coping paradigm* ahead of the *healing paradigm* because it has grown terrified of healing itself.

It was an experiment that became a transformative healing journey for many hundreds of people, if not thousands, that have in some way been part of In Search of Fearlessness (ISOF) Project or what became to be called ISOF (Calgary) between 1989-1999.

Forget not that “arrogant eye” is only an illusion of apparently confident righteousness -- it will fall one day—remember it is hiding its ‘fear’ of a larger Reality and Truth that shall be revealed in the bowels of ISOF.

This book is dedicated to sharing what these ISOFers have learned about that larger Reality and Truth. The meaning of ISOF and the path and life of fearlessness is discovered and recorded for posterity.

There was a whole other, almost “secretive,” way they spoke of themselves that has yet been written down. It must now all be shared publicly—a journey of an *adult learning and healing community* that spanned a ten year time period in Canadian (world) history.

They were naive of course, and that naivety probably was the main ingredient which spurred them on to do anything at all towards “standing up” and “coming out” in society and offering an alternative way to positively change the way they and others lived. Yet, the other magic ingredient firing their will was ‘love’ and a ‘spirit of truth’ that they could not deny.

There lies now ‘ghosts’ too. ISOF, like any organization had, and still has, its unhealed painful memories, fears, rumors, and terrors in the closet. In print, before your eyes, they come out of this text into to the light of day. Everyone can listen to them, re-evaluate them, destroy them. As Leo Tolstoy once said, “I am not afraid of ghosts... I am only afraid of myself.” The minimal-self must be destroyed to grow and cross the threshold of the ‘fear’ barrier—the place where Victims and Survivors are “smashed” to pieces and from their fragments arise en-flaming Sacred Warriors. And as transformative conflict practitioner Arnold Mindell (1995) once said, “Bring out the ghosts. Make community” (p. 70). The ghosts of the past, still present, are stirring again and calling to remind everyone...

Follow your bliss and don’t be afraid and doors will be open.¹¹ – Joseph Campbell

¹⁰ See for e.g., Freire (1973), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. See also Giroux (1983) as these were and still are inspirational classic texts in education for transformation with critical theories of “resistance” as their foundation.

¹¹ Campbell with Bill Moyers (1988) speaks not in “pop culture” dictums of cheap advice, he speaks from a life-time of research on mythologies from across cultures and time, and at the core of the psyche/soul of human’s everywhere, as told through myths, Campbell arrives at this basic phrase (which got popularized in the 1980s-90s) of transcendent truth and wisdom for us global humans today.

On June 30, 1991, Robert (Merlin) stirred a draconian ghost in his life, as he wrote to his x-wife, after a very messy separation (with their two daughters involved):

In unhooking from the co-dependency I move towards a final resolution... here are some of my major decisions: (1) to follow my 'bliss,' my Soul's calling and to flow my gifts and work with *In Search of Fearlessness* full time as an 'artist' and 'teacher' in whatever forms that takes... it has only been fear of the 'greedy dogs' of economic paranoia that has kept me from this desire and calling. I'm now ready to risk, and I have disciplined myself to accomplish it no matter what.

All 'hell' broke out from that letter. Speak to him Merlin:

I have known all beginnings and ends, and there is nothing to fear!

Indeed, as Stewart (1986) had written, "There can be no greater aim for us today than that which was achieved by the Mystic Life of Merlin" (p. 188).

Great aims, bring also vicious pain. To watch a family fall apart is despairing. Robert felt helpless to stop it. The wound catastrophic. A great darkness fell on his world. Analogously, if one is "awake" much the same feeling takes one "down" as they watch the world unfold with its relentless problems and challenges. A dreadful sense of helplessness and hopelessness is always near, if one let's themselves be vulnerable (as fearlessness must) to Reality.

Michael (formerly Robert) was co-founder and Director of ISOF from 1989-1997. With humble pride and incessant grief he watched a radical alternative community and program rise, peak, and fall. ISOF for him, is essential to what it means to be human, to be growing, to be healthy, to be loving, and to be fighting for justice in an often unjust world. He rarely stops reflecting and asking, "why didn't it continue?" He reflects:

Today, in the spring of 2006, listening to robins¹² singing in the Vancouver morning mist, am re-energized and re-connecting with the 'spirit' of ISOF, its great illuminating purpose and its shadowy 'ghosts.' I've pinned old brochures, photographs, and other momentos from our community up on my office wall above where I sit and write. They taunt me not to forget. Merlin never forgets.

This book is one of the means by which to historically rebuild what was so essential in ISOF. For Michael (Merlin), what seems like eons ago, in his soul feels like it was all just yesterday. He's open to being there again but he's not exactly sure what that 'there' is or means now, having taken a detour career move in my life for the past eight years. Writing this book will weave into the past, through to the present, and into the future. ISOF continues and returns in a post-9/11 world. 24 hr healing journeys have beginning again with Michael's daughters, Vanessa and Leah, leading the way to their own recovery and warriorship.

Michael wishes to tell you as richly as he can what ISOF has meant and could mean today. He welcomes you to investigate it, critique it, and transform it as you see fit. What doors will be opened on this next version of *In Search of Fearlessness Project* in the 21st century?

¹² I totally relate to Merlin's intimate "wild" side as one of connection to Nature, and one of connection to birds, which he contemplated on and learned much from, as have I as a naturalist and wildlife (bird) painter in my 20's to my early 40's.

Some 30 people strong at their height, operating as a registered non-profit society, with many other friends loosely supporting our cause, there was a very strong sense of community ready to take on transforming themselves and the world. The late Joseph Campbell, a great mythologist, was asked in an interview¹³ if he was optimistic about the world. He said, “Yes, it’s great just the way it is. And you are not going to fix it up. Nobody has ever made it any better. It is never going to be any better. This is it, so take it or leave it.” There is a lot of truth in that and it is, no doubt, meant to keep revolutionaries humble while simultaneously not cowering in their greatness. You’ve may have heard the famous lines (quoted just about everywhere in the past decade) supposedly¹⁴ delivered in the famous inaugural 1994 speech by Nelson Mandela:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

Perhaps, though Michael tends to see the deeper fear¹⁵ is of Reality itself (as Lacan would also theorize). He speculated recently:

We are susceptible beings to the “prison” for our minds created by ‘fear.’ And, as the sacred warrior, Wilde (2001), used to say, “Once you see it [Reality], you will throw up.” Sound familiar?-- familiar to those who have gone there, or those going there, or to those who have watched Neo in the 1999 film *The Matrix* learn about “The Desert of the Real” from his teacher Morpheus. We have an inherent responsibility to do the best we can to improve what we can. Knowing where to start isn’t easy to decide sometimes. Sometimes you just fall into it by crisis, foolishness, grace and/or circumstance. Yeah, all of them for me are part of what takes me to my deep relationship with ISOF.

The community managed to run a physical, rented, off-the-street open space, the In Search of Fearlessness Centre¹⁶ (later called Fearlessness Centre), for their daily operations and programming in the wider urban community where they lived. It was an ideal vision put into practice as a collaborative service, business and community. By around 1996-97 they had a fairly extensive structure of multiple programs and activities (Figure 1). ISOF’s mission and identity was clear to them. Communicating (and marketing their services) to the rest of the wideworld around them, as to what they were *really* about, was not so easy and actually proved to be a formidable obstacle to their success.

¹³ *ibid.*, Campbell interviewed by Moyers, p. 65.

¹⁴ Many now have learned that the lines come from Marianne Williamson (1992), p. 165. However, one author researched the ANC, whom Mandela was leader for at the time, and a spokesperson for ANC denies that such lines were ever given in a speech by Mandela. It’s a fraud association created on the internet apparently (see <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/4564.htm>)

¹⁵ Though “... our ‘biggest fear’.... Rather, our greatest (unconscious) fear is that we don’t actually know what ‘fear’ is. That gets rather terrifying when you think of all the approaches to coping with fear that have been invented...” (Fisher, 2003, p. 14).

¹⁶ The first address for ISOF was a post office box #510, 918-16 Ave., NW, T2M 0K3, and by early in 1991 we moved into a mini-mall in a residential area renting a 300 sq. ft. space 4814 – 16 St. SW, T2T 4J5 by 1994 we moved downtown to an 800 sq. ft. space 2nd Flr. 924 –6 Ave., SW, T2P 0V5.

Figure 1 : ISOF Organizational Chart



Starting as a mystical vision in August 1989, in Calgary, AB, Canada, by Robert M. Fisher and Catherine V. Sannuto, the In Search of Fearlessness Project (ISOF for short) took on many branches (sub-projects) but as quickly as it was formed, eight years later, it began to dissolve. By late 1997-98 most of those branches had withered and the Calgary ISOF Community crumbled to virtually nothing within another year, as Robert had left to attend graduate school (Faculty of Education) in Vancouver, BC. He kept the In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute,¹⁷ an institute and Canadian publishing house, co-founded with Barbara Bickel (his life-partner) in 1991, alive as a vehicle to continue his philosophical, educational, and political writing.

Earth my body, water my blood,

¹⁷ The first form of the ISOF Project was "In Search of Fearlessness" "A partnership company formed by Catherine Sannuto and Robert Fisher [1990-92] to act as a business vehicle for our work and to possibly support other projects" (excerpt from *In Search of Fearlessness Newsletter*, 2(1), 1991). The first form of a public institute was "The In Search of Fearlessness Institute" founded by myself in December, 1991. "... dedicated to giving the work a higher profile in the institutional and corporate community" (excerpt from *In Search of Fearlessness Newsletter*, 2(1), 1991); by the next year the name changed to add "Research" and shifted the focus to researching and publishing on anything to do with "fear." Barbara Bickel and I legally formed a partnership company in 1991-1995 called "In Search of Fearlessness Centre." I set up a legal business called "School of Sacred Warriorship" (1993-) to train sacred warriors within the ISOF Community. In 1995 a registered non-profit association called In Search of Fearlessness Centre and Research Institute Society of Alberta was formed, which went through another name change later after Barbara and I left for Vancouver to The Centre Gallery Arts & Healing Society of Alberta (1998-99).

Air my breath and fire my spirit.

Echoes still run of a chorus of brazen voices singing, hands and bodies gesturing with the words... Michael remembers that wonderful pagan-like chant was common in their celebrations and sometimes as a way to move through “stuff,” “break the ice” in a new group, or merely to sing for the joy of it at a community potluck, meeting, vision gathering or ritual. They had this song (unknown source) and many others in an “unofficial” ISOF song handbook. More old fragments of memories... he recalls in reverie (and study of ISOF historical documents):

Prior to renting a space, in March/1992 we had our second or third “Community Gathering Round The Fire” at my small apartment. A document (handout) for that candle-lit gathering noted 13 indelible names and phone no.’s of “Sacred Warriors in Training” at that early point of a growing conscious healing community:

Robert Fisher/Barbara Bickel, Larry Sannuto, Sandra Goodway/Andrew Zolnai,
Bonnie Bultz, Ed Hoover, Shaun, Debbie Bendig, Gordon Sim,
Karen Loza-Koxhan/Andrew Findlay, Louise

A faded yellow brochure (c.1992) catches my attention from my wall collage. It was the very first one at our first ISOF Centre & Research Institute. The front pitch line reads: “A place for Creation-making, Community and Learning the Path of Fearlessness.” Inside, I have to chuckle at the descriptor we (Barbara & I) wrote for what ISOFCRI is NOT:

- a cult,¹⁸ commune, or Religious order
- a specialized phobias treatment centre
- a place for ‘heroic’ individualism (e.g., bungy cord jumping)
- a place to learn mind control, ‘psycho-technics’ to be will full
‘postitive thinking,’ ‘new age,’ etc.
- a place to focus on one’s problems (symptoms) and worship
guru’s and their methods

I can’t help noticing a folder of “ISOF Community Meeting Notes.” Our monthly meetings took many themes, too many to remember, but here is a small sampling of the topics of a group of them in 1993-94: “Community Work on Anger” (March), “Power” (April), “Money” (May), “Work” (June), “Confidentiality” (July), “Sacred Warriorship” (Sept.), “Gifting and Service” (Nov/Dec.), “Classism & Leadership” (Mar/94), “Classism” (May/94). Then there’s a light blue “Calendar of Courses & Events- September to November, 1995” and inside a list of “Support Groups” available: “Liberation Peer Counselling (LPC),” “Women’s Circle,” “Men’s Support Group,” “Ventures,” “Artist’s Support Group,” “Parents and Children.” Dizzying. It astounds me, to this day, how hard we worked (some of us, anyway).

Telling The ‘True Story’: Many ‘Voices’

To tell the complete and ‘true story’ (if there is such a thing) of ISOF and its history is an ominous task, and one that ought to be written from many different voices and perspectives.

¹⁸ In 1992 I wrote a document for the ISOF Community entitled *In Search of Fearlessness: What is it?*, “In Search of Fearlessness’ then must seem to many people like a brain-washing cult. It can easily appear that way. There is no way to deny this appearance when looked at from a fear-based view... i.e., from that of the ‘norm’ of our [coping] society” (p. 5).

Where possible, throughout the text, inserted voices are utilized of people involved in ISOF. Other voices, beyond ISOF, some from books and some from real life, guided them all through the battle with a coping culture of fear. Each expressed various aspects of what they were about. Michael, today, ponders the way he wanted this book to emerge:

I wish I could include them all, no doubt I'll leave out some unintentionally. I assure readers, that this is not to be a 'syrupy' 'drippy' 'aren't we all wonderful' review of ISOF (Calgary); indeed, I'll reprint some of the conflictual experiences as well. There's something to be learned from the good times and bad times—no need to find 'scapegoats' for the troubles we had. We did the best we could at the time (individually and collectively) with the wounds we carried, the consciousness we had developed, and the information and experiences we had available to draw upon—the rest is 'hit and miss' as far as I'm concerned—call it fate, chance, or accidental, not everything is planned or miscreant. Shit happens! Although, ISOF is dedicated to everyone being fully responsible for "their shit!"

After waiting nearly nine years since its collapse, I thought I would start 'the story' off with my own 'insider' version. I've experienced the initial explosion of its creation to its imploding destruction. I both attempted to nurture and preserve ISOF (Calgary) and contributed to its demise. Of course, it takes a "We" to do both and it takes an ethos in the culture and political world as well to make or break a liberational project.

The "We" was always dynamic, sometime miraculous and powerful and yet nearly always conflictual. It was one grand human experiment in adult learning, recovery, healing and transformation with no one road map and no particular one tradition, that could adequately guide them. They learned as they went and adjusted creatively and intuitively as they needed. Their vision was large but their resources (mostly money and patience) were too little, too late, to sustain the work they were called, admirably and nobly, to do:

We adhere to a grassroots self-help philosophy that encourages all humans to reclaim their own inherent self-esteem and abilities to cooperate, trust, think flexibly, and intelligently, and create a world based on Love instead of fear/violence/oppression. To recover our inherent humanness requires the systematic removal of human distress [traumatization] utilizing a process of healing within a community support model.¹⁹

When they set up their first ISOF website c.1996, it was interesting to see how others in the wideworld had perceived them, for e.g., Dennis Postle, unknown to us, ran a G.O.R.I.L.L.A. radical (anti-) psychotherapy and liberation website²⁰ wrote:

In Search of Fearlessness.[ISOF]

"This seems to be an interesting example of a human potential initiative, no mention of psychotherapy or even counselling"... [he quoted from our first and only website²¹ below]:

"The healing community that Robert M. Fisher has gathered around the ISOF Centre and Research Institute of Alberta (a non-profit society, Canada), has arrived at a 'fear' vaccine method of practices that encourages the healing and transformation of 'Fear' patterns that inhibit full human, rational and loving abilities. The

¹⁹ Ibid., letter c.1994.

²⁰ <http://g.o.r.i.l.l.a.postle.net/hpvoices/hplinks.htm>

²¹ <http://www.intervisual.com/isof/>

healing journey has definable stages that move one from the stage of "victim" to "survivor" to "Sacred Warrior" to "Royal Leader"....." [from ISOF website]

For Postle, they were a "human potential initiative." Healing and transformation were the easy terms they used in ISOF to connect with what most people could understand. His descriptor fit alright but it is easily misunderstood. Robert (later Michael) consistently critiqued the Human Potential Movement and New Age (HPM/NA), and argued ISOF was directed far beyond the scope of most of the ahistorical and apolitical initiatives of the HPM/NA. ISOF never fit the normal categories of "activists" or "HPM/NA" and the reasons for will be taken up in detail in this book. Another few websites had mentioned the ISOF website as a resource for alternative healing and support services. One home schooling site listed some of the free ISOF Technical Papers that Michael offered from his own website.²² However, ISOF was never 'hot' as a project in cyberspace and they didn't really seem to care. Their work was with real face-to-face people, their neighbors, mostly right where they worked and lived.

Michael recently wanted to share:

One more reflection on ISOF, a real 'gem,' comes from my daughter Vanessa in 1992 (age 9), when she hand-printed a sign and put it up on our bulletin board at the first ISOF Centre [spelling corrected]:

Our world is going nowhere and nothing can help it but one thing... IN SEARCH OF FEARLESSNESS! It will help you and your friends. We counsel and get our hearts out. I know I like it. We do lots of things and we have them go outside for an hour and you will find the cold very refreshing for you. Please come now! The people that are in charge are Robert Fisher and Barbara Bickel.

So just who were/are these "people in charge"? It's a 'funny' question, because identity is so fluid in Michael's experience. He was always searching for some kind of "label" or "validity" for what he did and who he was and the two didn't always coincide. But now that his name has been used in vain (just kidding), he thought he ought to respond. Michael pondered recently:

I'll take, at random, one of the marketing bios that was put out to the public in a "Certificate Program" I was attempting to start in the mid-1990's called (rather ominously) *The Integrative Study and Final Elimination of Human Violence/Hurting*:

Robert Fisher: is an experienced educator, counsellor, artist and writer. Colleges, schools, and private clientele have used his teaching and workshop skills to enhance performance and awareness. He has a successful record in the family crisis intervention field and youth violence and developed programs and models for working care staff, families and adolescents in this area. He has presented workshops utilizing techniques based on art therapy and a number of interdisciplinary theoretical psychological models. His creative dynamic approach has proven popular and effective for professionals in a wide range of fields. The author of many articles and monographs on fear, violence and hurt, he is awaiting publication of a number of related book projects. Robert encourages interested individuals and professionals to contact him through the I.S.O.F. Institute with their ideas and concepts.

This was laced heavily with biz-speak and not my own writing. I reluctantly, thank those

²² <http://www.feareducation.com>

who over the years of ISOF's history attempted to help me be more "biz-smart" than I was/am.²³ By the way, these many brochures and hyped bios never produced much paid work, as far as I recall. Word of mouth was always best. As for Barbara, she didn't 'push' big or fancy sounding bios out to the world. She worked mostly in the background, a good organizer, and was particularly talented in running the Centre Gallery, of which she was co-founder. At random, one of the public posters (c.1992) had her humble bio. as:

Barbara Bickel: is an artist experienced in the use of music as a creative growth process. She has worked with special needs populations for the past 12 years.²⁴
[Note: She Co-Directed The first ISOF Centre with me from 1992-95]

"Oh, Mr. Fisher"... [a favorite question would always arise from someone in the audience]: "Do you *really* think violence/hurting can be eliminated? You think you have the answer?" To which I would (often) reply: "I'm not sure, and I don't worry about it. I do have the answer to stop the hurting cycle right now, right in this moment with each and everyone of you in this room, in your families... (pause)... do you want to know the answer of how to stop violence?" For readers, bear with me and the evolution of this book and I guarantee you I will tell you what I said to these people.

At times ISOF was "accused of being a religion" and that wouldn't have bothered Robert/Michael at all.²⁵ However, he preferred to think of his work as that of the same undercurrent of most all Mystery traditions (like that of the archetype of Merlin), which in the Western world were characterized, in Stewart's (1986) summary: "*Spiritual growth is an individual and non-religious transformation*" (p. 8).

Although his thinking about ISOF has become much more overtly political since 1998, Michael has no problem embracing the general humanistic and psychospiritual mission of the ISOF Project as it was articulated in those early years. Of course, he would likely make some changes today in the curriculum and its philosophy, and part of that would be to study political pop-culture sci-fi films like "V is for Vendetta," screen play by the Wachowski Bros. (2006), who always remind humans in their "teaching" that fear must be transformed to political fearlessness for people to lead a revolution against injustice and corruption that plagues so many current leaders. He particularly likes how the Wachowski's also see the pivotal role of women leaders as the first to make this transformation, something he taught often in ISOF²⁶ (see his dissertation, Fisher (2003a), on *The Matrix* film by The Wachowski's).

The basic ethic of ISOF was written down in 1990 as "*Living and Loving Beyond Fear*," which was the first workshop Catherine and Robert put on that year.²⁷ What could be a more sane way to want to live, and promote and support others to live? This has not changed as a priority for him in nearly 17 years. He still likes the most used (Tibetan Buddhist) quote that they used in public documents right at the start of ISOF:

²³ That is, Larry Sannuto in the early-1990's and Barb Kennedy in the mid-1990's. This piece of writing is primarily Larry's recycled 'art.'

²⁴ This came from a poster "Let's Make Music!" for special needs adults in the city, which was an 8wk. program she did with Richard Bickel (her brother's initiative).

²⁵ See Fisher (1994) "Rumors 'In Search of Fearlessness' is a religion: What's that Robert up to now? *In Search of Fearlessness Communique*, 7: 3-4.

²⁶ See for example Fisher (1995) "Contradicting sexism: A vision of ritual to turn the world over into the hearts and hands of women. *In Search of Fearlessness Communique*, 10: 3.

²⁷ Taken from the first edition (Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1990) of the self-published *In Search of Fearlessness Newsletter* (p. 2).

True fearlessness is not the reduction of fear, but going beyond fear. –C. Trungpa²⁸

The various descriptions, visions, and meanings of the ISOF Project have varied and Michael's research has deconstructed and reconstructed much of its theories and practices. All and all the notion of "beyond fear" has grown enormously complex. This book will outline that development as well as the problems of doing research on a topic like "fear." And in the 21st century it certainly seems that "fear" has taken on a new face of horror (evil²⁹) in its impacts worldwide, especially in the post-9/11 era (or "culture of fear," as Glassner, 1999 has written about and Michael Moore has made films³⁰ about). Yet, despite this growing awareness of the negative impact of fear, suffice it to say, up to this point in the early part of 2006, there is very little, although some significant, interest in the ISOF Project and his research on fear ('fear')³¹ and fearlessness, and fearless.³²

This book will be a chance to critically self-reflect, as an individual participant and as co-founder of ISOF, as it is still disturbingly obvious that the people involved in the ISOF (Calgary) community had virtually all abandoned it as soon as the leadership (Barbara and Robert) stepped down. What would it take to do that, when they all knew it was so beneficial to themselves and others? As Segal (1984) would say, "We are not bad, we are frightened" (p. 88). When frightened, we screw up! Today, Michael cannot let go of wondering and critique:

One acronym for fear I heard over the years was Forget Everything And Run. I'm convinced it is not merely individuals that are so undermining to that which is 'good' (albeit, not perfect). What counter-force was (and still is) operating collectively to "erase" something like the ISOF Project which is aimed a liberation? I await the day when this incubation and recovery period of ISOF will change for the better. Meanwhile, the research continues without financial support but with an insistent passion I can only call 'Spirit.'

The mystery 'story' behind ISOF will soon unfold, if not spill out all over these pages. It never seems to be very controllable. I wonder where the energy comes for me now to even take on this re-working its history?

How quickly even Michael can forget Merlin, and the journey without beginning and end. He continues to envision, albeit, from a wounded sourcing:

What I do know for sure is that the ISOF Project has not disappeared and never will. It will emerge again, morph, live, die, and re-emerge in an endless natural cycle, as all systems do in this cosmos. It is not owned or copyrighted by anyone. I envision a plenitude of creative sub-projects and an eventual global social movement. In 1991, C. Sannuto and I articulated its distinct definition for the first time as:

Project In Search of Fearlessness was born as an overall open idea (umbrella) for

²⁸ Chögyam Trungpa, a spiritual sacred warrior from Tibet, came to America and established the Naropa Institute in Boulder for E-W Studies. See his books for more information on the sacred warrior tradition of Tibet (Shambhala) that he taught. There are training centers for this amazing work around the world <http://stishambhala.org/>

²⁹ See Fisher (1992) "A new story of evil." *In Search of Fearlessness Journal*, 2(3), 3-4.

³⁰ See especially Moore's docudrama *Bowling for Columbine* (2002).

³¹ The use of single inverted commas on the word *fear* indicate a very different "species" of fear is being referred to. This is much more profound and not merely a "feeling or emotion" as our psychological and medical textbooks and dictionaries lead us to believe. Much more will be said about 'fear.'

³² Perhaps most significant in recent years has been the award I received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (doctoral fellowship No. 752-2001-2274 for \$51,000 over three years) to study fear ('fear') and fearless leadership post-9/11. The title of my dissertation is: *Fearless Leadership In And Out Of The 'Fear' Matrix* (2003, The University of British Columbia)b.

anyone to use and create their own project dedicated to building a fearless society/world.³³

In 1995, at the peak of our expansion, an MFTA group³⁴ formed within the ISOF community and proposed to the Board of Directors a plan entitled *ISOF: The Next 20 Years*. In that report they (Robert wrote it) put forth a Vision of ISOF 2005-2015; it's worth quoting 11 years later:

2005-2015: This will be a time of strengthening the efficiency administratively of the last 20 years of work in ISOF. There will be a tendency to want to keep expanding and creating new options etc. But it is in the vision at this time that ISOF will continue to be solid because it keeps growing organically and without desperation and despair—avoiding the constant barage of “band wagon” solutions for ONE World Orders. Other groups and movements are likely to be scrambling more and more with the increasing terror and dangerous state of world order [chaos]. The details are very scanty of what the ISOF organization would look like but its purpose and Spirit can be kept strong by strong leadership and administration based on rational (non-‘fear’-based) policy. The ISOF teachings and practice will be modified to more “user-friendly” language and use of large scale communications systems will be essential for effective delivery of services and information exchange both within the ISOF Organization and with the wide world.

The impact of ISOF Research Institute and new discoveries about ‘fear’ and ‘fearlessness’ and oppression and liberation will take on a new focus with money and resources coming from all sectors of society. The ISOF Research Institute will be a major source of research on how to deal with ‘fear’ and not create more ‘fear’-based designs of a new world order. Major papers, journals and magazines will be published in disc and paper form and distributed world wide, preparing the way for the next 20 year expansion of ISOF internationally. The ISOF Communities in western North America will be “grand” models of success in how to build new communities and a new society that is truly healthy. If there is a theme for this period of the ISOF Society and Project it is: SLOW BUT SURE! (MFTA, 1995, p. 49)

Sounds good but what does that *Project* really mean? Communicating, and especially writing, about ISOF’s core essence is very challenging. Robert used to comment to friends that he changed what he said about it almost each time depending on circumstances, what came to mind freshly and spontaneously, and what he remember about what he’d previously said or written. Afterall, some consistency seemed important. The ISOF Project is, if it is one thing at all, entirely dynamic and never static. For many people, that’s deeply disturbing; for him that’s radically alive and demands a radical trust³⁵ or what some might call faith in creative evolution.

He further noted the difficulty of marketing something so unmarketable:

I also mentioned that there were many meanings held and things shared about ISOF that

³³ Excerpt from *In Search of Fearlessness Newsletter*, 2(1), 1991.

³⁴ This rag-tag group, My Fearless Therapist & Associates, were working ISOF volunteers, core community members, and interested-entrepreneurs and included Barb Kennedy, Madelaine Joss, Tim Buckler and myself. We were searching for ways to make right livelihood that supported ISOF sub-projects as well as our own small business initiatives that were complementary to ISOF work in the wideworld. The Board mistrusted us and the proposal was trashed in mid-stream (a painful story to be told in a later chapter).

³⁵ Barbara and I named our own private partnership business “Radical Trust” in the early 1990’s and maintain it to this day. That enterprise, minimally hovering around poverty-line, supported and donated funds for ISOF often in the past, and still to this day. Barter-economies have kept us going along with student loans. Things could change, new doors of opportunity to make money could appear, though we don’t seem to know how to not follow our bliss.

never made it into print documents, especially the public marketing documents. We had a business to run with services to offer, and even though we never made profit we had to “sell” something that was fundamentally ‘spiritual’ and ought not to have to be “sold.” We ideally wanted people to join our movement and/or support us in both spirit and cash. We always had to pay bills, like everyone else. In today’s W. society, finding support comes only with a good deal of ‘marketing’ smarts. We had to be intelligent in what we said and didn’t say in public, and especially in print. We also took big risks. We were inevitably “political” (albeit, that’s not typically how we were perceived by others or even ourselves).

We managed to get some press coverage by the local city newspaper a few times. The first interview³⁶ (Mario Toneguzzi, 1993) was entitled: “Beyond Fear: City Institute Teaches People To Break Pattern.” By the third paragraph in that article Toneguzzi wrote, quoting me from the interview:

‘Our society conditions us to be motivated and make decisions primarily on fear’ [He continued in his own words:] The [ISOF] Centre is dedicated to encouraging people to understand how they have been hurt and oppressed by distress. By embarking on this path of fearlessness, an individual can learn to conquer and overcome that fear—not cope with fear but dissolve it at its root. All kinds of people walk into the Centre [he quotes me again:] ‘I think they’re looking for freedom from fear.... And they [society] want to make us feel afraid, feel terrible, feel terrified, feel hopeless, feel despair, feel powerless.’ (*Calgary Herald*, Mar. 12, 1993)

That’s a political upfront challenge to an oppressive society that humans (mostly) live in and settle for such a condition as being ‘normal.’ ISOF refutes that ‘normal’ and calls it a ‘Fear’ Project (or ‘Fear’ Matrix, “culture of fear” or “coping culture”). The *Essential Rebel*³⁷ in humans demands a Fearlessness Project to counteract the oppression of ‘fear’ in its multitudinous forms, from gross to subtle. ISOF believed people are looking, more or less consciously, for a “Fearlessness Project” and many forms exist on the planet today under various names and movements. Joseph Campbell (1988) speaks to of the “quest” ISOFers were about, whether they were fully conscious about it or not, and that is:

... the goal of your quest for knowledge of yourself is to be found at the burning point in yourself, that becoming thing in yourself, which is innocent of the goods and evils of the world as already become, and therefore desireless and fearless. That is the condition of a warrior going into battle with perfect courage. That is life in movement. That is the essence of the mysticism of war as well as of a plant growing.
[and I’d add: That is the essence of the Essential Rebel in us all.] (p. 218)

Michael continued:

Although hardly perfect, I trust we didn’t ‘market’ out of fear-based “rationalizing” but merely strategically, in order to connect with the public we were offering our services to. This might be hard to believe, as virtually all advertising in the 21st century, for just about

³⁶ Normand Bergeron and I put an ad in the *Calgary Herald* city newspaper in 1993, advertising ourselves as “Sacred Warriors” willing to do “24 hr. Healing Journeys” and if people were interested to give us a call. No one called for the healing journeys but Mario, a reporter phoned me and wanted to do a full page interview on our work and Centre. Who would have guessed that our “crazy” (humorous) plan to put an ad in the paper would have been such a golden opportunity to promote ISOF overall. It pays to do the outrageous sometimes.

³⁷ My rebel theory includes three kinds: (1) essential rebel, (2) twisted rebel and, (3) ‘normal’ rebel. These distinctions are important in any activist, revolutionary type of work. I’ll ensure a whole chapter later is devoted to these three archetypal (strategic) patterns of resistance in anti-violence or liberation work.

everything, is usually a manipulation of people's fears in an "economy of fear" (e.g., Rogoff, 2005).

However, there is also a caution from another source that led many to not share everything about ISOF to just anyone. The history of liberational-spiritual movements is one of teachings and practices, led by those who "initiate" those who are ready, willing, and proven as to their purest motivations. Accordingly, ISOF meanings were shared in their profound sense, when people were profoundly curious and committed to the path of fearlessness that ISOF invoked. By the way, one could be (and can be) secular, atheist, theist, or just about of any persuasion of color, age, race, gender, sexual life style, politics, and so on to be involved in the ISOF Centre and Project. Difference and power differentials are part of life. They never wanted (and never will want) homogeneity and conformism, at the expense of stifling good conflictwork³⁸ that is essential to authentic relationships and emancipatory learning. That said, They also don't welcome people into community who are so distressed, fearful and mistrusting (often traumatized severely), that they only can manage to tear down community. They've never been able to work with everyone who wanted "in" and in the end, they withdrew themselves as they found ISOF "incompatible" with their aims. Many people participated in only learning, healing, arts events³⁹ at the ISOF Centre but never joined the more formal aspect of ISOF (Calgary) Community. That was fine, as they wanted many avenues, with varying degrees of commitment, for people to explore what ISOF was about.



Figure 2 – ISOF Logo (modified from the original 1989-90) created by R. M.

Fisher. The logo (black with yellow, orange, red and silver colors) is a Sacred Warrior Shield. It symbolizes the unity of the sacred circle and the diversity of the unique individuals (groups or organizations) within the network of developing "Sacred Warriors" and Wisdom on the planet. Each unique cell/individual contains the 'bow' of the Warrior aimed with dedicated purpose toward the Truth and direction to the East and the Great Eastern Sun vision, as C. Trungpa spoke of it in the ancient Tibetan Shambhala tradition. Each 'bow' is motivated by the flaming heart and outpouring 'tongue' which speaks compassion for the Soul of a "healing culture" (Love-based world) as opposed to a "coping culture" ('fear'-based world).

The ISOF Community, like most communities or organizations, was indeed "layered" (some might have called it "hierarchical")⁴⁰ even if they used a "wheel" model for organization as Figure 1 shows). They (especially ISOF leader-types) were more or less "secretive" with some things—of the profound kind. Michael remarks:

For example, I don't recall ever fully writing out the vision I had from the start of ISOF, whereby the ISOF Logo (Figure 2) would be placed in every 'place' in our world that supported the mission of ISOF; nor do I recall ever writing down my original vision that there ought to be ISOF Centres everywhere-- in every village, town, and city on the planet. The ISOF Centre would be both real and symbolic, like a church, a hospital, a fire hall, a police department—essential services that keep a community "healthy" and preferably "non-violent" toward themselves and their environment. A couple good examples of something sort of similar is what Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Re-

³⁸ A term (and process) I draw from the amazing "worldwork" of Argyrion Mindell (e.g., 1995) et al. see <http://www.worldwork.biz/>

³⁹ Arts-based approaches were central to ISOF from the start, The Centre Gallery, founded by Barbara Bickel and Pamela Grof, was a critical site in the ISOF Centre in downtown Calgary. More on that in later chapters.

⁴⁰ The notion of "natural hierarchy" vs. "pathological hierarchy" has been taken up by the theorizing of the contemporary integral philosopher Ken Wilber (e.g., 2000), who has greatly influenced my thought since 1982. More on that later. See also Riane Eisler's (1987) "actualization hierarchy" vs. dominator model hierarchy (cited in Gunnlaugson, 2005, pp. 340-1).

evaluation Co-Counseling (RC) have established worldwide.⁴¹

And of course, unlike the church, hospital, fire hall, police department, ISOF would have a sound philosophy of fearlessness (*a la* Gandhi⁴²) that guided its every ‘right’ action. They were not interested in creating an unhealthy fear-based “dependency” on their services. As a grassroots movement, they taught people how to “do it for themselves” in a peer-to-peer model (albeit, with expertise and instruction where required). What that “it” is can be hard to explain, but Michael recently blurted out his latest summary as he recalled the original vision:

ISOF is at heart a movement for “non-violence.” It was clear that people everywhere had to have access to an ISOF Centre, which was a ‘fear’ vaccine⁴³ centre. Such centres would provide space, expertise, and support services for helping people (and organizations) to (1) RECOVER, (2) TRANSFORM, (3) LIBERATE (more on that model later in the following chapters).

ISOF is about liberation and bases all its philosophy, theory, fearlessness practices, curriculum, teaching, and community from a point of view called a “fearless standpoint” (i.e., a “liberated” perspective⁴⁴). ISOF was not intended to ‘put out fires’ and ‘put saue on symptoms’ as so many human service institutions and programs do. Instead of offering ‘First-aid’ we offered ‘Second-aid’ and ‘Third-aid’. We wanted to get to the cause of suffering (‘fear,’ trauma, oppression-repression and violence) and interrupt it and eliminate it (as much as possible). The world seemed consumed by a ‘fear’ pattern virus (FVP+) and there needed to be a place where people could find the best ‘fear’ vaccine, through fearlessness practices that were being systematically suppressed and denied by the vast majority of authorities” on the planet. Access to that ‘fear’ vaccine had to be at a minimal cost (if any). ISOF Project was an “enemy” to the State (concretely and metaphorically). It was also a “negative utopianism” not one that ‘sells’ hope at any cost to the desperate. Our aim was to begin to help people “unplug” from the ‘Fear’ Matrix of this world; then they would re-enter the world and help others “unplug”—you’ve seen that story, if you’ve seen the Wachowski Brothers’ profound sci-fic movie trilogy *The Matrix* (1999-2003).⁴⁵ The ISOF Centre (Calgary) was a place for people to “drop out” and “de-stress” first and foremost—it was a sacred space of “transition” (respite from the hectic frey of everyday existence)—and sometimes a place where people needed to just “go crazy” for awhile. It was sane to “go crazy” when living in an insane world, we would say. Not a journey for the “weak-hearted” souls of our world, but not a journey for the “bravado” souls either.

Vulnerability and fearlessness go together. Integrity, sincerity, and discipline were

⁴¹ The recovery and healing models of these two movements have been greatly impactful to ISOF, yet, they are also contentious in other ways with ISOF philosophy; unfortunately, we had to continually dis-associated from them, as they did from us throughout our initial growth period. Later in the book this will be addressed. AA is of course well-known for recovery from addictions. RC and its various ‘splinter’ groups are awesome liberational organizations (politically-invested as well as healing-centered), but hardly known to most people. See the article Sandra Cross, Barbara Bickel and I wrote (1994) “Exploring an identity: In Search of Fearlessness and the Re-evaluation Co-counseling movement. *In Search of Fearlessness Communique*, 8, 1-7. See www.rc.org and Co-Counseling International www.cci-usa.org

⁴² One cannot talk about a liberational spiritual movement and politics of fearlessness without mentioning the amazing leadership and organizations based around the late Mohandas Gandhi of India. See his concept of *ahimsa* and the essential distinction to make between when a motive is fear-based or fearlessness. See for example, <http://www.ahimsa.com>

⁴³ We are not talking about a medical (necessarily biochemical) vaccine. It is a metaphor but real process we had discovered, with at least six elements/practices based on a lot of different sources from psychotherapy models to spiritual models. More on that in later chapters.

⁴⁴ This “liberated” or “fearless” standpoint is (universal and) complex and will be articulated in later chapters. Suffice it to say here that it is based on a lot of personal experiences as well as a long study of literature from the “wisdom traditions” from around the world (i.e., mystical insights, enlightened teachings and empirical research on consciousness, etc.). In ISOF such a standpoint is also “developing” not fixed in stone by dogma.

⁴⁵ So much could be said about this movie; the great integral philosopher Ken Wilber has pronounced the movie as one of the most important myths for our times (see DVD collection *The Ultimate Matrix*). I am also critical of the film narrative and much of the trashy pop-cultic hype that lacks depth of interpretation of what the ‘message’ is in that film (see my dissertation on the topic Fisher, 2003, which is available in full pdf if you Google “R. Michael Fisher” and click on the website “a/r/tography” dissertations).

all required to get the best from this work. That will always be the case, I suspect.

That's a small sample of the forthrightness, the profound, and the simple truth, to the ISOF Project. There's a lot of terms thrown out, and there are a lot of terms in ISOF philosophy, theory, practices and organization. They knew, as Frye knew in the women's liberation movement, they had to create their own language of healing against a backdrop referent of a language of 'normal' that was based on a culture of fear and coping. The most complete "Glossary of Terms" (and overall study guide of ISOF thought) exists in the 1996 ISOF publication Robert put together entitled *Dare to Contradict, Dare to Distinguish: Into the Flaming Heart of the In Search of Fearlessness Project*. It contains a lot more detail, albeit, a bit out of date, on many of the things talked about in this current book (copies are available from the author).

The rest of this book unfolds, more or less, linearly by dates so you can get a sense of the development of 'all things ISOF.' Barbara and Michael will dialogue at the end of each chapter as they reflect on its material and offer some of their current thinking on the topics. It ought to be fun. The remaining chapters ought to guide the reader through the historical, personal, and communal aspects of this grand, unique, and radical adult learning experiment. Michael commented:

For myself, while re-searching, I've found a surprising re-learning, re-memembering and re-connection to the ethic and guidance of ISOF. I trust readers will get a taste of that 'Spirit' that articulates everything I've touched in ISOF since August 1989. May the words "*living and loving beyond fear and coping*" come alive in a new way for our times and for the people that will lead the way. Stay tuned! I've met some amazing souls so far, and we have connected, exchanged, and transformed on levels that one just cannot put into ordinary English written language. Yet, in this book I will share moments and exchanges that passed, and still course as glowing sparks through my veins.

On a personal note, I want to be on record for the expression of my heartfelt gratitude for all that I have already received from the ISOF existence. *The Course in Miracles* summarizes it well for me: "For it is in giving you know that you have received."
- Normand Bergeron⁴⁶

I couldn't think of a better soul, who gave so much as my dear "Pelleas," Normand, wherever you are. I wrote a letter to Normand (age 61) early in the first year of our relationship in ISOF:

What I really appreciate about you (Pelleas) is your dedication to Truth... it is unlike anyone I have ever met before... I also appreciate that you see me in that same light. That feels good. For so long I couldn't figure out why so many relationships I had never quite seemed to "gel"... there was always a "gap"... I know a lot of it was my own "distress" and yet I felt the other people were not committed to Truth like I was... it was always difficult to tell if I was just imagining it. With you, I have come to validate the accuracy of my life path and ovrk... that is a gift I am so grateful to you for. No matter what happens to us, from here on, I have recived a great gift from you Normand. I treasure it. I will never go back to that fear-based "doubting" again about myself and the purpose of my being on this planet... you have shown a great courage to admit [your weaknesses]... Truth is admission... Admission is Truth! Dear Pelleas you are a Sacred Warrior... your intent is clear to me... I GET IT! I wish you the best on your journey to Royal

⁴⁶ Excerpt from Bergon (1993), "ISOF Membership" in the ISOF Communique, Vol. 3, August, p. 4.

Leadership... I sense we will travel together for some time yet as Sacred Warriors. [July, 30, 1993, just before Normand's 24 hr healing journey as a "client" with myself and Madelainne Joss as Sacred Warriors]

And to that wreckless wonderwoman who has stuck with me and Barbara (and our daughters) like no other, I offer her closing words to Chapter One:

Exchanging is the key to community. - Jan Sheppard⁴⁷

"Exchanging" meant acting as healing and emancipatory allies with each other, at all times, not just when we felt like it, not just at a workshop or during a course together. In the most simple language, "exchanging" meant offering (mutual) unconditional attention, free of one's own distress patterns, to another, for 10 seconds, for 10 minutes or for 24 hrs. The story of ISOF has many adventures to tell of what "exchanging" means in building a "healing culture" in the midst of a devastating and dominating "coping culture."

ISOF Leadership: In Current Dialogue (Michael & Barbara)

M: Well, there's a lot of themes here in this Chapter One we could pick up on. We won't likely get to them all here in this spontaneous response dialogue. I'd like to start with one theme that continues to be problematic when attempting to express "what ISOF is?" to a contemporary 'quick-time' world that likes short sound bites and marketing glib. It's a very real problem beyond my own, as I was just looking an e-mail I wrote to Mariah Nov. 22, 2005, where she was talking to me about how hard it was to ask for funding from a potential family member who had lots of money and would like to support service work in the world. We were discussing starting up ISOF (not under that name) in Calgary again. I wrote, "... asking is hard for me too, especially when it is so difficult to figure out how to describe what ISOF is without anything 'concrete' that shows results of the work." Then there is the theme of my own (and others') doubts about the value of writing a book on ISOF or any book on the way I conceptualize 'fear' so differently than most people can easily grasp on a first or second encounter with my work. I am remembering Christopher Plant, one of the editors of New Society Publishers, responding (e-mail Sept. 14, 2004) to my book proposal *Culturally Modified 'Fear'* in which he wrote, "Hi Michael, Well this is entertaining and intriguing, but whether or not it makes a saleable book I'm not sure...".

B:

⁴⁷ From the *Morning Fire: Official Journey House Newsletter*, 1(1), "After Jan's quick recovery [from a breakdown], she has returned to Journey House, "new and improved." She would like to express her appreciation to all the support given her during her 48 hr. healing crisis/journey. Jan has decided she wants to experience the freedom of being an 'average' parent and trust that Alexandra [her daughter] will be wonderfully taken care of by the Universe. She is wanting to be who she is. She doesn't want her old patterns of 'hit and run.' She wants to shit-disturb and stay around to see what happens." (Sept., 1994, p. 1, edited by Jan and Teri Sonnenberg).

CHAPTER TWO

BIRTH OF THE ISOF PROJECT- 1989-1990: Where Two Or More Gather

-R. Michael Fisher (formerly Robert)

© 2006

Timeless Merlin: Invocation

MERLIN

O Merlin in your crystal cave
Deep in the diamond of the day,
Will there ever be a singer
Whose music will smooth away
The Furrow drawn by Adam's finger.⁴⁸

Birthing A 'Soul Child'

Fearlessness is something we all need to fight for.... You and Catherine have created a beautiful child. What a beautiful idea. I am filled with anticipation.
– Julie Green, (a letter, 1989)

He is old now. Some days much older than old.

He gathers binders, folders, journals, manuscripts and amasses a formidable fortress of paper documents from ISOF's 17 year history around him. He can't help being amazed at how it all began:

Accidentally, you conceive; think about an abortion; decide for vague reasons that it might be a good time to have a baby. It grows in your womb. Then comes the labor, the stretching, the pain of birth. And LIFE enters the world, squalling from the depths of your body. You can't quite believe it, but from then on you know that you are within the creative intelligence of Being. – Sam Keen (1983, p. 193)

Yes, it is exactly as Sam Keen described, I.S.O.F. was conceived in the hot and passionate month of August, 1989, between Robert Fisher and Catherine Sannuto. Within a few months it was birthed into the world as the Project In Search of Fearlessness. Just as we all entered the 1990's and looked forward with optimism into the 'decade of the turnaround,' Catherine and I shook with terror and delight as we realized we had entered a new phase of our personal lives and a new phase of intimacy in our relationship. We both knew we had to face our worst fears in order to

⁴⁸ Excerpt from the poem "Merlin" by Edwin Muir, cited in Mary Stewart's (1971) acknowledgements in her book *The Crystal Cave*.

deeply live in love together.

– R. M. Fisher & C. V. Sannuto (1990, p. 1)

Michael in reverie:

Sam Keen's (1983) book *The Passionate Life: Stages of Loving* and Chöygam Trungpa's (1985) book *Shambhala: Sacred Path of the Warrior*, were two books that Catherine and I used to read and re-read, while discussing their implications for our conscious partnership and "worldwork" (*a la* Mindell). I would recommend them to anyone looking to transform their perspective or worldview, and sense of life purpose. Oh, those amazing 1980's and the books that poured out calling for us to 'turn' the world around—an *Aquarian Conspiracy*, as Marilyn Ferguson (1980) called it-- and see things from a new and healthier paradigm.

I was recently in a bookstore and picked up Marilyn Ferguson's long awaited (25 yrs.) next book entitled *Aquarius Now* (2005). I quickly scanned the Subject Index to see if she was writing about fear or fearlessness. To my pleasant surprise she was saying a lot about fear. However, I zoomed in on p. 154 "Fear of Fearlessness" as that looked most intriguing and not something I have seen in all my researching before. She wrote,

"Many people see fear and worry as safeguards. If we were unafraid, what foolish or dangerous thing might we do? A primal alerting response—the clear sense of danger at hand—has obvious value. It makes sure that warning pangs cause an emotional contraction. After all, most poison tastes bad. Our senses discriminate. Vigilance is an evolutionary asset we share with other living creatures. Yet our brains can maintain a level of vigilance without the volatility of fear. As a sentry, vigilance is less trigger-happy. **'Don't fear fearlessness,'** the Dalai Lama told many audiences during a world tour. Fear is a blackmailer whose bluff must be called." [bold added for emphasis]

Thank you Dalai Lama for saying that in public. That would have been a great advertising promo ad, and a legitimate validation for the ISOF Project 17 years ago, from its inception onward. What exactly the Dalai Lama or Ferguson meant by using the term "fearlessness" is not known exactly and much later I will take up the 10 different, sometimes contradictory, uses of that term I have found exist in various sources.⁴⁹ But of course, the wisdom in books cannot be the answer to our problems nor are they 'real' guides until put into practice. Later, in this book I'll take up some of the fundamental general orientations (from Keen, Trungpa, etc.) that were invaluable to the growth of the ISOF Project and some of its sub-projects.

I'm 54 years this next month, yet such quotes by Keen and Catherine and I (above) seem as fresh as the day I penned them in the first edition of the *In Search of Fearlessness Newsletter*, which appeared seven months after our mystical vision together.

He sits back, all of his years experience boiling toward the surface with a passion remembered:

Mists appear and disappear, concealing and revealing only what the faithful will to see and prevent from seeing. Sisters gather round, let the memories re-live for his sake.

"He led the pony in under the trees, and tied it up. Then he kissed her. After a while she

⁴⁹ Fisher, R. M. (2006). Use of the term *fearlessness*. Unpublished paper.

pushed him away. ‘I ought not to stay. I brought the things, so even if I can’t come tomorrow—’. She stopped. She had seen the saddle on his horse, the muffled bit, the packed saddle-bag. Her hands moved sharply against his chest, and his own covered them and held her fast. ‘Ah,’ she said, ‘I knew. I knew even in my sleep last night. You’re going.’

‘I must. Tonight.’

She was silent for a minute. Then all she said was: ‘How long?’

He did not pretend to misunderstand her.

‘We have an hour, two, or more.’

She said flatly: ‘You will come back.’ Then as he started to speak: ‘No. Not now, not any more. We have said it all, and now there is no more time. I only meant that you will be safe, and you will come back safely. I tell you, I know these things. I have the Sight. You will come back.’

‘It hardly needs the Sight to tell me that. I must come back. And then perhaps you will listen to me—’.

‘No.’ She stopped him again, almost angrily. ‘It doesn’t matter. What does it matter? We have only an hour, and we are wasting it. Let us go in.’

He was already pulling out the jewelled pin that held her cloak together, as he put an arm round her and led her towards the cave.

‘Yes, let us go in.’”⁵⁰

This chapter unmines the oft forgotten origins of ISOF. It will have a little bit more autobiography in it than other chapters in this book. Some background context to Catherine’s and Robert’s lives is useful to see what came together, two becoming one, becoming two again. I’ll take a somewhat roundabout course to bring you to the center of what can only be described as what Walter Benjamin, the eminent cultural theorist labeled, a “Messianic moment,” as a happening or event “... which forces itself on reality from outside history and into the present.”⁵¹

Before the autobiographic introduction, let’s hear from the letter Michael just wrote to Catherine (Vicki)⁵² about three weeks ago (March 6, 2006); and share some of her responses. As well, some old correspondence between them and bits Robert published later in ISOF Newsletters ought to give a sense of their (almost mythic) ‘story’ of the birthing of ISOF.

In the Subject line of the recent e-mail Michael wrote it said, “17 years later.” He had not met or corresponded with her for almost 15 years since they separated. He saw her once (c.1992) when she came to the first ISOF Centre to talk with him, and then once more by accident a year later or so at a conference (more on that later).

For some reason, on November 20, 2005, Michael reached out to Jean Robertson, a woman leader of the first conscious community he had ever been in (1980-1988). That was in Olds, AB, and it greatly affected his life. Those were the scary Cold War years, and having a conscious community to be part of was a real plus, as well as a learning experience beyond anything one gets in any other way. His children, Leah (now 24 yrs. old) and Vanessa (22 yrs.) were born in that alternative learning community called “Common Ground (CG).” After eight years, he left the CG, somewhat miffed at Jean’s leadership and the direction the CG initiative was heading. Over

⁵⁰ Excerpt from Mary Stewart (1973), pp. 12-13.

⁵¹ Excerpt quote from educational philosophers, Gur-Zé et al. (1999).

⁵² I acknowledge she prefers Vicki and yet I always used Catherine (which she never objected to). I felt Catherine was her “transformational” soul-name (which she never disagreed with).

all he thought it was getting “too green, and too soft.” Within a few years CG collapsed entirely. He had not contacted Jean, who had since moved to Calgary, for 20 some years. She never responded to his e-mail to re-connect and possibly collaborate on an adult learning project he proposed. Luckily, his daughters have now and again visited Jean and Michael has no problem with that. He wants them to experience these radical alternative ways to create what Dr. Imre, a cultural studies professor at McMaster’s University calls “autonomous spaces” in an oppressive society.

Moving with this same 2006 energy to reconnect and heal old relationships, Michael also took the initiative to look up Catherine on the Internet. He found her working at a university as a counselor in the U.S. It’s worth citing her work website introduction to herself, because it gives one a quick sense of the way she wants to represent herself to the public (her official public/institutional self):

Vicki Sannuto: Moved here from Alberta, Canada, in 2000 but originally from Toronto, Ontario (hence the spelling differences). I’ve been a bit of a gypsy in moving around and having too many jobs to even remember them all. First year completed at the Ontario College of Art. Then a Bachelor of Physical Education, a Diploma in Rehabilitation, and a Master of Educational Psychology—Counselling from the University of Calgary. Washington State Licenced Mental Health Counsellor. Chartered Psychologist (non-practicing) Province of Alberta. Trained in Distance Counseling. Member of the American Counseling Association, National Career Development Association, College of Alberta Psychologists. My worst job was doing data entry of well sites for a petroleum company eight hours a day. I almost went crazy plus I was working on the 30th floor of a huge office tower, increasing the feelings of being trapped forever in a dead-end job. My favourite job (besides this one!) was working for a cinematographer booking film shoots around the world. This was a wonderful opportunity to be involved in all sorts of creative projects with some amazing people. The longest job I had was eight years and what kept me there was that it was constantly changing, demanded me to grow in many ways, and I was able to travel extensively both in Canada and the United States, despite my fear of flying!

Well, she didn’t mention her work with ISOF as a highlight in her life, and she only mentioned “fear of flying” as a kind of joke. Michael felt she was hiding her soulful life, replacing it with a public persona. Well, maybe that’s none of his business but he doesn’t honestly think their relationship is that simple, that private, that distant, or that forgettable. He thought:

It was hard to connect that this was the curious radical intimate partner who co-founded and developed the core ideas of ISOF Project with me in 1989-90. I waited six months or so before having the right combination of events and ideas trigger a new compassionate open-heartedness for her. Here’s the letter I sent, which in three weeks she responded to (to my surprise). I would have been okay if she never responded, although, it is wonderful she did. Our conversation gets ‘weird’ pretty quickly, as you will see.

Hi Vicki,

Mar. 6, 2006

No, I’m not writing as an old boyfriend of yours in crisis looking for a fix. Assumptions dispelled. Yes, I’d love to talk. Here’s a small entrée... Found your website re: your job with e-mail on Nov. 20, 2005. I waited until now to contact you. Three quick stories (insights), perhaps abstruse for you, that led me risking to reach out to you: (1) listening to Leonard Cohen’s new album (2004) it really went in deeper than ever that Spirit is “cardboard and piss” as much as Spirit is “Love”—it is all a matter of translation and perspective—yes, my spiritual realiz-

ation deepened from Cohen's song "Here It Is" that the terrorist's who slammed the jet airliners into the World Trade Centre were Spirit attempting to communicate with Spirit, (2) Barbara has been reading at nights to me Catherine Clemente's (2001) book *Martin and Hannah*—a wonderful fact/fiction book (feminist perspective) on the three way relationship of Martin Heidegger with his ever-loving faithful wife Elfriede and Hannah Arendt his ever-loving Muse—lots of tears of connection there for me of Spirit's play in one's love life, (3) at a conference this past weekend on "Climate of Fear/Commitment to Peace" put on by a local peace activist Christian group and the Thomas Merton Society—interesting but not very original—long story... the last half hr. was a song/movement/meditation in the church building and a quote by Jean Vanier that went through me and percolated and helped me write this letter to you this early morning. Vanier basically said (quoting roughly from memory): "forget about perfect community, it doesn't exist; start forgiving those in your community the moment you come to community; that's the struggle of community." I would love if you would read the 5pp article I read last night by Rabbi Michael Lerner, a trigger as well... it is available at <http://www.tikkun.org/magazine/tik0603/lerner-fear> for it is quite an excellent summary of spiritual politics (of course I have a critique too) based around the notions of the paradigm of fear and hope as "core" issues today—too bad that wasn't written around the time we came together as young 30's somethings in an amazing era and climate which is now more like the Mists of Avalon to me—a sad Merlin. Life goes on.

In the "gift of fearlessness,"
-R. Michael Fisher, Ph.D.
www.feareducation.com

She wrote back to me March 25, 2006 [not addressing my new name "Michael" nor "Robert"]:

Yes, it is a long time. Several thoughts went through my head—why stir things up again as what else is there to say to each other? Why now after so many years? What is the purpose behind your reaching out? What do I want out of this connection? There are probably more, I'm sure.

Oddly enough, about two years ago, I had thought about trying to find you.⁵³ I knew that you were at UBC. I knew Barbara was doing well with her art (Google is amazing). What did I want to say to you? I've recognized over this recent time that I haven't made good decisions in my life. Poor decisions on my part have caused some serious pain for other people. You are one of those people. I am very sorry for any grief I caused you in the past. I don't think it was intentional at all. It was just a series of poor decisions piled one on top of another. I don't need your forgiveness, however, as I think I have paid for those poor decisions in multiple ways. I did want to sincerely apologize though. This is all I wanted to say to you.

I read some of your web site so I know that you are still doing the fear work. Good for you! I'm not overwhelmed or even slightly swayed by the fear campaign mounted here in the U.S. Remember "divide and conquer"? It is exactly what is happening. My fears

⁵³ The uncanny thing about this timing of her thinking of me and wanting to reconnect was the time when I was separated from Barbara, my life-partner and wife, and we were allowing each other space to explore other intimate relationships and see if we wanted to continue together.

are smaller and more personal and will be forever what I struggle with.

Jean Robertson is a good example of someone who needs to hear Jean Vanier's words. She was always looking for community⁵⁴ when it was right in front of her. I pointed this out to her and I think it fundamentally undermined my relationship with her which ended a couple of years ago. Vanier is right—community is what is around you, right now.

Thanks for risking.

Vicki

p.s. you may want to check out Karen Armstrong's "The Holy War" (about the Crusades). It's an excellent book which puts religion in its place.

Michael reflected on her response, with more than a little critique:

I had so many thoughts, feelings, analysis. A part of me couldn't help seeing her 'distant' tone, like she was talking to and apologizing to an 'object' not me, not the co-founder of our "soul child"—I wanted to remind her she is a 'parent' still, and always will be. I didn't ask for an apology did I? She'd done that numerous times in the early 1990s. It seemed her standard tape recording. I was disturbed by her one-sided, narcissitic, framing of everything as personal (and 'normal') and avoiding the transpersonal (spiritual; not-normal; relational) perspective upon which we grew together to birth ISOF and parted ways. There was something 'slippery' about the repeated use of "poor decisions" on her part; and really that statement is quite cognitive, meaningless, and superficial. ISOF philosophy, which she birthed with me, was all about discerning very specific decisions based on 'fear' (coping and distress) and not on 'fear' (i.e., 'Love')—and, she doesn't acknowledge that ISOF healing language, that soul communication or deeper perspective in her letter.

He wrote back (Subject line of the e-mail read "Delighted"), attempting to enlarge her perceptual framework to possibly meet again and see what might need (or desire) to happen-- what healing was left unfinished:

Hi Vicki,

March 28, 2006

Delighted to hear you. Hard to take in. Breath. Yes, long time and not long time at all when people are connected in Being (out of normal time and space). I acknowledge your reasonable cautions in re-connection on the 'other' plane of reality. No problemo. Incubation is good. I'll ponder your comments carefully before responding to them directly, and seeing if a mutual dialogue is productive. I sense it would be.

I knocked... you opened the door. That's gotta be transformative! (potentially) As I said originally, "I'd love to talk"—and now, you have to decide.

To give some more context to you deciding, it may help that you feel out more of my context I carry in and around you (and have done so for 17 years). Nothing has fundamentally changed in that ISOF Context in all those years. Of course, I have

⁵⁴ Catherine knew Jean Robertson from the 1990s onward. They kept in touch, and Catherine found Jean supportive during our crises. Catherine also spent some time with Jean's new "Livingroom Context" community venture, but obviously left it with some strong critique.

a ‘story’... (I’m currently writing a book on ISOF Project, 1989-1999, and am surrounded by ISOF archives in bulging boxes, so I’m pretty connected to it all right now)... so I have attached the first 2pp in Chapter One to give you a ‘taste’... as well I found this article I wrote in 1997 to our ISOF (Calgary) Community “A Letter to Catherine...” and in the intro. of that article I wrote the following:

“The co-founder and divine mother of the ISOF Project is Catherine Sannuto. She was my x-business partner, intimate friend and lover. Without her spirit ISOF would not likely have been born and with her, ISOF has had an unhealed wound of adultery ever since we split up in the summer of 1990, officially because she had an affair with Dan and chose to leave me, our just purchased home, and ISOF.”

Hope this helps,

Looking forward to hearing from you.

-Michael (pronounced my-ky-el; and you may remember who that is in honor of)

Intuitively, he was trembling a bit as he sent that letter. He knew it would ‘get to her’ but he didn’t know exactly how. She responded the same day in the following e-mail [again she does not address his name].

The book chapters seem to be good. I’m not sure who will read such a story but, hey, you never know. It seems that it is important for you to write it out.

I didn’t realize that in “letter to Catherine” you started out with such an introduction. Yes, very true, I committed adultery and I left you “for Dan.” But do you have to keep telling people about it in that way? I’d especially not like to have that blasted across the internet. For you see there are always two sides to the story.

I recognize where your new name comes from. I will never forget that experience. V.

Michael felt great that she was talking to him, at least. He didn’t particularly like how she was talking to him but that’s another story. He was increasingly disturbed by her personalizing everything about her, him, them; and worse, ISOF was never even mentioned. He was glad to see she remembered his honoring of “Michael” (actually, “Mikhail”)—that’s a wild story coming up soon in this chapter on them as a couple encountering their first “fearless teacher.”

It kind of hurt him that she thought the book he was currently writing was only for him and his healing or something. He responded self-reflectively with his heart-mind filled with feelings and thoughts:

Ouch. My ‘enemies’ several times, over the years, used to throw that critique at me when I gave them a manuscript I was working on. Ouch again. And who said she committed “adultery”? No one, not me, not anyone I know, ever, has said that. The good side of that notion, in her head, is that we were ‘married.’ I believed that all along but she never did back then, at least she refused to marry me when I asked her early in 1990 while driving down the highway in my old VW van, with love pouring out of every cell in my body. It was a sign, I guess.

Her latest reply had created a potentially vulnerable and delicious opening. She mentioned “two sides to the story”—maybe, now, he could ask for what he wanted in the present moment. He wrote back inviting her to the next threshold and challenge of their cyber re-engagement:

To Vicki,

March 29, 2006

Okay, I get your concern. Nothing went out on “digital” in that letter, it was an inner community newsletter (hard copy only). Again, I cherish your responses and will hold them before responding to each with nuance. I’m merely trying to give a bit of expanded context over the years you were’n’t part of ISOF growing as a living community and process.

Now, just to sweeten the “intro” you didn’t favor so much, here is an excerpt from a letter from Julie Green in 1989 (she was maybe 22-23 yrs. old and a beautiful soul), she was in Victoria, BC at the time. I met her through one of the Quest staff and ended up sharing ISOF materials, brochures, etc. with her... the letter she sent (I’m sure I would have shown it to you at the time) was decorated with her color drawings and stickers of joy (she was also on a “born again Christian” stik). She wrote, “Fearlessness is something we all need to fight for.... You and Catherine have created a beautiful child. What a beautiful idea. I am filled with anticipation.”

Most important, what I really got excited about in your last response was “there are always two sides to the story.” And yes, for sure. For pragmatic purposes I’d love it if you wrote your side, completely, since we met in 1989 until we parted (and more if you want). I’ve written and shared so much of my story. You deserve print space. I’ll gladly publish it in my book on ISOF Project without editing. If you don’t wish to do that then I’d love to have you write it and send it to me (for “private” use only). The reason it is so important to put in print publicly is that there are hundreds, if not thousands of people who have been ‘touched’ by the ISOF Project... and more to come. Your name is always there, and you’ve been a mystery (or interpreted one-sidedly by myself, Barbara, the girls, who knew you). It would be great to have others read you directly. Please consider this as your ‘gift.’

Thanks Vicki. I wish I could tell you how “healing” this is, for not just me. It is for ISOF, I do this, in the larger soul context. I also realize you and I are still considering how far we want to go with re-connecting.

-M.

Over a week has gone by and no response from her. He’ll try to let it go, as he knows he must. Although, one more letter has proven to be interesting, one that was never sent. It was written by Barbara Bickel, my life-partner who entered the scene of ISOF immediately after Catherine (Vicki) abandoned ship.

Hi Catherine,

Mar. 27, 2006

Michael asked me this morning if I was going to write to you? I responded that the thought had not crossed my mind. In reflecting on why he asked me this, I realized that he wants me to speak of my thoughts to you. He also suggested that I send an article to you that I am working on “Unveiling a Sacred Aesthetic.”

I do not have the spirit connection that Michael has known with you. My knowing of you is that of a ‘ghost’ who helped light Michael’s passion and who’s betrayal

has also poisoned that passion at the same time. I have lived with the pain that you refer to in your letter, for your bad decisions in life. It astounds me, at some level, that Michael has a desire to reach you still, and yet he knows he's not able to reach you on his own. That's where I think his suggestion came from.

I have dedicated myself for the past 12 years to working, almost exclusively with women. Working with the fragmentation, exile, and disembodiment of women in our society. I have been dedicated to women's liberation as their liberation is my liberation and we are still far from it. So, Catherine, ISOF did not die after you abandoned it but it has flourished and floundered impacting many people's lives, including my own. It has not been an easy journey and has demanded many sacrifices. The greatest being my own security, family, friends, and my knowing of who I thought I was.

My passion and my spirit and my soul have grown with this ISOF Project, even when it has been dormant. It has always remained alive through my relationship with Michael and now with our daughters Vanessa and Leah. So what do I want to say to you? Know that Michael has a deep wound and loss that he carries from your betrayal and abandonment. He wants this wound to heal as he knows it limits the ISOF vision in the world. He wants the spirit of ISOF to flow and it has struggled to flow in its highest potential with your abandonment. I personally don't hold a lot of faith in your giving any spirit to ISOF, but I do feel that you may now be able to 'lift the blocks.' I would offer my support to you, if you did decide to connect to ISOF, knowing that it would assist in healing the wound and re-enlivening the spirit. This would be a decision not based in the personal but at the soul/cosmic level. So, this is not a personal offering from me to you, it is a greater one than that. At the personal level I have no desire to connect, as my personal knowing of you has not been an experience of any kind of presence on your part. You were hiding and running, so it was really impossible to know you.

In the Spirit of Fearlessness, and the desire to let Love be set free,
Barbara

It was really useful for Michael to have another point of view, and to hear the 'story' of ISOF unfold in different voices. Most touching, and most critical, are Barbara's words: *"It has not been an easy journey and has demanded many sacrifices. The greatest being my own security, family, friends, and my knowing of who I thought I was."* This rang true for him as he knew those sacrifices deeply. He knew the living conditions of survival at the poverty line and below which is hard (exhausting) to take year after year, when society doesn't give any validation for one's passionate soul (liberational) work in the world. He strongly believed, and he will show throughout this chapter that Catherine knew the Truth and refused the Call (at some level) to the path of fearlessness—particularly, not surprisingly, when the going got rough. She wanted to be there—to walk the path with him, but it was incomplete and dissociated from the other part of her that was heading the other way fast. Michael remembers:

I mean when the road ahead was going to call for big sacrifices and loss of security. Catherine may sound brave and all in her letters above, but she proves over and over to be very timid, if not a wimp, and worse, she doesn't see it and inflates her qualities of fearlessness. This is not a place for beating down upon someone who is timid but it is a place, as is any public place, for truthing between those who make claims that are unsubstantial, if not lies, be they conscious or unconscious.

Catherine and Robert met as graduate students (in our 30's) at The University of Calgary in the Rehabilitation and Counseling Diploma program in 1988. She sat a few seats over from him in one of the classes. Interesting that that's how he met his first wife Linda Des Lauriers (his girls' mother) nine years before then. He seemed to prefer intellectual-type women, and as he has gotten older, it was more clear his preferences. Catherine didn't stand out in appearance or character-- but little did he know she was on a slow pursuit of him in some manner. Later, she told him she immediately found his energy and way of thinking critically in class "very interesting." Too bad the professor of that course didn't agree, as he got one of his lowest graduate school grades from him. Robert thought the professor thought he was arrogant and Robert thought the professor was arrogant. Catherine's personality at that time, was anything but arrogant. She was mild, and simple, sometimes critical of things that needed to be criticized in society, but wise and not extremist and full self-glorification or self-righteousness. She's a Libra, level-headed, mediative, and a balancer of opposites, so says the astrological text. Being an Aries, Robert is situated on the opposite side of the chart in qualities from Catherine.

After working on a paid research project together that year, which she invited him to be part of, they began to meet outside of university a few times to talk or go to the theatre. He had just left his wife, as this was the final time they would try to make the marriage work. He was living alone in a small basement suite in SW Calgary, working as an art teacher and therapeutic case manager a few days a week at Quest Ranch, a residential program for young males (13-18), who were "behaviorally disturbed." He recalled:

My grief over leaving the girls and a failed marriage was intense but I knew how to heal through it. Yet the depression was mountainous at times. Solitude was always an important "healer" for me and I protected my alone space but I sure appreciated Catherine's visits as we had so much in common, and conversation flowed easily from the deeply seriousness of injustice and the tragedy of life to the humorous and superficial. I never had laughed so much with someone since I was in my teen years. Our friendship was quick and mysteriously so at ease, as we remarked it was like we were "brother and sister." We were both advocates for the "disabled" and followed the radical anti-institutional philosophy of normalization (*a la* Wolf Wolfensberger⁵⁵) in vogue at the time. We studied Michel Foucault's theory⁵⁶ of power and how it had marginalized people throughout Western history. It was too good to be true how a beautiful woman could just come into my life when I needed a friend, colleague, ally, and something more attractive than my books on the shelf that surrounded me. "Soul mates" was not my usual way of thinking of intimacy with women but I knew something was different than the 'normal' relationships I'd had.

She owned and drove a motorcycle (350cc Honda). That's not normal for a 'girl.' She said she liked the 'freedom feel' of it. For recreation over the years she played wheelchair basketball with a mixed team and coached a team of guys in wheelchairs as well. She told Robert of living intimately with a guy, who was a paraplegic, for a year or so. She came home from work one day to find he had shot himself in the head. He like how easily she showed her tears of sadness and trusted him with an open heart. Yet she was quite masculine in features and style and her

⁵⁵ Wolfensberger (1988, p. 70) stated the anomaly clearly: "... no serious student of history, sociology, and political philosophy, and especially of the literature in these areas in the last 20 years or so, can seriously doubt that human service structures are one of the major means for carrying out destructive societal policies towards poor and marginal classes."

⁵⁶ See especially Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* and *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception and Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*.

independence sat at the wheel of her Honda. He liked 'free' women who didn't depend on a man to tell them who they were.

Soon, he learned she was in the painful process of leaving the current boyfriend she was living with. On her initiative, she came to visit him regularly and her phone calls were long and intense. Attraction grew naturally. Robert wasn't wild about her as a "catch" to pursue, rather he liked her as a close friend and was glad to keep it that way. He recalled:

My heart was too broken and I was probably fearful of another intimate relationship with a woman. My first wife betrayed our trust as partners and that was devastating. I did a lot of art therapeutic work on myself at that time, saw many therapists and healers, and layed by the single candle (listening repetitively to Gregorian Chant) reading, journaling and mostly holding myself to keep from flying apart with sorrow and despair. I was frightened of who I was now, after being a husband and father for eight years. The core of my tectonic plates of self-identity were shifting, and I sensed I was in the middle of an earthquake day after day. I felt like I was going to die or go crazy, either way I felt I was losing myself, dissolving, and terror and dread were waiting on the dark path ahead.

For Robert in these tough dark times, she was a source of light. Catherine loved art and wished she could get back to doing that as she said "that's where my soul lies." She left her art-life/soul and seems to have never returned again.

For Robert, he couldn't get enough darkness. He couldn't stand being out in the world any more than he had to but he would walk the Elbow River banks as a regular ritual, squeezing the sage leaves and sniffing their essential oil to keep him grounded in the beauty, truth and wisdom of Nature, which is the only realm he completely trusted beyond doubt—a characteristic of his life since his earliest childhood.

WE ALL HEAR... the Merlin. A voice resounded in the darkened bedroom: "I've watched you. You go your own way, and sometimes I think you're nearer to the wild things than to men. You know she called you for the falcon?"

When nearly 19 years of age, his mother cackled on his soul with the cursed words: "What's wrong with you? Where are your girlfriends? Are you queer or something?" And before he could react, his father jumped in to say: "Leave him alone, he's already married. He's married to Nature."

In Robert's post-marriage year, Nature and darkness became his womb of regression and withdrawal from a hurtful world. He knew Nature would never betrayed him. He wasn't able to cope well and as it turned out that was probably a good thing for his self-transformation to occur.

WE ALL SEE... the Merlin. "I had a hand on her wrist, stopping her. 'You mistake me madam. I put it badly. I only meant that the god had said it through me, and because he had said it, it must be true. Ambrosius must win, it is in the stars.'

I said gently: 'Don't be afraid for me, mother. Whatever god uses me, I am content to be his voice and instrument. I go where he sends me. And when he has finished with me, he will take me back.'"

Michael remembers those days of the late summer of 1989:

She would come and lay with me in the dark and we'd tremble as our bodies fit so well.

Often we'd lose sense of any reality beyond a Oneness that came over us. There was at times no way to tell where her body began and mine ended. It didn't matter. We saw it as "spiritual" even though neither of us came from any religious tradition. I was very conscious however, and refused to let senses and flesh and instinct rule. We agreed it was not good timing and common wisdom was that you don't jump from one intimate sexual relationship to the next—especially if both parties were in the 'leave' of a long term unresolved painful relationship. That rational sacred code lasted for a few months. Our meetings turned to timeless swimming souls bathing in the ocean of ecstasy. Sometimes we cried for hours too, holding each other in our secret dark cocoon. We wrote copious love letters,⁵⁷ short and very long, and dropped them in mutual mailboxes in the middle of the night. I was floating (again) and loved it.

Yes, and it had been unconscious in Merlin's world and Robert was dreaming it, freeing himself slowly from the personality of whom he was expected to be—for his mother, his culture—his own internalized image of a "family," "good husband," "father," and "provider." He hated it too. His first step was to "leave the Mother" who had become ill and violent on his soul. From his journal notes, we pick up on the months before him and Catherine were to conceive ISOF:

Feb. 21, 1989- I noticed during the day how I have [been] brewing thoughts about my decision to leave Linda [now x-wife]. I generally feel it is right and a good choice.... spending time with Rosemary and later with Pat, seemed good anchors in the reality of individuals who made choices to leave 'bad' relationships with children involved and who seem to have turned out for the better. The reading of Nouwen's spirituality, last night, helped me see the vital spirit and creativity... for if I continue to suppress it, under my wife's presence, in this relationship (due to fear, we create), I will be not living life as I know I can and will. I will lose what I need, and then what will I offer to my children.... my relationship quality with my daughters [Leah 7 yrs. and Vanessa 5 yrs.] may differ after I leave, but the quality of what I bring to them and to the world is more important to me than this structure of a family unit which is dysfunctional....

Linda, an x-nun (age 33), and Robert (age 28) were married in 1980, and went through a separation in 1988, with lots of dramatic pain and fear, and then he moved in again for eight months to try again to repair what was damaged. He knew by Feb. 21 (above) it was finally over, as she was not who he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. There was no going back again. He had been living on his own that spring for only a couple months before meeting Catherine. His journal entries give more insights to his upcoming major 'shift' of his being:

March 4, 1989 – I dreamt of being on another planet with a lot of other people, young people mostly, [and] I was younger too, and there were cosmic forces that came by every once in awhile; I was never really sure which ones I could trust and which ones I couldn't; I hid under places until I was sure what was happening. In all cases I recall, they were benign, and it turned out there was a gift....

Robert (Michael) had often thought he was from another planet. Once he was nastily accused of being an "alien" by a relative. He'd sensed at times, vaguely, he was on a "mission" and was here to do some "scientific" experiments to see how people here manage "fear." Another journal entry:

April 17, 1989 – [day before my 37th birthday] A lot of revelations tonight. What do I think of reality? I try not to let it get in the way of Truth. I realize how hard I struggle

⁵⁷ I kept copies of most of them and recently have lost them or I'm even thinking I threw them out a few years ago as a final "separation" healing.

to not let everyday reality and all of its emotional patterns and destruction and de-humanizing elements get in the way of knowing and following Truth... I do sense truth... thank god! I have had a revelation tonight, after talking ecstatically with Vicki, that I can see Linda's struggle as that against patriarchy and the search for self-identity.

Robert was deeply understanding of sexism, albeit, a bit naive, and he often got bit by the feminine 'shadow' that won't allow itself to be 'rescued' by a man. Regardless, he knew he was a sensitive man and loved his creative-healing feminine side. His journaling continued:

May 13, 1989 – I dreamt of being in this place with my [VW] van.... Later, in the dream I recall working with an art therapist and she was a woman who played music that was something with help/rain in it.... We drew. I created a very elaborate picture, quite outstanding and [it] attracted a lot of people's attention... lots of colors and expressive decorative markings, it was a kind of feast in itself... then she came over, the therapist, but would not interpret it with me, she said something like "I was still there" or something. I played with some others at the workshop who interpreted with me and we came to see how I had lots of things in pairs, especially in the middle of the picture (pairing, love) and I talked about the new relationship with Vicki that was beginning, I also at the same time talked about the break-up with Linda.... While I want to 'grow into love' [rather than 'fall in love'] with Vicki... it will be more balanced. This relates to my thoughts of not wanting too much 'love intensity' in my relationship with Vicki for at least a year of grieving time.

He had a natural sense of 'balance' and 'order' and 'timing' to Life. He knew the laws and principles of how a healthy system worked. He'd learned so much in his ecological studies and by his observations as a naturalist too. His 'wild side' was very feminine and earthly smart. The next day he journaled on a significant reality of how fear was going to attack his own daughters, once he was no longer there to protect them:

May 14, 1989- After dropping the girls off [at their mother's house] today, I noticed how they retreated out of the way so quickly, disappeared, so as to not feel the pain of seeing the separation... Vanessa still asks me to this day, why do I choose to live apart. I still feel her pain and questioning. She still asks: "Is this a dream Dad?"

His journal at the time is filled with lots of anger at his girls and Linda, and everyone for running away in fear from the real pain. He hated fear controlling them all and creating a dissociated self—a "split" in their very soul. He knew his freedom, was his children's imprisonment, a paradox to this day very difficult to reconcile logically, if at all. His journaling continued:

May 16, 1989 – I'm glad Vicki held back from coming to me last night. It pained to not have her with me, but separation, is important for both of us... good move on her part not to overwhelm me/her.

May 20, 1989 – I dreamt of being with a couple of different single women, who were divorcees, who had children and we were going out—and I knew I must tell them I have found the one in my life now, and it's Catherine.

By this time, Catherine was already "inside" Robert's heart for good. She was the "One." He was so ready to love—love again—and love like he'd never even imagined before. They were not

sexual at this point but made love in every way a body, mind, and soul knows instinctively how to do.

May 20, 1989 cont'd- Catherine hit it on the 'head' with me the other night... I was feeling so much joy/pain/sadness/fear reading her recent letter... the feelings centered around [my own realization]: "I didn't think, I would ever stop being alone." (deep in my soul). She is a true companion for me.

May 21, 1989 – Feeling so vulnerable. Vicki has something to do with it. But I sensed tonight it was something to do with my loss of identity which is part of my life right now. What do I want? What do I not want? Trying to find me... a new me ... is it going to be separate... my girls, with Catherine... it seems all kind of frightening when I fear somehow I will get tied down in a relationship with Catherine, or is it pinned down—is it having to be responsible with/for her. My *puer* [eternal child] doesn't want to give up—the free youthful adolescent... it gets too serious and I want out! There is still a nagging terror in my back of my head—saying 'watch out' for her 'sting' [I had had a lot of dreams of insects and small animals getting inside my clothes and stinging me for months prior]. She could be just luring me and then would poison me... with (?) her distress/helplessness/pain—I feel I could paralyze myself... so I need to put up some protective boundaries to her at this point in time. Do I want to, or am I willing to just live with it no matter what?... Why am I having these fantasies of being able to attract women still? It is a searching of self!

Sounds like Robert had his warning signal, but what it meant, he would not find out for another year or so. The image of the (female) deadly poisonous Black Widow Spider had been common in his art therapy work around his real mother, and his x-wife. However things were, and would become, he was willing to risk, and his theme song with Catherine eventually became Bruce Cockburn's "Lovers in a dangerous world." It never failed to produce tears in their eyes.

May 29, 1989- I realize I still need to face the grieving around this separation [with Linda and the girls] and how it is pulling me into blame and self-doubt. I have to keep my relationship with Catherine at a moderate level so I don't escape in it... that would in the end be no good for anyone.

He knew this journey of healing and transformation, leaving "the smothering Mother" was a lone journey, and there was a seductive tendency to avoid it by finding another "mother" figure, a woman to "hold on to" and keep his old identity of man-woman relationship in a 'normal' coping cultural imaginary. He used to say, "Intimate relationships (like "love") are mainly irrational."

June 7, 1989 – I dreamt of having to make a decision between Linda and Catherine (though it was a more beautifully attractive woman in general not Catherine per se). I recall the decision came as I agonized over the fact of wanting to leave but not being able to leave the family home (which was in a strange place)... the only way I was attached to Linda was by sex and she approached me on it; but even though I was willing somehow we didn't follow thru because Catherine came by, eventually I removed myself from them (note: Catherine lived in an apartment only a couple of doors down). I tried to escape but decided to move in with Catherine, Linda was furious.

Decision made. Seven months later he would buy his first house with Catherine, move in together, and settle into a long life together and “live happily everafter.” But wait, there are other signs in the dream:

June 7, 1989 cont’d- Now somehow this seductive/wealthy (got it all) kind of guy was also greatly in love with Catherine and made great attempts to find her, show her he loved her, and I was simple and actually became friends with this man. He and I had been building some kind of strange structure, messy, of bits of paper and spider bodies dried out up high in this room... it kept needing repairs occasionally and eventually the dried out spiders fell down, I had to clean them off my sweater and so did he, but they were gone. At some point when I was discussing my love for Catherine and wanting to have sex with her, I realized he too was in love with her, yet we were such good friends, [and] I suggested to him we were brothers... we were the same being. Complements for each other, we needed and supported each other. As I moved in with Catherine (and this ‘brother’)—Linda kept coming in [and] intruding (note: the door was not that good/sound)—I kept fighting her off, pushing her out, threatening her, though I also recall feeling she could come back and threaten me with a gun—she would try to kill me. As time went by it was my real brother instead of Linda at the door and I had to fight him. [he wrote an insert in brackets, “I’m curious of my ‘brother’ in these dreams”]

The dream was a portent, as we shall read as this chapter unfolds.

Merlin, sing, sing, sing with us, your goddess guides:

*“The land is grey and bare, the trees naked as bone,
Their summer stripped from them; the willow’s hair,
The beauty of blue water, the golden grasses,
Even the bird’s whistle has been stolen,
Stolen by a girl, robbed by a girl lithe as willow.*

*Blithe she is as the bird on the May bough,
Sweet she is as the bell in the tower,
She dances over the bending rushes
And her steps shine on the grey grass.*

*I would take a gift to her, queen of maidens,
But what is left to offer from my bare valley?
Voices of wind in the reeds, and jewel of rain,
And fur of moss on the cold stone.
What is there left to offer but moss on the stone?
She closes her eyes and turns from me in sleep.⁵⁸*

“Grey grass... cold stone.” Get to know your enemies well, they are closer at hand than you may think. Michael returns to his old journal notes of his Robert-self loving and dreaming in dangerous times:

June 12, 1989 – I dreamt of being in the bed and having women come into the room

⁵⁸ Excerpt from Mary Stewart (1986, p. 362).

to sleep with me and this “monstrous” “devious” character was somehow controlling it all, watching, playing tricks, on us, “setting me up.” After a few trials, I found a woman I could love. We wanted to have sex and yet she finally refused, and was “taken” away from me by this “character,” who was nebulous but laughing behind the door, then it was my brother and he was laughing and I was irritated and I was on top of him protesting his trickery, wanting to bite his ugly head/face off. [in a note in parentheses Robert wrote: “What is this? Some potentially undermining force?”]

Radical Thoughtlessness: Oneness And More

Michael’s memory is not clear of all the timing of things 17 years ago, although his journal entries helped, but he senses with Sight and remembers it... nearly all. Thinking calculatively or rationality itself, was of little interest to the breakdown he was going through. His union experience was about to enter a new phase. Perhaps poetic words of Gibran, or Rilke would best be used at this point in the narrative but he’s drawn rather to the philosopher Martin Heidegger (*via* Coe, 1985) to introduce this next phase which is best, to remember, as a time of radical and reflective “thoughtlessness,” which for him was a difficult thing because he loved to “try to get reality down”-- think rationally and systematically, theorize, draw maps of ideas and complex concepts and write critical philosophy about many topics and contemporary life was often his ‘prey.’

He was a “scientist” by training, although that paradigm had crashed ominously with his x-wife’s experiences of repetitive psychoses and the strange Christian “mystical” experiences she had. He was an “environmentalist” and the world was going to ‘hell in a handbasket’ as far as he could see it—a future darkly. There was no other species on the planet that was so neurotic and insane that they would “spoil their own nest.” For him, all humans had to “get it right” and soon, or they would not be able to correct the ecological and human disasters that were eroding the fabric of sustainability on the planet. He lived with this catastrophic sense of urgency and responsibility (sometimes a dread) to do something about it from the moment he studied his first undergraduate course in ecology and environmental problems in 1972. Back then, the expert futurists were predicting the world as humans know it in the West would collapse by the late 1990’s (e.g., *Limits to Growth*). It never happened, at least there was no Armageddon. Other global political things were collapsing in 1989-90, and that is brought up later at the end of this chapter, as it is evident that what was happening to Catherine and Robert in those years was connected to larger global transformations (using that term loosely).

Looking back to years before divorce, before Catherine and ISOF, he’d guess, at the time, one could have called him a young 20’s something “activist” and definitely an anti-technologist type, who wanted everyone to live in “voluntary simplicity” (Duane Elgin) and to abide by E. F. Schumacher’s “small is beautiful” ethic.⁵⁹ He reflected:

I was an idealist too, but also a realist. Nothing much has changed there but 30 years of experience has left me a lot less excited about any rapid liberation of humankind from their capitalist fetish in materialism, fear, vanity, and greed, etc. A lot of grey hairs and a lot less hair, with a flabbier gut, and they tell me (my intimate ones) my personality is rather like a “porcupine.” Okay, sometimes but I’m really a marshmallow inside.

Back to the main ‘story’ climax. Coe (1985) wrote,

⁵⁹ To this day I still love Schumacher’s (1976) Buddhist-Western mixed philosophy and his classic book “*Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*.”

Heidegger says the thoughtless glorification of the calculative thinking that permeates our contemporary technological civilization must be renounced so that we may see technology in its true light. 'I call the comportment which enables us to keep open to the meaning hidden in technology,' says Heidegger, 'openness to the mystery' Behind calculative thinking that focuses solely upon beings, stands the mystery technology seeks to overcome. (p. 219)

He never really knew what *love* was. In some ways, he was raised in a society that made "love" a jazzy-technology to perform. He thought it was Okay, sometimes, even wonderful. But he was never convinced love was all it was hyped up to be. He wasn't a romantic in that way. Then one night, when Catherine was over 'we made love' and 'Love' made us. It was The Force. At the height of climax together they soared free from their bodies into a simultaneous cosmic union that released feelings of All kinds from All beings and back again to their simple organisms lying there expelled on top of each other. He recalled:

"What was that?" We never asked that question but it permeated the moments of silence as we re-incarnated to this world and the place of sanctuary my basement suite had become for us.

Love glowed through every cell. Catherine burst into crying and deep sobbing like I had never heard before except only from an abandoned child. I cried for no other reason than what she was feeling I felt too. We cried together just because and from that emerged spontaneous laughter as our eyes fell upon each other glistening in the single candle's light, reflection of a star, a galaxy, a space so large that 'mystery' is the appropriate term. "What was that?" Was it an encounter with "The Mystery" they call God, Brahman, The One? Now we were two, but a soddering of our souls had taken place in that ecstasy and we knew it as lovers and as spirits. It was a Love we held and rolled in beneath the blankets again and again. At one point, we sat up in bed and asked each other simultaneously, though the words flowed from my mouth alone:

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF THIS LOVE?

Together, without hesitation, staring in the mutual pools of ivory black watery eyes, they answered; something answered; though the words flowed from his mouth alone:

FEAR, IS WHAT GETS IN THE WAY.

We listened. Fell back and held that question, and that answer, as if we held our breath that was not ours. Given from the mystery, or call it The Mystery that mystics everywhere and everywhen have spoken and written about, the message was very simple. We got it. We must have asked for it. It sunk in. I jumped up with excitement and in a return of rational thought I uttered:

Catherine, let's start IN SEARCH OF FEARLESSNESS!

She received and fed everything that flowed from my mouth. We kissed the soul of the universal wisdom that tore us apart and glued us back together again. We were in Her magic flow. From that moment we co-founded the In Search of Fearlessness Project and knew that it was not ours. There would be no copyright, no control based on fear someone would steal a good idea. We merely wanted to spread the 'good news.' We had

been birthed anew, like the born-again of faith, and the question and answer were ours not to question or doubt but to enhance and craft. The presence of what entered us was radically thoughtless, compassionate, and so simple to be beyond rational analysis. Today, even all the words, just miss the essence of what we experienced.

So, I concluded that from heretoforth, we were life-partners of a mission to establish on earth the ISOF Project, and all else would follow. Follow your bliss and the terror will follow! “However terrifying these transition moments, they have consistently [throughout history] been birth moments,” wrote Thomas Berry (1988, p. 162).

One of the immediate discussions I recall, as Catherine made tea and we ate fruits for our revival, was around “why” fearlessness and not In Search of Love. My philosopher inside was racing again, and I led the notion that it was a counter-move of sorts that we were to lead with the ISOF Project. *Fearlessness* had the word *fear* within it, and thus those who follow fearlessness or the Fearlessness Project would both be countering the Fear Project that is running and ruining this world, and they would be following a ‘spirit’ of liberation from fear that never forgets fear. As we talked, it became clear to us there was a logic that defeated anything we had learned here on this planet. We had learned “love is all you need.” The pop culture and songs of our youth, and to this day, tell us that over and over.

Our parents, our teachers, our preachers, our gods, and even our government leaders told us we ought to be kind and loving to be good and everything would be alright. What fairy tale doesn’t teach that lesson? However, neither Catherine nor I remembered a truly healthy love from our parents that was so great and all healing and all fixing of everything. It wasn’t our lived experience and we were pretty sure that most people would agree with us. The disillusionment with “love” was also becoming part of postmodern society, where one has sex for recreation not for love. People are now often constructed into ‘objects’ or ‘toys’ or ‘technologies’—sex toys, if you will. But the longing for love, or is it The Mystery (?) still continues and likely always will deep in the recesses of the human ‘heart’ (soul).

They weren’t about to write pop songs about fearlessness. That was too big of a word and hard for people to hear, as they soon found out in sharing some of our experience that night with others living in a coping culture of fear. Yet, so it was, the first philosophical principle, and premise of ISOF, was that *it was better to remember fear in our pursuit of the freedom and glory of fearlessness, than it was to forget fear* (and its enormous power to destroy love). The choice they made, and little did they know it at the time, was to place *the value on fearlessness higher than love*—at least, as the human relative world was concerned. In the Absolute sense of The Mystery, and our knowing, and much of what they’d read later, Love is the highest value and only Absolute value of the Kosmos.⁶⁰ If the contemporary Christian theology is based on “God is Love” then that’s Absolute enough, whatever the words and concepts one uses to communicate, what the mystics and Catherine and Robert knew from experience that night.

Wisdom and discernment, through philosophical reflection, and an open heart to the *universal teachings* we received that night, and led them to conclude, at least strategically-- here and now on earth, that *fearlessness is the better way to go*—the better notion to promote. Why? They argued, they dialogued, and they concluded that far too many eons of human history had passed where love was promoted as the be all and end all, the source and the god, and guiding light for ethics of most every kind of culture; but what the evidence showed them in that “Messianic

⁶⁰ I’m using Ken Wilber’s (1995) “Kosmos” as inner and outer reality, not merely “cosmos” in the scientific materialist outer empirical sense.

moment” (*a la* Williams), was that *love was not enough*. They were convinced that love, as most humans could interpret it, was often distorted and twisted, used as an excuse for violence, used as distraction from the *Truth that people are living in fear most all of the time and that destroys the love they espouse they value so dearly*. They don’t admit that part. And that is fear itself telling the big lie. “Love” was (mostly) a big lie, as far as they were concerned. Love, in its distorted forms, forgets fear⁶¹. “... fear engenders fear, fear never gives birth to love,” wrote Nouwen (1986, p. 17). Human history pursuing love teaches that love doesn’t work to end violence and suffering, nor to end fear. “We are not bad, we are afraid,” wrote Segal (1984, p. 88). Michael remembers their feverish righteous passion at the time:

There was (and still is) a cycle of fear and violence (i.e., the ‘Fear’ Project) which reproduces in our individual and collective lives, everywhere and everywhen, that cannot yet be managed or stopped—nor will it ever be the case, until there is a healthy love; and that healthy love must be based on fearlessness as the top virtue⁶²—the ethic and path of liberation from the ‘Fear’ Project.

How Was ‘Fear’ Created, How Was It Destroyed?

So many people have asked Robert/Michael over the years “where does fear come from?” People have great imaginations about the origin of fear and there are many stories and myths, as well as theories and dreams of how it all began. In 1992 his daughter Leah wrote and illustrated (at age 11) a wonderful fear “origin story” [she wrote it on her own; spelling corrected where needed]:

HOW FEAR WAS CREATED

Written and illustrated by Leah Fisher

This book is dedicated to my beloved father Robert Fisher.

One day when the dinosaurs were still alive a person came walking onto the earth. The dinosaurs saw this person and fled from where they were and weren’t seen again that whole day. (p. 1)

For once in their whole life the dinosaurs were scared! They could not believe it because nothing in the entire world (until now) was ever afraid of anything. This person was not liked very much in this part of the world so she kind of felt lonely. But one day another person came and asked why the animals and plants were gone? She answered saying that no one liked her. (p. 2)

This *fear* never was conquered, for it began to take over the world until a spirit named God said “Why is there so much fear?” His question wasn’t answered but God decided to make a thing called *LOVE*. It really helped and I’m glad he made it but *fear* was still out there. (p. 3)

⁶¹ I say that with a caution, that for some, like the poet e.e. cummings “love is more thicker than forget.” And I acknowledge there is debate as to what kind of quality of love (Love) “casts out fear” as the Bible says and what kind of quality of fear (“Fear”) “casts out love” as some poets have written about.

⁶² In contrast to the Western religious traditions, in ancient Hindu texts and some Eastern traditions it is common knowledge that “fearlessness” is the virtue of all virtues, and from when all virtues can only be virtuous upon. To be discussed in later chapters in more detail. I only read about this sacred hierarchical ranking of *fearlessness* long after it was intuited in the birthing of ISOF. The West has a lot of screwed up ideas (myths) about what *fearlessness* and *fearless* mean. I want to correct that with this ISOF Project work.

This problem I'm sorry to say was not totally solved but it was helped and it was even more help when later on in the future an organization was made and it was called *In Search of Fearlessness* (ISOF). (p. 4)

Yes my friends and that club was doing very good but fear is still out there and that's a fact. –The End (p. 5)

The teaching, from the old ones and the new ones, has begun again. It flowed from both of Catherine and Robert then, but he was definitely the mouthy one (spokesperson) unable to hold back from telling anyone in sight. The prophetic (even evangelical) archetype is close to his Merlinesque soul. In reverie he senses the 'spirit' again:

Seventeen years later, as I read the documents above, I can touch that 'spirit' of inspiration again, and the philosophy flows easily. Many of my critics, doubters, or even closest intimates wonder about all the words I "preach" and question the source—although, my daughters always found away to put ISOF in their 'own words' and images. I understand that doubt. I am a professional critic of everyone and everything. Writing this chapter has perhaps shown the context of that which flows from my mouth when I am speaking in ISOF terms. My mouth is going, but that which is spoken is from a wiser source than I (and if it isn't, then I'm in big trouble). Take that explanation how you will, it is not easy to understand if you haven't experienced what I experienced that night with Catherine, and the following steps that developed into a movement called ISOF. Of course, such a claim of epistemological knowing is not to be taken as "gospel truth" that is "written" as "the Word/God." No, I wouldn't claim that nor defend that in any text or discourse. Everything I say and write and do is open for critique as it must. Refinements of wisdom and compassion come through dialogue and development, through deconstruction and reconstruction. I'm too much of a philosopher and critical theorist/pedagogue to want people to merely "trust" and "believe" truth. They ought to work hard to mine it from ignorance (*Thanatos*) and arrogance (*Phobos*). They ought to work hard to find truth from the confusion of fear ('fear'). Those topics will return.

That criticality is the driver and purpose of *transformative learning* which is at the heart of the ISOF Project. And yet, clearly calculative rational analysis and technology is not enough either. The mystery is illusive. The mystery is also not enough to guide humans totally on this planet of the 21st century, especially in a post-9/11 world. He is still a realist. The important thing for everyone is to challenge themselves and others with care and concern, with good quality information and vigilant self-awareness, and to ask simultaneously: *what is my motivation to criticize?* If one's motivation comes from fear-based patterning then it will only increase fear (and confusion) in the world, no matter if your critique is just or not. To critique from the fearlessness path is another 'story' and one Robert/Michael will ethically defend throughout this book. *In Search of Fearlessness* is a search for clarity and Truth as much as it is a search for compassion. Many wisdom traditions teach that you either chose to come from a motivation of *Love* or *Fear*. The former is better than the latter.

Michael has found a curious memento on his dusty shelves:

In a dark green binder in my office just now I found my unfinished ms. intended to be

“The Book” (Bible) on ISOF philosophy (June 19, 1990).⁶³ On the front cover of the binder, to my surprise, is “Vicki Sannuto 812 765,” scratched over with a black felt pen. It must have been one of her university note binders, maybe even the binder she brought to class when we first set eyes on each other in 1988. The cumbersome long title of my ms. is *In Search of Fearlessness: Towards a Unitive Healing Theory as the Foundation for a Healing Culture*. I opened the Abstract for the book with two quotes that still ‘hit home’ for me right now:

... a book should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us. – Kafka

I have faith in all those things that are not yet said.
I want to set free my most holy feelings.
What no one has dared to want
Will be for me impossible to refuse....
If that is presumption, then, my God, forgive me. – Rilke

I continued in the Abstract:

It takes an ‘outsider’ to help us see ourselves most clearly and simply. This book is written from an ‘outsider’ view. This is the outsider as “artist” as “naturalist” in the most general sense of those words. If I was asked by a reporter what I thought of human nature, I’d like reply; “I’m sure its fine. I’ve never seen anything wrong with Nature.” And if I was asked what do I think about Human Services today, I would likely complain that its far-too-common a situation that there is a lot of helping, without healing. This book... is about a revolution and transformation of the very essence of the Western mind. It is the revelation of a simplicity and unity of complexity. That is where healing begins.... This book is a call for a “truthing” re-evaluation of the hegemony of Western dualistic consciousness as it affects all aspects of our lives and culture. The simplicity of the healing theory remains grounded in aesthetics and compassion with guidance from the *a priori* principle “Beauty is Truth, Truth is Beauty. That is all ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know” (John Keats). “... Beauty is its own proof” (Murchie, 1978).

And a couple more quotes, original ideas, from the text of the ms. (fav’s):

We make a decision to know, to “Know thyself,” as Socrates said and in this knowing based on fearlessness we reconnect with the Cosmic intention: ‘To know is to Love... to Love is to know.’ Faith becomes obsolete at this level of knowing. (p. 29)

You may say we need more activism than theory today as our crises mount. We don’t need one or the other. We need both. Currently there is a lot more activism than theory in the various movements of feminism, environmentalism, social human rights and so on. The danger of activism is that it can be easily based on

⁶³ Sure, that is so impulsively me, upon this reflection, always ready to write the new “Bible” and to write it before I have enough experience to do it well. This attempt in June 1990 was only 10 months after the breakdown and breakthrough experiences Catherine and I had in birthing ISOF. No wonder manuscripts typically don’t get finished in my life. This is not my first impulsive attempt, I assure you. My most impressive failure was an unfinished ms. in 1982 entitled *Appropriate Education: Education as if the Human Being Mattered* (a take off inspirational massive work based on Schumacher and Wilber). I’m only returning to re-write that book in 2006, along side the current book. More manuscripts than you can ‘shake a stick at’ but what will be there fate? In between revolutions, revolutionaries (as exiles) write books, so I’m told.

fear-based thinking. This leads to a narrowness of vision and “fanaticism/facism”-like qualities. Characteristically these movements have a lot of projection going on. Someone ‘out there’ is to blame in one way or another. Activism is only coping when it has no model/theory of unitive healing. These movements inherently do not yet have a clearly articulated theory of oppression that gets beyond shame, blame, guilt and fear complexes. The fear creates a “death-making” culture/world and this only increases our fear of death. This primal fear started the whole syndrome in the first places. These movements in their extremes are characterized by the anger and “insanity” that comes when despair overcomes rationality. They even fight with themselves. Compassion and care are no where to be found. This is our woundedness at its worst. Terrorism is the perfect example.... (p. 33)

Ours is not a ‘healing culture’ but rather one that teaches us to cope with life instead of living it fully in Love, joy and trust. As one teacher said: “Coping is learned discouragement.” Too many of us have given up that such a life of fearlessness (beyond fear) is even remotely possible. (p. 53)

Coping culture’s have a “taboo against knowing who you are,” says Alan Watts (1972). No wonder we don’t want anybody else to come too close to us. (p. 57)

Historically, the abuse of Love has always had outcomes much worse than the abuse of fear. (p. 63)

Before going on to the explication of a theory of fearlessness it is important to share briefly my experience with entering the path of fearlessness in my loving partnership. It was only over a year ago that my partner and I came to birth the *Project In Search of Fearlessness*. Within moments of its spontaneous birthing we knew we had become parents of a different order than on the physical level alone. We had a “child” born to us that was never gain to be turned back in hiding due to shame, guilt and fear. Our commitment was to live our lives and relationship beyond fear: This was the only way to living a relationship in Love. We finally understood the depths of what Love and Creation was really about and we cried for weeks and months grieving and loving in joy. This book is an outcome of that Love which transcends us personally. It is God’s Love. It is the Love of unity consciousness far beyond the “romantic fallacy” of our egos. What has been most miraculous to us both is that it was nothing other than allowing and practicing a total vulnerability and making a “theoretical” decision to live beyond fear. Theory and practice have never been separate for us. (pp. 72-73)

Love may be our origin and destiny but ‘fear’ is our daily bread. (can’t find page #)

No lack of enthusiasm, grandiosity of vision and propositional explosion on the page for this author. Catherine would have been very shy about these writings, she never saw them. She wasn’t an activist (in the normal boisterous sense) either. She liked to keep her life more private than he did (recall the tone of her recent letters earlier in this chapter). There’s a distinct Boomeritis (*a la* Wilber) inflationary romanticism in the writing (pure and innocent?) that is quite embarrassing to some degree as he reads it, and reprints it, in 2006. He is moved by it again and that counts. He wonders what happened to the higher standards that he seemed to let slip by over the decade plus. A lot of ‘water has gone under the bridge’ since that time.

Let us turn now to the “Beauty” and aesthetics of the artist-healer-teacher-researcher that grew from their relationship with their nascent “soul child” ISOF. Their relationship took on a new

phase and character. They had faith (and beyond faith) in something, like never before. They had purpose and wanted to lead something. They didn't really know how to do it. There were no maps. They started somewhere familiar and enjoyable and moved from there. Below is a sample of some of the early sub-projects they took on to manifest the Beauty that was flowing between them and from them. Any healthy "love" does that—it exceeds itself with creativity into the world. Exploding forth, drawing in people, attracting... and modeling that which we are—soul deep.

Spontaneous ART
Expression Group

This OPEN group for 16 yr. olds and over is intended to provide a space to explore self-expression in a non-judgmental supportive small group atmosphere. Absolutely no artistic experience is required.

EVERY TUESDAY 7:30- 9:30PM at
North Mount Pleasant Art Centre, 523 – 27 Ave. N.W., Calgary
Fee: \$3.00 / night each

Facilitated by Robert Fisher and Catherine Sannuto, both who are experienced in the use of art as a therapeutic and creative growth process and way of sharing. They both work as consultants and counselors in the Calgary area.

Note: This group is not about solving problems, it is about nurturing oneself through creative expression and sharing. Bring your own simple art materials. Some supplies will be made available at no cost. For further details call Robert or Catherine at 276-9674

This was taken from an original poster (c.1989) advertising what they offered regularly for years, and which then became a base or standard practice in ISOF with Barbara facilitating with Robert and sometimes others facilitating on their own. It became part of the 'fear' vaccine. What a meaningful time was had by so many people. The feedback from participants was always so positive and inspiring, that they knew they were offering something important. They appreciated the "safe space" but yet they were free, as were others, to be "autonomous" and "expressive" risking that they couldn't do anything wrong but be themselves. Later in this book we examine a lot more about this part of the 'fear' vaccine they (Barbara and Robert) eventually called "Spontaneous Creation-Making" (Bickel & Fisher, 1993).

From the first ISOF brochure (c.1989-90) they advertised: "Some Proposed Projects include: (1) T-shirts with the sayings: "I may feel devastated but I'm not defeated" and "I won't be overwhelmed" [printed 200 with the ISOF logo], (2) distribution of the I.S.O.F. logo and information (newsletter/journal) throughout the world via a support network of people and organizations, (3) production and distribution of a fear and terror handbook⁶⁴ for all us ordinary

⁶⁴ The "Fear and Terror Handbook" idea came in Feb. 23, 1989, before Catherine and I were really together. I was taking a counseling course at university and writing copious journal notes. I saw the manual as essentially a contradiction (cura) to how to get beyond fear and terror, that I had seen consume my first wife (spread onto me and ruin our marriage and family life). On one page of journal notes the manual took the form of: "Feeds IT" and the other side "Reduction Act" or "Starves IT"—the first few entries here will give you a sense of where I was going with this. "Feeds IT: worry about conflict and what others will think about me re: judge me; keeping light on my feet, with 'antennae' out looking for it everywhere, waiting, stalking; thinking it is real and totally appropriate to present time and I should react to it ... 'stupid!' 'Do something.' On the other side "Starves IT: no one has the right to judge me or anyone other than self, re: I am doing less than the best I can.; not care about it, because I refuse to be concerned I have to know how everyone feels about me and how I am affecting them (at least sometimes); risking with women, without thinking I have to be their friend (always); by claiming total choice on my part to risk, and that they make choices about risk... therefore we are both totally responsible for our

people, (4) researching, writing and publishing of a book “In Search of Fearlessness in an Age of Terror,” (5) sharing experiences, facilitating workshops, enabling community development based upon the principles of fearlessness with all people.

No doubt there was lots of discouragement in that other people were not so excited by their ISOF ‘baby’ and scheme. Many of those sub-projects never happened but the T-shirts did well,⁶⁵ though they gave most away. They sent them to the premier of the province and all kinds of people in “executive” positions in human services, and they sold them to others for a minor profit. They also got some lovely positive responses from people who appreciated the spirit of their venture and T-shirts.

One of the sub-projects, in fact it was first to come from Robert’s initiative, was the “Seeding Card Project.” Several months after the summer breakthrough with Catherine and birthing of ISOF, Robert wanted to do something on a daily basis as spiritual practice. He knew they had to wade through logistics to pull off other sub-project ideas and money was short. He wanted to do something “in the world” that didn’t cost money. He pulled a pile of old recycled paper left over from their first ISOF business cards, and began to cut them up into 4 by 5 inch pieces. He printed by hand, with all his ‘love,’ a quote on them that had to do with fear and fearlessness, and a contact number at the bottom if anyone wanted to pursue these ideas further with him under the ISOF Project (and context). He made over 500 and put them in people’s mailboxes, on car windshields, and at bus stops, phone booths, etc. He was “seeding” the potential of “freedom” from fear. He was definitely like (to use a euphemism) a “born-again” in religious traditions.

He wasn’t going to shove ISOF stuff down people’s mouths or condemn them for not “repenting” but the same energetic was invested in what he was doing. He wanted to shout out the ‘good news’ of liberation and encourage them to turn their backs on the ‘Fear’ god. In minus 30 below winter snow storms he delivered the cards at random. Once or twice Catherine joined him. He recalls:

... but I think she thought I was pretty nuts. Of the 500 cards delivered, only one person (a stranger) phoned me and more or less said (as I recall): “Are you the son-of-a-bitch who put the f.... card in my mailbox during the middle of the night.” I listened, and it was pretty clear he wasn’t impressed or curious about ISOF at all. More like he wanted to slap a lawsuit on me, as I recall. Not the last of such charges that would be thrown out my way by people in the ISOF (Calgary) community as well, over the years.

It astounded me then, and still does, that people wouldn’t see the cards as a ‘gift.’ I mean really, the messages on them were quotes like: “*Fear not for I am with thee.*” —Isaiah 43:5 or “*A spirituality that begins in sin, ends in fear.*” —Matthew Fox or “*All fear is past, only love is here.*” —Gerald Jampolsky or “*In dealing with fear, the way out is in.*” — Sheldon Kopp or “*We are not bad, we are frightened.*” — Jeanne Segal and so on. Clearly, I learned that people are either frozen (the “living dead”) or are angry that anyone reminds them of their unfreedom (fear-full-ness) and possible way to freedom. As Rowe (1990) wrote, “The secret is fear” (p. 11). Ouch. It was a shot of reality! A message

choices; I don’t hurt people, they also allow themselves to be hurt.... that, with an anger response, or what looks like an attack on me, is not necessarily all about me.”

⁶⁵ Catherine’s hand-written notes from a 1989 meeting we had: “T-shirts for every oppressed person—babies to seniors. All styles. All languages, i.e., sleeveless for bikers, adolescents, polo shirts for upper class. All print sizes from small to large so you can graduate in your real humanness. Same price for all styles. Front: “I won’t be overwhelmed” and Back: I’m a real human.” Work has to be done by like-minded people. No one should be excluded from having a shirt (find sponsors to donate materials, time, etc.)—including big distributors. Products would have to be totally available, totally practical in any culture. Support ethical investment and production and right livelihood in all aspects.... Global therapists—we give them mirror, images, lives.... “Quality” is important. We want them to be beautiful and quality made.”

returned to me from the everyday world. I stopped making the cards but I didn't shut up.

Catherine quickly tired in the early stages, as I sensed that she was critical of what seemed like my need (or desire) to work, work, and do more work for ISOF. I made sure to add in some "fun" too for our business/relationship meetings.⁶⁶ However, I loved every minute of working for a purpose larger than personal, and larger than 'normal' life. The work fed me, it didn't drain me. In retrospect, Catherine felt that spirit too and was deeply inspired, but she took 'hits' from her friends and colleagues who pointed out, "you'll never make any money doing this." Her friends didn't really know what to do with me, and that always made her uncomfortable, disturbed and rather despairing that her and I were getting more and more socially "marginalized." I didn't care, because I saw those friends and colleagues of her's as highly fearful people trying to squash a liberative project. I resisted their resistance and a "war" began, no doubt. Catherine wasn't that kind of fighter, not with her friends and colleagues. She wanted peace. I had long ago, in other conscious community and liberation work, experienced the virtual total rejection from my friends, colleagues and family. I was used to the gnawing pain of how following Truth is an "enemy of the people." The path of fearlessness is a lone one, indeed. And I've learned to discern who to share what with, when. "Secrecy" has its place in this 'business' of liberation. Reid and Croucher (1983) wrote of the tradition of master teachers in the warrior traditions of the ancient East,

The masters of old did not reveal their knowledge readily. To be allowed to share the techniques and wisdom they had accumulated during years of dedication was a privilege accorded to a select few. (p. 18)

Many have, and may continue to accuse Robert/Michael of being elitist (and arrogant), in today's pc culture. Such ethical discernment (or hierarchical decision-making re: values) is part of wisdom and strategic in the battle against the hegemony of a coping culture of fear, to put it bluntly. We are equal, but our "truths" are not all equally correct or ethical, he would say. And some "truths" (i.e., of the coping culture of fear) are carried in discourses (*a la* Foucault⁶⁷) that are created as "what we believe" and "who we are." The discourses carry *power/knowledge/fear*, as Michael would teach today. The discourses are not our own, and often are not made for healing or transformation. They rather, are meant to keep our minds in "prisons" of "shoulds" and conformity to 'norms' we did not create. Not that all parts of tradition are bad and oppressive. He has also been advised by experience as well, that "any thing good can be twisted for bad." One has to discern what to share with whom, but there are no guarantees of how ISOF theory and practices can be used. That's life.

⁶⁶ On Aug. 16, 1989 we had a partnership meeting and the notes I made for our agenda included the following: "In my 'obsessiveness' to think and act clearly and fearlessly, I was reminded last night that you and I have several things we have talked about but have not yet prioritized to follow through and I just want to list them for our further consideration... (how was that?, I am trying to write outside of my own distress): - get the "Four Worlds" film and show it with Don and Carol [Hale] and whoever else we might want, call Phil Lane [Univ. of Lethbridge] if necessary; visit Olds on a Sunday night for participation in their meeting/community ritual; visit my good friend Bruce and Elaine in Edmonton, I know we will have much in common to share in our journeys; get bike rack for VW van for our holidays to BC; contact the Rainforest group re: buying land; contact and follow up the search for recycled paper products for computer paper etc.; visit some more art galleries... yeah!; have a get together with some friends of yours to show my wildlife art slides and get drunk, and be silly... yeah!; talk and plan about setting up a support (RC) group of friends in Calgary and you and I facilitate this; hot bath together... ooops! SSSSSSTTTTTTOOOOOOPPPPP!!!!!! Love, your mild mannered friend and hero; -Robert

⁶⁷ A French social theorist, "Foucault is one of the most provocative voices of critique and dissonance internal to the critical tradition, and for progressively inclined adult educators his analysis of how apparently emancipatory adult educational practices often contain oppressive dimensions is particularly (but usefully) disturbing. In his view repression and liberation coexist to different degrees wherever power is present... the simple classification of power as either good or evil is, for Foucault, hopelessly wrong. Power is far more complex, capable of being experienced as repressive and liberatory in the same situation" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 120). This is important to keep in mind in ISOF, and we always gave room for dissent and places to publish for everyone's (unedited) diverse opinions and challenges to ISOF power structures.

Clearly, Catherine, with her many nightmare terrors and panic attacks⁶⁸ (at the time) wasn't the only one in ISOF from the start dealing with deep terror(s). One day, c.1989, still living on his own, and nearly paralyzed with the implications of this new fearlessness message, he wrote a long 19 page letter to Catherine (quoted below from pp. 18-19 only):

Catherine, I am just learning tonight what terror looks like and its two levels (at least) that I have to deal with. It looks like vomit, it feels nauseating and it sits in the stomach! I wanted to vomit over the men who hurt me [in the past], I want to expell the "poisonous toxins" I have imbibed, taken into my body from the cultural patriarchy in teaspoonfuls of far under the 'lie'—"it will be good for you son" and with a cold pat on the head—I swallowed it all—the oppression of the vulnerable and sensitive male [that I am]—all the time knowing the very cultural hand that fed me "that was supposed to be good 'medicine,' good for me" – would turn on me and kill me in a moment if I betrayed this fer-based trust/conspiracy to conform to the death trap of the industrial nation state psyche—this is the "Beast" talked about in Revelations and prophecy—my own "father" (my culture/nation) will turn on me if I betray it—we are totally terrorized as men/boys—we all are—and I drank its 'medicine'—but I now must vomit out those toxic wastes or I will forever, continue to be controlled by distress and I will forever be disappointed in myself as a total human being and healer. (this is the kind of "conditional love" we know—I know!). Of course the paradox of the distress is that as I move to liberate myself, I will continually feel guilty I betrayed my 'father' (this is archetypal in history in the Prometheus myth and self-punishment and punishment then must I accept).. I really am aware I self-punish well. I can't have too much fun and liberation nor feel too much without the asceticism cutting in as a punishment... there lays Prometheus on the "rock" at Caucasus... his liver picked out by Zeus's eagle daily... This is the pattern of deep 'guilt' that Rank wrote of in his study of 'artist-types' (sensitive and vulnerable types) of men. He didn't go far enough in his understanding and RC theory of oppression has much to offer. This connection and more came to me while fighting (shadow-boxing) in the mirror and then hitting my pillow—screaming. I do find clarity comes when I break open distress patterns, expose them to rational thnking and discharge the bodily emotions. I now understand why males at Common Ground [community] never have become real close to me over all the supportive years together—they are not (perhaps, with the exception of Prosper) hurt in the same way as I, they are not "feminine" males like I grew up. They all have carpentry and mechanical traditional male skills, in fact all the men in the men's group do—except me... that is interesting! Anyway, time to shut down. I want to talk with you now.

I do deeply love and cherish you and your committment to change and growth.
I feel you are an ally for me! –Robert

⁶⁸ I recall during the early 1990's when we planned our first workshop "Living and Loving Beyond Fear," and a few days prior to people showing up, Catherine has a nightmare of being in our basement, where we were holding the workshop, and Satan came after her there and was trying to convince her, more or less, not to do this work. She was really deeply shook up. She also experienced a lot of anxiety about our first postal box and putting ISOF out into the world with various documents. She felt somehow someone would send us something horrible in the postal box, and she didn't like going there alone to get the mail. I recall one day we got a response from a fellow, at the Canadian Mental Health Association (I think he was an activist-client), and he wrote this disturbing letter to us about the story of the "Wandering Jew." The letter carried this creepy religious animosity toward Jewish people, which Catherine and I were not, and that if we were still always "searching" (as in In Search of Fearlessness) then we clearly had just not let our hearts open to receive the Christ and we would wander and search perilously forever until we did. That really freaked Catherine out and she didn't want to respond to it. I did, but I don't recall what I wrote. No response came back from this guy after, that I recall. Opening up to the "public" with one's ideology brings out the opposing ideologies (and discourses) that exist.

Merlin... we hear your suffering. Your brothers have betrayed you. We wear your tears as they are ours too. Let your sisters take you to and from the mountain spring, and wash the blood from your head. Let your head rest upon the moss-covered rocks for 18 hrs. and then the transfusion of your heart's direction may be prepared. Prepare, old young one, they are coming for you.

The basic principle is well known in all the Mystery Traditions: *the futher you stretch out the 'good' the further you will encounter its opposite*. There's no doubt that ISOF takes "two or more" to act as allies,⁶⁹ when all else around seems inadequate to the task and the depth of understanding of this journey—to understand the depth of the transformation of the "self" (whatever that is). By 1998 Robert had come to call himself a 51:49 she:male, and within a few more years he transitioned to a 60:40 she:male. The marginalization of that gender identity adds to his daily struggles to 'fit' into a world of 'norms' that seem only an enemy to someone being really who they are. But indeed, Robert became strongly female from many sources, without giving away his masculine capabilities. His tests and teachers were coming. He was preparing for something he knew not exactly what it would be. His dreams, regularly journaled, became more intense:

August 3, 1989 – Later, these three men came and terrorized and tortured us mildly at first by intimidation. Then I think I couldn't stand what they were forcing us to do and I challenged one of them [from the gang] physically and then had attracted a specific amount of attention to myself. The terrorists loved this of course, as they kept grinning with the look of "evil" demons. I ended up doing several of the intimidating things they put me through. They also had young lads helping and learning about this torturing. (I just realize now why Jesus was a man—it was the male psyche at this time of destructive patriarchy that was calling out to offer a healing to the masculine violence [of the] patriarchy of the Roman culture). At some point, I declared to all, though it was noisy and I could barely be heard, and also I was in so much pain I could barely be legible, I declared to all that from this moment on I would not cooperate and participate in their dehumanizing activities. Of course they zoomed in with my "challenge" to them and they dressed me in womanly robe, that had "death" symbolically written all over it. It was like I all the time had my hands tied behind my back literally. I knew they would test me with the fear of my own death. Then they sharpened knives. I knew what was coming. They put my testicles one at a time in this specially-made holding/receiving type of vessel and cut out my testes... I thought it would be a much more painful experience than it was. They joked about it. They continued torturing me (I recall at some point in the dream telling one of the terrorists I was a beginning psychologist but I didn't get a lot of reaction and I thought it was not to my advantage to put that out anyway. I am reminded intuitively that the only defense to terrorism is arts—art is the one form of cultural activity that has not hurt these terrorists. I recall now at this emasculated point, the young terrorists abused me, poked me in the sides, I was becoming hypersensitive to pain, said one of the older terrorists. I tried to stop that reacting/hypersensitivity but couldn't really. Then the young terrorists drew all over my body as if it were an object. They took my penis and tried forcing it into a young boy's 'vagina' ('asshole')? And finally, I recall being taken off on a "leash" [crawling on my knees beside them] or something by these young boys, and I saw police cars going by at one point. I couldn't seem to call out anyway. But they (the police) seemed preoccupied and obviously unable

⁶⁹ The conceptualization of "ally" is complex, and is dealt with later in this book in detail. Suffice it to say, it is more than "friend." Ally implies one who is on the same path of fearlessness—meaning "liberation." They task is to assist you on that path, not collude with the comfort and security of a fear-based ego that only wants "company" and "friendship" and not challenges from an ally. The ally also supports when they offer challenges—but that support is for healing, not coping, albeit, coping may be a first step to healing and transformative work.

to see (didn't want to see what was going on), or to help in anyway. Then I heard this beautiful music in the background while we stood outside on this lawn, it was hopeful and I cried. I knew I had waited so long to let go in crying. It was like I had tonnes to cry and vomit out of me—the pain and terror I had absorbed/ingested [over a life time or many life times].

Robert took Catherine to the old fir tree grove on the Indian Reserve just outside of the city west of Calgary. It was called the forest of the “Elders.” The trees on this one slope in a small area were all gigantic, and had survived fires and logging. It was magical for him to go there and now he had a special friend to take there. They hiked for an hour, with little trail to be followed. It felt like he was lost at times but he kept intuitively following his “nose” and they made it to the ridge. There were eight magnificent “elders” they snuggled up around and held each other. It was so quiet. A light breeze floated over the hillside and Robert became very attuned to everything. He recalled:

I don't remember how long we layed there, and no where. I do remember hearing distinctly the words, from some where, spoken to me (to us?): *“BE A GUARDIAN OF THE SOUL.”*

For some reason, he doesn't remember telling Catherine of the voice he heard. From his journal on August 21, 1989, he remembered that he also had an image come to him like a vision while laying under the giant trees. It was of a Lion and Tiger lying outside a ‘Gate’ as protectors of the Soul and threshold to the beyond. ISOF had already been conceived a week earlier while ‘making love.’ Now, they had come to a ‘Gate’ but nothing else was clear.

Fearless Guardian At The ‘Gate’: Mikhail Returns

Upon reflection, Robert/Michael/Merlin could see the “reality” that was at the ‘Gate’ they had to cross (or refuse to cross). He could have never predicted the exact form The Guardian would take. It was to be a “fearless teacher,” literally, as if, from another world. Neither had met such a one before. And they weren't even doing drugs. This was cold “real” life.

This fated meeting with their ‘teacher’ began in mid-December of 1989. Robert was still in his dark time and filled with agonizing despair over the losses in his life, and the pain of not seeing his daughters everyday. He felt like he was losing control of these wrenching feelings and that he was being consumed by “forces” that were driving him to want to kill himself. He recalled:

I was not one to ever really ask for help. Call me Mr. Independent-Superman. But I knew I had to ask, something, someone, some... transpersonal being... my god. I had never needed help before so badly. Catherine would not do. No one worldly would do. I let go—and the phone rang. It was a spiritual new friend I met from my work place at Quest Ranch. He told me he saw a poster of a workshop coming up in the next week and he thought I would be interested. It was called “The Final Elimination of Fear.”⁷⁰ After checking to see if I had heard the title correctly, I immediately said “yes.” How could I turn down something so outrageous. Catherine and I went, regardless of the

⁷⁰ T.E.L.S.T.A.R. was the intergalactic group that organized this in the cosmos, while the earthly group was “Nova Productions” of Santa Fe, NM and there were events like this going on all over North America, mostly in the U.S. They had a diversity of events as well, and their tapes to order had titles like “Immortality as the Basis for Evolution” (Adam), “Art: The Great Transformer” (Isadora), “The Empowerment of Women” (Mikhail). Catherine and I never kept in contact with these folks. Although, once I got a letter a year or so later asking for money/donations because Saratoga had a baby and... anyway, it was too weird.

\$250 U.S. per person, which was way more than I could afford or her either. It was being put on by this group from New Mexico. All very mysterious but magnetic to me. We showed up at a fancy hotel in downtown Calgary. A group of maybe 40 people, adults of all sorts. Soon, we were the audience, the doors closed, and the organizer (an older woman in her late 50's) greeted us and gave us a bit of a run down of how this "seminar" was going to work. Catherine and I kept glancing around to see if we knew anyone but we didn't. We almost couldn't keep a straight face, especially when this well-built bodyguard type younger man came strolling through the doors, emanating beauty and Herculean strength. Behind him was a gorgeous woman in black long hair (maybe mid-30's). The costumes were dramatic, and flowing, colorful as could be. Every detail of the performance seemed impeccable. The scene was like out of ancient Greece in a Temple or something. She, Saratoga, a goddess if I'd ever seen one, addressed us, as a "walk-in."

This was a totally new experience for Catherine and Robert. They were not into psychic stuff or "new age" or "channelers." But there they were confronted with this amazingly stunning and vividly present creature (a tigress) called a human being, who had walked out of her body and someone came in—and apparently, that body was the vehicle of seven archetypal beings from another galaxy. Oh, yes, the story went on, and Saratoga told them what would happen. These archetypal walk-ins (higher intelligences) would interact with the audience. She, Saratoga was channeling these "extraterrestrial guides," as she called them, and she warned us that some of them are males, even though she would be in a female body. She noted, "their perfectly harmless," with a bouyant laugh to follow.

The spinning story continued to prepare the participants. They had come to serve humanity who had become lost in "FEAR"—and of course, that was just the word. They told them that none of them (in the audience) would actually understand the force that was upon this planet—which humans called "fear." The point was, that this next event was not rational. They were clear that the "operation" to reverse the flow of fear to Love took place on a plane and level of consciousness—otherworldly-- on other dimensions, with other beings, and well, don't try to figure it out, they told them. Just try to get out of the way and let the "higher beings" do the work. It would take as long as it takes, but the effect of the "reversal" would be permanent and that would end "fear" in each one at the seminar—if, they wanted it to. That's where the "channeled" beings came in. They were to "work" the audience until everyone was "prepared." Robert remembers this one great 'teacher' named Mikhail:

I was fascinated by how Saratoga channeled at least three or four Beings during the 18 hrs. we were there. The breaks were short. The whole thing very intense. The warrior Mikhail (Merlin returns) was the most active of all. She/he wore a golden suit and white leather straps and boots. She/he walked around the room and would zoom in on someone and start a conversation, and soon, that person was "breaking down" (usually) in some way revealing all their fear.⁷¹ It was astounding to see the ego defenses fall, and I knew exactly what Mikhail was doing, or at least it seemed familiar to me. It was like a good therapist, but then it was so dramatic and collective. I began to "love" this character, and was mesmerized by the fearless presence. In my view, that's what the 'spirit' of ISOF ought to look like full-embodied. ISOF ought to be a vehicle for more Mikhails on this planet but I had never actually seen one. I couldn't believe that this event was happening in conservative Calgary, Alberta, and that Catherine and I were there not

⁷¹ Neither Catherine nor I were conversed with during the 18 hrs. directly by these "channeled" beings. However, through Saratoga's black eyes, we were glanced at and "met" several times.

missing a thing. It was uncanny that we had months earlier, independently, seen that the planet needed to heal through FEAR, as well. Saratoga (Mikhail) had gone so much further than Catherine and I, and regardless if it was a “hoax” in terms of actually transforming fear in our hearts, I wouldn’t have missed the performance for the world. Yet, they were steadfast and kept reminding us why we were there. Finally, everyone was ready, and prepared, they told us. And so, they put on some music, and told us to close our eyes. Catherine and I looked at each other, perhaps for the last time(?). We snickered. It was terrifying, at some level, to just trust these people so much. Thoughts of “cult” came to our minds, and no doubt to everyone’s minds. What were they going to do? Were we being lured into something... hypnotized... or were we really free and autonomous to do what was right? We must have felt their “love” and “care” but those words hardly seemed in context for what was going on. They told us not to open our eyes and break the energy until they told us it would be Okay to open our eyes. We picked up some message that this was legitimate and real. We cooperated. Albeit, several people left the seminar in disgust and anger long before this last phase of the ceremony. Not everyone could believe, or more to the point, not everyone was willing to change their fear-based earthly identity. Some just were content to serve the Force (and Pain Master) called Fear. Some humans cannot or will not imagine an identity that is not befriended in a fear-based worldview. “What would I be without my fear?,” said one participant that Mikhail worked with.

After 15 minutes of this “transmission” or “flow reversal” they told them to open their eyes, and they could go home. The event was completed. They would not be the same. Although, they did warn them that the Fear Force is so great on the planet Earth that it would try to come back into their hearts and reverse the flow again, but all they had to do was think of Mikhail, or any of the other teachers they had met in that time, and they would help if asked sincerely. As well, they offered a short workshop at a community centre three days later for a “booster.”

People piled out of the hotel in the middle of the night, it was 3 am. They were all exhausted and silent. Catherine drove Robert to her apartment as they wanted to be together to integrate the experience. On the drive, they never said much and looked at each other with the strangest of looks—silently querying: “Did you see what I saw?” What was there to say, after a ‘party’ like that? They were exhausted and opened the door to her apartment and suddenly one of them “burst.” A massive energy of gut-splitting laughter that was contagious between them. Rolling on the floor, and even in pain, they laughed so freely and wildly it took their breath away. After a half hour of that, they talked, smiled, and fell asleep together, only to wake a few hours later full of adrenalin, and they talked and made love, and made love again, and a wild energy took over that lasted for three days. It wasn’t until the second day, that they decided to get out of bed, get dressed and see what the rest of the world was doing. They needed nothing from any one, any where. They had each other and this special experience, they knew they would never forget.

ISOF was re-energized by this experience with Mikhail, and they felt they could do anything. By June 1990, they put together their first weekend workshop under the ISOF label. They were to co-lead in public for the first time. They signed up about eight people, most of whom they knew.⁷² The event’s purpose was heartfelt to the core (from their handout to participants):

1. this event will be both theoretical and experiential. You have been provided with

⁷² I don’t recall everyone there, but there was Coralie W., Larry Sannuto, Dwight Braunberger, Cori, Sandra Cross, and a few others. Larry, Coralie and Sandra were to follow-up and join ISOF community well into the early 1990s, with Sandra with ISOF as a “leader” until ISOF’s collapse in 1998-99.

handout material to support the presentations. The package of figures (20pp) will provide an outline for the presentations.⁷³ You may find it helpful to follow using them and making notes on them if you desire.

2. this event is not intended to focus on your particular fears but rather on the path of fearlessness. It is primarily a high quality and indepth educational event. Catherine and I are “artists” and “educators” in the largest sense of those words. We are not traditional psychotherapists although we both have some training and experience in counselling.

3. true fearlessness is not the reduction of fear but going beyond it... which is always your decision. We prefer that you refrain from taking any stimulant drugs (e.g., caffeine, nicotine, excess sugar, etc.) or “pain killers” during this workshop unless they are a prescription drug. It is still your choice.

There were 10 overall purposes declared on the paper handout. Perhaps most significantly, people at the workshop were told that they couldn’t do it “wrong” and to let their soulful creative energies flow. That was on the surface of the presentation to the participants. For days Robert, with Catherine’s assistance now and then, was planning his “attack” on the ‘fear’ pattern. He had informed Catherine that he was going to do a “Mikhail” performative routine during some part of the weekend, and really allow himself to get out of himself and sort of “channel” the memories and teachings of Mikhail. Catherine “gulped.” She knew she wouldn’t be able to stop him as his passion was overflowing and he knew exactly what he wanted to do.

The day before workshop participants arrived, Robert went into Catherine’s closet, where they lived in their new (older) house together, and began putting on various bits of her clothing, like black tights, and assorted dramatic colored wraps, belts, and he even put on some of her make up, not to look like a woman but to look like a warrior/magician type character, more like a Trickster figure.⁷⁴ Upon seeing him all dressed, Catherine just about fainted and then burst out laughing. She couldn’t believe (oh yes she could) he was actually going to wear that in front of people who were paying for their workshop. Robert convinced her this is what he was called to do and that they were called to do as a couple. Walk through the fear, and keep walking through the next layer and the next layer until you can laugh at fear all the way to utter joy and bliss. It wasn’t Catherine’s style at all, and she stayed well in the background of the co-facilitation.⁷⁵

The workshop, was a way for them to bring people together to share their own experiences as a couple on the path of fearlessness, or what they called “living and loving beyond fear.” People were interested. The participants got a lot out of it and were enjoying the presentations by Robert, until the time he went off and told them that he was going to get a special guest for the remainder of the afternoon’s session. Everyone was a bit shocked that a special guest was coming that wasn’t announced on the handout. The element of surprise is always a good way to catch fear off-guard. Sure enough, dressed up (a cross-dressing shaman madman?), Robert did his thing, and provoked, and invoked, attempting to get the participants to make the final decision—the only

⁷³ I was a maniac for “diagrams” and “maps” of the human condition and Reality. I still have copies of the 20pp of drawings and ideas. It is like I couldn’t get enough out, and I wanted to do it all in a weekend. Some of the “maps” are still foundational in my theory of ‘fear’ and fearlessness today. In the actual weekend, I didn’t follow most of them anyway and preferred spontaneous “lecturing” and dialogue.

⁷⁴ It turned out I grew to love doing radical performances of this transformative kind and did them a few times in ISOF, at my continuing education course at University, and at my dissertation defense. Dramatic arts forms are great for ‘walking through terror’ and doing something fun and educational at the same time. Arts-activism has become increasingly of interest to me as a powerful learning site/method.

⁷⁵ She also stayed in the relative background of ISOF likewise, not ever figuring out how to be with “Mikhail” (me, Robert, Michael) with my exuberant energy and overt teaching style. You have to remember I was a teacher in my early 20’s as a park naturalist, I did musical theatre, played in dance bands, and was a professional trained school teacher, so I had lots of experience being up front and leading in groups, which Catherine did not.

really important decision of why they came to this workshop in the first place—and that was, to make their own “life decision” about whether they want to live in fear or live in Love. Now, was the time to make that decision and stick with it. Of course, Catherine and Robert (and Mikhail) would support them to carry out the practice of that decision. A few minutes of silence were given, and he asked them to decide, inside, not to share it. That ended the first day. The next day they went to the University and used a classroom space for spontaneous artwork and processing. Everyone felt refreshed and relatively more alive. One, of several, letters of appreciation from participants included:

Dear Robert & Catherine

July 5, 1990

I want to let you know how much I have gained from the “Living & Loving Beyond Fear” workshop. Over the past couple of weeks I have experienced a greater sense of myself and enjoyment in being who I am becoming. I feel much more able to stride forth into the world without limiting myself by being afraid of others and my own capabilities and faults. My capacity to feel has also been enhanced. I have to say this has not always been easy, even with so called ‘good’ feelings, but I can feel the passion of my thunderbolt having a more poignant effect. Thank you for opening yourselves and your home to make the workshop available.

—Warmly, Cori

A few other participants shared on the workshop evaluation form:

You have a lot of guts. You can see clearly when fear becomes thicker and ugly....
Your wisdom is great and you truly are a fearless leader.

I have experienced a greater sense of myself and enjoyment in being who I am becoming.

Thank you for your perception and your ability to be human in its truest sense.

They put out a call soon after to form “I.S.O.F. Groups” for support on the journey. Robert had experiences with Scott Peck’s community-building model, and Catherine has lots of experience with support groups for behavioral and disabled people. They knew facilitating community⁷⁶ experiences that were “about creating an atmosphere of safety and respect above all else”⁷⁷ were foundational to the work that ISOF was up to. Even though Robert had his “wild” Mikhail-side, he wanted to respect that that style of transformative facilitation is not everybody’s cup of tea, and Catherine was much lower-key, and that was fine too. They worked together, as a loving couple, and as a relationship basis for their theory and practices. The ethical foundation of ISOF was relationship-based from the start. They were not interested in ‘guru-worship’ or ‘experts’ doing all the ‘healing’ or ‘liberating.’ It was a highly feminist model of emancipatory growth work and adult education, even though feminism was not overly highlighted in the ISOF discourse.

Robert received a phone call from Cameron, a professional athlete, who was looking for a new training gimmick and *In Search of Fearlessness* had caught his eye. He wanted to check out the

⁷⁶ I also am not a believer that “community” per se is the be all end all answer to our world’s problems either. In fact, I went so far to challenge the entire ISOF community with its own “habitual” frame for community on several occasions and I published an article entitled “ISOF is a what?: Meta-community!” in the 1996 *ISOF Communique*, 13, 16-18. I considered at that time, that ISOF was more a meta-community in design than a community per se. ISOF was meant to be a model for community (communities) that were interested in liberation. ISOF would teach how to do it, but less, ISOF, in my view, was actually such a functioning community, nor did it need to be per se. Read the article to find out more. I was pretty critical of the ISOF “Community” over the years, especially at the end.

⁷⁷ From an unpublished document c.1990 “I.S.O.F. Groups.” They wrote, “No one in the group is a ‘healer’ or ‘converter.’ Our task is to co-create together an atmosphere of healing, which is the atmosphere of true community.”

options. To get a good sense of how Robert attempted to come from a transpersonal (impersonal) space with “everyday people” interested in ISOF, it is worth quoting from the letter he wrote to Cameron:

Dear Cameron;

Oct. 2, 1990

Your interest in IN SEARCH OF FEARLESSNESS was obviously sincere and important to you. I am pleased to share some thoughts below on how we may be able to work together. My strength lies in my intuitive abilities to sense what is fear-based thinking and acting and what is not (i.e., love-based). I am most interested in you or anyone I work with from the point of view of healing, not just “coping” and “managing” your life and world. Without going into all the details, let me say that we all have learned “coping/management” strategies to keep ‘performing’ (be it on the field or in the bed) in the world. Much of this “performance” is loaded with guilt, shame, anxiety, and fear. There is a place where we are not “performing” for others but entirely for ourselves. This ‘place’ of self-identity is truer to our inherent nature than the socially-conditioned self which is still hooked on performances for “rewards” (and/or fear of being punished/shamed, etc.). Coping/management models never ask healing questions. They merely look to see how we can just cope better, or handle distress better. This is oppressive to our true nature and all of our amazing abilities.

What I would pursue with you Cameron, would be a relationship where I am most interested in your and your true Nature (some people might call it your soul). I am most interested in your “peak performance” and ensuring that it is not driven and motivated by the ‘guilt/fear/blame/shame’ complex. I told you on the phone that this fear-based stuff is always fed and motivated by unhealed painful memories from our past. I would suggest that any “performance” that is motivated by guilt/fear/blame/shame in anyway will be “toxic” to the performer, and in the end will never lead to true life fulfillment. It is a toxic fear pattern (equivalent to any addictive pattern) that ends up leading to a lot of self-abuse in subtle and not so subtle ways.... By becoming more self-aware in all dimensions (i.e., physical, mental, emotional, spiritual) you will have higher quality attention. High quality attention is the key to the “power” and “success” of the “sacred warrior” in the ancient traditions. It is an intuitive power really. It is the ability to pay attention to your deeper inner voice of wisdom that knows just what to do and when in a given circumstance. It is a wisdom that is in harmony with that in your environment. It is the coming to know the power of ‘silence’ and waiting until it feels just right. Cameron, you will figure out how to use this high quality attention in your athletic pursuits. We will be there to guide you into areas you may not be aware of in yourself and to guide you when you feel you get “lost.” We will act as mirrors for your personal development... that is, the development that is the true unfolding of your “authentic self.” It is always challenging to apply the principles we have discovered to all sorts of professions and pursuits. I look forward to hearing from you soon, so we could meet for lunch to discuss possibilities further.

Loving Relationships: Hurting Relationships

Both Catherine and Robert had a lot of pressure to ‘perform’ their ISOF relationship as something beyond ‘normal’ or ‘coping’ relationships. They were under surveillance from people in their courses, in their lives, and in general from the world. There is no way to describe what that does to people under strain, except to quickly note—they tend to hurt each other, when trying not to. A paradox, and one of many on this journey of liberation.

The final betrayal was on its way, as often happens in great ‘stories’ of human accomplishment. Jesus was betrayed. And Robert (Merlin) was about to have his turn. One day, without hardly a clue, Catherine admitted to having an affair with a man she worked with. It was just starting. She was devastated that she had fallen into an old life-time habit of having more than one man—a secret ‘love-life.’ For Robert, nothing like this had ever been suspected, and nothing like this was familiar. That ‘story’ is long and painful, best left for a biography or autobiography. Michael looks back in reverie:

We were supposed to be special. How could this be happening to us? I offered every bit of healing attention, support, compassion I could muster, but she was destined to leave the relationship and live with this other man. Everything collapsed. I had to work through levels of abandonment like never before in 20+ years of healing work I had done in courses and with therapists, and in peer counseling. I was and wasn’t ready for it. It was another ‘failure’ like my marriage, but for different reasons. I actually couldn’t figure out the reasons. I couldn’t figure out what I had done wrong, or missed, or... Catherine, continued to tell me during our separation that it wasn’t my fault. She owned up to it being her own fault and decision we didn’t carry on. I was so embarrassed in having to tell people we knew, and especially “students” of ISOF. It was horrible. And all I could think of was her ‘hiding’ out with her new lover in bed, as if I didn’t exist anymore with real feelings, and love for her too.

Fact is, it was all in his dreams... months before... nearly a year... the unconscious patterns knew what was to happen, and that must. It would be his great healing, and transformation one more time to become a “single father” of ISOF and lead from scratch, lead through and past the embarrassment of failure... to continue on. He must; he had to face “the public” as a “teacher” who held the highest of expectations for all his students, even his lover/partner—and now, he had to face humility, poor fearless one.

“The blood in my mouth bubbled and oozed down my chin into the ground, and I knew it was I who was groaning. Merlin the son of Ambrosius, the prince, the great enchanter.”

“As the path took me lower, the seas came roaring up closer behind me, till I felt the spray of the big waves salt with the salt blood on my face. The tide was full in with morning, the waves still high with the night’s wind, shooting icy tongues up the licked rock and bursting beside me with a hollow crash that shook the very bones in my body, and drenched the path down which I crawled and stumbled.”⁷⁸

Robert couldn’t get it out of his mind that Catherine had fallen prey to ‘fear’ (to Satan, to evil)—that was the betrayal destined to wound him deeply in the heart, from the ‘sword’ of desire, his own best friend. He wanted to ‘save her’ but she refused.

“If you were a prophet as you claim to be, you would have known.”⁷⁹

For Robert, ISOF was abandoned by its mother. His healing journey would become more intense than ever. They still wrote each other ‘love’ letters. So many letters poured from him. She wrote back only a few times and then stopped. He was challenging her more than she wanted to hear.

⁷⁸ Excerpt from Mary Stewart’s (1986), pp. 448-449.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 451.

On one exchange of letters in this break-up period the sense of their greater connection and wisdom together can still be felt. First from Catherine.

July 21, 1990 – Robert you are beautiful. The Beauty is more than what is visible—emotional—It’s the kind of beauty that the outside world doesn’t always recognize but it is true spiritual maturity.

“There is no room for me.”

“Yes, I have been hurt when I was vulnerable and human—that is past. I am committed to being human and vulnerable.”

July 22, 1990 – [short excerpt from a 6pp letter from Robert to Catherine]
I feel like I am difficult to be around while I am dying.... Last night was a good example of our differences in development at this point in time.... I have gone through a lot of the anger stage (though not all) and fell like I am more in the despair and disappointment... all of this anger’s Catherine’s ego... though her soul knows exactly what is going on. Our relationship I sense has gone through similar “battles” as does ISOF. “Battles” of our two own levels of consciousness, whatever that means... our own personal developmental struggles.... We are anything but ‘normal’ as a couple.... Why do we still hang on to try to be normal too?.... I had thoughts of going away, off on my own for sometime, but it doesn’t grab me right now... it is more something internally in which I have to be alone.... it is as Catherine advised me “Do it your own way.” I am just beginning to take in how important it is, to follow “truth’s way,” “god’s voice” --- and no other... if people I care about who are around me see that as a rejection of them—so be it! I cannot collude any longer with their fear patterns—they will feel hurt—but I know I am not hurting them from my ego--- but because I am not willing to collude with their fear-based patterns, I suppose it hurts them if I choose to go alone (but this alone... does nto mean without them)—it just means I am going to steer my own ship)—I question if this is ego-based? No, it is love-based—it is that I care enough about Love, to not let it or myself be abused. It is not that I am fearing being abused, it is rather that I am loving to not be abused by fear. Love is the only answer to fear. It is the only answer. Love is making a choice to be alone!—not to be lonely, but to act alone if need be. The path of fearlessness is the path of aloneness. And that is scary and disappointing no matter what... these are the times of transition and madness... that is not my choice... it just is!

The paradox of a relationship-based love that births a ‘soul child’ ISOF and leaves them both alone... even Catherine now, writes back on this letter and shares some of her wisdom and existential positioning... irreconcilable... they part in a sad ‘love’ alone, still alone.

Robert;

July 22, 1990

The above passage is exactly what I feel all the time. It doesn’t mean you don’t want people around or do not love them, it is just the realization that we are always alone—within ourselves (the existential aloneness I always speak of—this is the feeling). It means having responsibility for yourself. We, as humans, try to avoid this like the plague but you cannot. Because ultimately you are dealing with who you are in the world. I don’t think this is ego-based either. Except you could say that you exist therefore you have purpose—which is also true. But I believe that the search or quest consists of us trying to understand what this purpose is. Even if we were simply to lay in bed for our whole lives we would still ask this question. The curse

of “thinking” beings. At times we seek closer deeper relationships (like ours) and we can enjoy it immensely but we will never stop searching. The key here is to try and be with another person while you move forward and they do as well. At time you will be out of step but all it takes is communication to be close again. It is the dance of life. Sometimes you can drift too far apart and both partners will feel discouraged that they can never be in step again. They can but the fear says they cannot (the patterns do as well) and a lot of old hurt comes up around losing people due to the “drifting apart.” True heart sharing does not drift apart. That is love. Love is a strong bond. But fear will try to wedge the gap wider because it grows in the non-love space. Anyhow all I’m saying is that you are experiencing the leaving home, the search—and you still have people around you. Yes, it’s harder to do battle with the patterns but that is why you have to be centered in that love for yourself. This life is for you too. Keep going. -Love C.

Her “ra ra” helper-coaching strategy at the end of the letter was not all that valuable to Robert at the time. It made him more incensed, that she didn’t understand him or ISOF. C. always wanted to “play” at being friends with Robert after he learned about the affair. He would have no part of “friendship” with Catherine unless he met both her and Dan (the guy she was sleeping with) up front and discussed what is going on really. C. never would do that. Thus, there was no friendship. For Robert, it was a ‘lie’ and ‘escape’ based in ‘fear’—the ultimate betrayal of everything ISOF and their relationship stood for. It was a royal disgrace.

Upon reflection, it is hard to know who that “C” was. Sometimes Vicki, sometimes Catherine. Michael believes she was “split” or “dissociated” at a fundamental level, and couldn’t integrate her earthly and soul personalities. Not that it is an easy task for anyone; not that most people even know it is a task at all. They are just fine the way they are. The two, a special couple, were not on the same wave length when it came to “existential” philosophy, and it could be summarized as saying that Robert/Michael knew the existential but was working in the transpersonal, as the next level of consciousness in evolution (*a la* Wilber). C or, whoever, was still identifying with the existential-self, and not able to transform to a transpersonal identity fully. They parted on that philosophical, and developmental note, one could say, but it was never discussed, never analyzed... and left unresolved all the years. As Michael has analyzed Vicki’s most recent 2006 letters (see earlier in this chapter), he is convinced she “personalizes” everything, and cannot perceive that her own fears and her management of them (which she indicates she is doing well with), is self-centered thinking, when the people of the planet, the Soul of the planet, is what is at stake. ISOF always took that broader perspective, and it is greatly disappointing, for him, to see nothing much has changed from her “existential” stage of development in 17 years. He’s convinced she is “stuck” developmentally. And she’ll be pissed to hear him say that.

No wonder Michael writes now to her. He does take C’s own words about “love” seriously, and wonders if she does. His latest letter writing campaign to her soul, was not the first, and it was not to be left in “private” any more. In a 1997 issue of the *ISOF Communique* (Vol. 18), he wrote “A Letter To Catherine: Adultism At The Source of ISOF” which is worth quoting in full in relation to his attempts to put their relationship into the ISOF context many years later, and in an attempt to “free” ISOF from a heritage that still works to undermine it.

A Letter To Catherine.... by Robert M. Fisher – 1997

Recently, I’ve been researching everything I can get my hands on where women’s voices are speaking out about ‘fear’ and its central role in the human condition. I’m

also collecting their voices on fearless and fearlessness⁸⁰ as essential qualities of human liberation. Some of you know my “theory” about which gender is going to lead the world out of oppression—it isn’t like going to be men—and I have lots of good reasons for this, if you want to know—just ask. I decided to go through my old correspondence as well. I turned up this letter below from Oct. 24, 1992 written almost two and a half years after I split up with Catherine. It was my attempt to reach out to heal “our ISOF family” and to especially allow for the healing of ISOF as a ‘soul child’ that had been very wounded (and still is) by internalized adultism (and no doubt sexist) oppression.

“Dear Catherine; I awoke this morning knowing that I must write you as a continuing effort to heal our relationship and to me, even more importantly, to heal the wounds at the source of ISOF. The health and fecundity of ISOF as a soul child is going to be determined, I believe, by the nature of our relationship at the deepest Truth. Any unresolved secrets, misinterpretations, denials (comfortable forgetting) etc. around you and I as creators/founders/birthers of ISOF will limit its “truthing” power in the world as The ‘Fear’ Project increasingly captures the Soul of humanity and destroys the natural ecosystems systematically.

I want to ensure that all Truth is revealed from you... the mother... from me the father... of the ISOF Project (this is not a “moralistic witchhunt” I assure you... I am not interested in moralism, guilt-tripping, or shaming of anykind... only Truthing). ISOF will need all the strength, honesty, integrity and clarity possible to go ahead into the future as a significant force that can contradict, transmute and heal through the accumulated woundedness of world powers and patterns of oppression which hurt life.

Again, most importantly, your relationship to ISOF Project is what I would like clarified... a statement of your [her]story with ISOF, written by you, and a statement of your relationship now and in the future (as best you can). This I ask you in a sense of cooperation and Love, our soul child will be the benefit most and the world of the future will be different because of it... That is my vision of it... I understand you may not have that vision... and you may still struggle with confusion around it... I am willing to listen to you how you would like... I would also like to be listened to. There are very few days that go by without me contemplating and reviewing our relationship past, present and future. I have enclosed an Oct. 18/92 communique [send to the ISOF Community] which I would like you to read, “Vision for a Change.” This will set the context for what I am about to share with you in this letter. I have also enclosed a rough abstract of a major piece of research I am putting together as a project of the ISOF Research Institute.

Sounds dramatic. Yes, I know “dramatic enactment” is the essence of all transformational healing processes. That is the art of fearlessness. ISOF Project is dramatic in the largest scale of world events. I am asking for your cooperation (and Dan’s), as best you can, to ensure the Truth (good or not so good)... that accompanies your life since we were last together as a couple, partnership, and friends. I would like all of the truth, and your statement to ISOF Project of where you are now, where you intend to be as mother of this divine Project. I am not demanding anything from you Catherine. I ask it, for the Truth of ISOF Project... our soul child. I feel I have come a long way in healing our relationship personally, though there are some pieces still to be cleaned up... I am totally accountable for that. I have recently done major healing work with my mother, brother and sister that

⁸⁰ I had put together a small book (collection) of all the statements women in ISOF had made about ‘fear’ or fearlessness, as well as women and feminists in published books and articles. This unpublished document is currently ‘missing.’

has been truly miraculous (my life's preparation, dream has come true⁸¹). I have been inspired by Barbara's healing work with her family. I guess I am looking at cleaning up as many of my past relationships as possible. I would like us (you, me and Dan) to spend several sessions together "truthing" our relationships past present and future. You and Dan and your relationship is an essential component of the story and history of ISOF Project. Did you realize that? Does Dan realize that?... I want you and Dan to be involved in the ISOF Project (see the Oct. 18/92 communique I wrote)... ISOF Project could benefit by your Love/relationship/devotion/commitment to each other and to ISOF. That would give ISOF Project [our soul child] the integrity it requires from both its parents... Wouldn't that be great Catherine. I am after that greatness, that integrity and Love. YES! But first comes "truthing"... that is where the greatness grows from...." [this letter goes on in more detail for 3 more pages]

Bottom line: she never responded, and has not responded to any of my following correspondence after this. We have met a few times since and did a lot of crying, sometimes talked a little but no clarification could I get from her on the issues in this letter. I haven't heard from her for three years or more. I've told people it took me four years of intense grieving to get Catherine out of my heart. She is out of my heart, but our 'soul child' still has her buried deep in its broken heart—the heart of ISOF. This exposing of the wound in ISOF due to adultism on Catherine's part is "neglect" and is "abandonment" – it is oppressive adultism, and it is hurtful—admission will do. I cannot control what anyone else in their 'fear' will do. I have no doubt of the destructive power of 'fear' to kill anything that is liberational—to kill a 'soul child'—to slaughter and debase true authentic 'Love.' What else is new hey?

Wow. The dude's on a major rant.

I have not seen a divine mother of ISOF appear in 8 years and I'm not sure it is possible as long as ISOF (our soul child) carries this wound of adultism and the women in ISOF carry it too. As I write, I contemplate, for the first time in many years, attempting to contact Catherine and see if she would be willing to deal with the issues of this letter. But that will sit and incubate. More importantly, I'm really seriously looking at why women generally (a few exceptions in the world exist that I know of, one is Marianne Williamson⁸²—and I honor her, though she has come across a little too 'new agey' for me) are not attracted to pushing and leading the wisdom in regard to 'fear' and fearlessness—they have not fully adopted this ISOF Project as divine mother, they have not wanted to learn all there is to know about it, nor have they contributed to the research in a Royal Leader manner. The "blindness" and "asleepness" casts a veil so thick, that we don't want to expose the "*root of all roots of violence*," says Dr. Ellen Taliaferro, co-founder of Physicians for a Violence Free Society. This is greatly disappointing to me. If I die of anything (who knows when?), it feels like it would be disappointment (dramatic? maybe? but true).

I recently got hit with this rejection (via passive aggressive withdrawal)⁸³ of women to take on the ISOF Project (even in a small way) when my daughters made up their minds

⁸¹ I facilitated a few family of origin healing circles, and they were very healing, but that doesn't mean the "battle" against fear is over, and in fact, my mother retreated completely after awhile as it was all too painful to look at the truth of our experience growing up in our family. My sister and brother have also distanced themselves from the healing paradigm and returned to coping paradigm, and our "closeness" was quickly dissolved and buried again under 'normal' life for them.

⁸² She has written many books, see Williamson (1992), cited in chapter one.

⁸³ It astounds me that this pattern has continued, as Karen (now Mariah) Loza-Koxahn, has also done the exact same thing to me, Barbara, and ISOF, when she said, just this year, she wanted to carry it on into the future and was all excited, until I started to challenge her internalized patterns

not to take up my invitation to learn more about LPC [Liberation Peer Counseling] and the basic ‘fear’ and fearlessness information I teach, research and write about. They said, “*not interested dad.*” They meant it. Someday, we will confront each other on that one. When I watch how no woman has stepped into “lead” in ISOF since I stepped back and Barbara stepped back—the details are more than boring. The point is: there is no woman leader who’s filled the ‘gap’ and ISOF as a Society in Calgary is highly in question. I can’t help thinking just how powerfully sexism (and internalized adultism) are operating to keep women skirting, escaping, rationalizing, and making excuses for not leading liberation with the ISOF agenda. I guess this challenge to Catherine could be written to every woman on this planet... and that is my job, that is Merlin’s job... I’ll keep it in your face. I do acknowledge how ‘fear’ and terror have oppressed females (and continues to). But that is no excuse for letting timidity patterns dominate your inherent nature--- your Essential Rebel. I still see a lot of Twisted Rebels, quite frankly. And I’m accused of “abandoning” women and others in ISOF, who I see as playing ‘victim’ patterns looking for rescuers, that then they can kill as oppressors, so they won’t have to feel like ‘victims.’ A nightmare of projections. I’m not interested. Mostly, I see people not in ISOF in the first place (the real issue is who’s abandoning ISOF?)—who’s abandoning Spirit? ISOF is Spirit?—that’s what I see and know to be true. Principles before personalities please. I think I will literally throw-up my breakfast the next time I hear a woman (and I’ve heard two so far) in ISOF say, “It takes more courage to leave ISOF than to stay.” Right! ‘Courage’ maybe. That is not fearlessness and it is disgusting how the ‘fear’ twists that one backwards and inside out. I see the seductions. I know them well and seeking “pleasure” is biggest (as Krishnamurti says), for in it is usually always the motivation of ‘fear’ to escape “pain.” So clever, but not at all very wise. And we’ll let Life show what is “true”—it will come down to what you manifest dearies—that is the only judge in the end! Yes, this is *conscious deviancy* on Merlin’s part; a push, ‘a prick’ (and oh, can I hear how many women in their twistedness will love to call me that). Wake up, sleeping beauties, wake up! And you just want “peace and love” (in this world?)—good luck!

Women; I’m interested to hear why you may take the “timid” positions you do in regard to ISOF, and I’m open to hearing why you think that focus on ‘fear’ and fearlessness (or Robert’s approach and style) is not for you—and why you think you have something else better? If you do? (Oh, yes, I’m open to validating your strengths and accomplishments too, if you like, just ask).

I’m ready to follow any female Royal Leader who is in full integrity and power. I am disappointed. And yes, of course, my view is my view and I have my biases. I guess, I really wonder what you women are doing in ISOF anyway? What is your vision? Your goal? Why is ISOF your vehicle? If you don’t buy the ISOF theory and model then go somewhere else and develop your own? Show me. I’m not interested in yapping about which is best really. Show me. Show the world. I’ve taken that fearless stand to show the world a model, and I’ve ensured the information is being collected to support the model and improve it. What are you wanting? What are you doing? Have you admitted your ‘fear’ fully and women’s major oppression around even discussing world ‘fear’ and its

of sexism, and ‘fear’—and she told me where to go more or less, and to never contact her again. End of story. Karen was with ISOF as an interested reader of the very first ISOF newsletters in the 1990s and she was always curious. Bless her heart. She also ran as “Chair” of the ISOF Board of Directors, when it closed down the Centre’s operations, implicitly, because the Board wouldn’t accept some people needed to make a living while working as volunteers (as well) at the ISOF Centre. That story of the administrative (classist) fall of the ISOF Centre begins in 1995 and goes for a few years. See later chapters.

role in shaping our children and ourselves daily? Show me your position. I'll get it when you are in it—that I know. That I'm certain. I'll see it because I know it.

"We were considering the extraordinary complexity of everyday life, the strife, the conflict, the misery and the confusion.... Until one really understands the nature and the structure of this complexity [The 'Fear' Project], how one is caught in this trap, there is no freedom—neither the freedom to enquiry.... Such freedom is not possible if fear exists in any form, either superficially or in the deep recesses of one's mind..."
- Jiddu Krishnamurti (1991)

Robert (Merlin) was at the peak of his relentless pursuit and passion, and Mikhail was all over it—all over the pages of the ISOF newsletter in 1997. And he was now to bring his challenge to an end and wait, wait endlessly for an honorable 'warrior' to take up his challenge:

As a last quote from a 1990 letter from Catherine in the height of our eternal love:

"I feel such passion for you, Robert. Not a word that I use lightly. You are a candle of light, warmth, heat. You are subject to the currents of air around you. You need to flicker low to protect your flame so you can burn for a long time, so your fears drip slowly onto the ground you were created from. You exist between that ground and the air above. You are the go-between of these worlds. Sometimes people will try to extinguish your light and you may have to fight fiercely to continue to shine, or you may need the love of a protective hand to keep you safe. But you will shine forever. In that I have faith."

"This relationship is a gift to the world." - C. Sannuto, Nov. 9, 1989

And a last quote from a 1990 letter from Catherine in the height of betrayal and loss:

"I am weak—mortally weak. Spiritually, I am a lot stronger. You have tested me, Robert. You have challenged me rather. I have loved it and hated it. I have been very angry at you at times.... Robert, continue to go after the fear. I want you to. I continue to support your work/our work. Sometimes I am just too inside my own distress.... Yes, I feel very disappointed about ISOF. I think it should be like wild fire but it is not. Yet I still have hope."

You've given me a lot of love and care and really there is not much to say was not right. Just an underlying feeling for me of "Not Ready." I am still the child, still searching for parents.... I remember how clear I felt about ISOF, then curtains began to come down, to close out the light. Fear set in. My fears of money, security, lack of direction, lack of my own identity—all useless fears but strong enough to move and alter things... sometimes I just crave 'normal'.... This one is strong."

And a last quote from Barbara's recent letter that gives me the "love of a protective hand" when I'm struggling in my weaker and hurting moments to validate myself and ISOF's work. She wrote,

"Dearest Robert; I live and share a life with a great visionary. I want to validate that big time for you. I know I lose that ability to validate in my own hurt and distress of living in this world. Having my angel friend Echo here giving you beautiful attention while I was in my mistrust/disbelief was a big eye-opener. Then tonight I ended up

reading some of your ‘research’ letters (Catherine and yours). I cried reading your letter of all you were willing to let go of to continue the relationship with her [after she had betrayed you]. She meant that much to you. I understand and appreciate your adamant stand in not settling for any less than everything in our relationship and that you keep going for it. Going after the truth.... I would love to have a vision talk with you. I feel ready to grieve and cry and create. I am in search of fearlessness.” - Barbara

Michael reflects:

The last letter written in 1990 quoted above, is very telling if I have to try to explain why Catherine left ISOF and our relationship. Between the dreams I had with her, and the need for her to be “normal.” It is not surprising she wouldn’t last for the long haul. My daughters, particularly Vanessa, when they were little used to continually query me, with some lament, that they wished I was just “normal”—for them, that meant being a “normal” dad⁸⁴—so they could feel normally accepted as normal persons. “The trouble with normal is it only gets worse,” says Bruce Cockburn in his song. The stories of tragedy I could tell, books yet written, of how my daughters have suffered because they fight being different but not too different. Their need to please others and neurotically give their power to others because they are afraid what other’s think about them has led to their hitting crises after crisis—an inevitable outcome of a coping culture of fear and normality. I grew up as a teen cutting my teeth on anything but “normal”—the 60’s 70’s and 80’s, which Catherine, like Barbara, were significantly younger, almost of another generation and world ethos. They didn’t have a sense of a world about to radically change, and they never were taught they were ‘revolutionaries’ to be—becoming that big change we saw needed in society to be more just and healthy. It was cool to be on that leading edge, and we didn’t think much to feel all the fear that went with it because we were caught up in the adrenalin of activism and hype, of a communal experience of transformation we could taste at the tip of our tongues. It was a “joyful revolt” (Kristeva, 2003) for me; at least for the most part, although certainly the nuclear terror of the Cold War took a lot of the joy away and crashed our optimism. They were, and Barbara still is, quite conservative. They get embarrassed to “stand out” in public in any way. They like to be social and “fit in.” Which all bores me to tears. Catherine chose “normal” because it was easier, and any thing beyond that is a rationalization, I’m saying. She chose the route of ‘fear’ and concealment—it was “safer.” As Sidney Jourard (1964) wrote in his book *The Transparent Self*: “We conceal and camouflage our true being before others to foster a sense of safety, to protect ourselves against unwanted but expected criticism, hurt, or rejection. This protection is purchased at a steep price. When we are not truly known by other people in our lives, we are misunderstood. When we are not known, even by family and friends, we join the all too numerous ‘lonely crowd.’” Erich Fromm, the great humanist psychoanalyst and social critic took that need (fear of freedom) to a deeper analysis and showed it was the “biosocial filter” (as Wilber called it) which led to conformity, riskless society, and a set up condition for totalitarianism and fundamentalism. Psychology becomes politics and politics psychology. I wished I would have shared more of that analysis of Wilber’s work⁸⁵ with Catherine, I don’t recall sharing any of it with her, and no wonder she wouldn’t “get it” that the existential is not

⁸⁴ Vanessa wrote me a wonderful birthday card and poem, of which the last stanza says: “Your souls roots become stronger like the growing tree, As you start looking ahead and finally see, You’re the key to saving humanity.” She ended the card with: “Never give up dad, I love you lots and hope the next year is filled with lots of wonderful surprises. Happy Birthday (49th) and good luck on your journey. Oh, and thank you for not being normal!” (April, 18, 2001).

⁸⁵ I have been a fan of the transpersonal (integral) philosopher Ken Wilber since 1982. See his early works, which greatly influenced my understanding of the development of consciousness, at the individual and cultural and historical levels (e.g., Wilber, 1979, 1980/82, 1981).

nearly the highest stage of human evolution of consciousness and of cultures and societies. Oh, well, that's a small regret. Catherine was operating from a lot of deeper assumptions about life and her own being, that were significantly different (contradictory) to my own. That's not the problem per se. We all develop ideas and ideologies and assumptions along the way. Unfortunately, with only nine months living together as a couple, there was precious little time to learn more of those assumptions and "truth them" and ... the rest is hindsight.

True enough, hindsight is easy. Yet, Michael knew (or is pretty sure) exactly when Catherine got her first 'shot' of the reality of ISOF in her "normal" life. Reflecting:

It came when she invited a graduate student from work to a dinner party. This woman came with her husband which neither of us knew very well. I was in a good space, as we sipped wine in our new home, and let the food settle. The weekend workshop had come and go, and Mikhail was 'fresh' in me blood. At one point the graduate student said something that sounded like a fear-based coping culture (realism) rationalization for "that's the way it is so don't think it is going to be any different." Mikhail jumped out of me, although I was very relaxed, I mean it was quite subtle I thought, and I challenged her claim. Well, it didn't take long, and clearly this lady wasn't used to being challenged, because she was quickly inflamed by needing to defend the case. I never bought and was persistent to show to her why I thought that was a fear-based claim and not reality at a higher level or in a different healing context. Well, then her husband came into the argument and they both colluded quickly like a tag team and started making personal attacks on me. Catherine was no where to be heard. I looked at her as the 'heat' was rising, and she was slouched down, looking very pale and with that look that "I wish this would all stop." I was angry she didn't come in and defend the ISOF position, at least enter a good argument. Well, I learned that was not 'normal' for her and how she hung out with friends at a "nice" dinner party. That graduate student left quickly with her husband ending the night. I stood my ground, and Catherine wouldn't talk to me about it. I felt the lady was irrational and out of line actually. Well, next day she phoned and apologized to Catherine. No more dinner parties with Catherine's normal friends.

Michael needed solace with his male friends, and he also need perspective and critique from others he trusted, who knew Catherine and his relationship with her.

I visited my best buddy Dwight Braunberger, my artist and biking pal and musician from the very first band I was drumming in when I was 14 yrs. old. Dwight and I had stuck it out all these years but by 1990 he was struggling with me too, as most of my friends had all long left me (and I left them). He too was struggling to be normal, I guess. But he really wasn't at all. I wrote in my journal on October 7, 1990, after having one of our long talks, "I enjoyed my talk with Dwight and he pointed out a couple patterns in me, that I would like to let go... the pattern of 'form'-making, and my inability at times to give-up, let go, and let the women find initiative in taking form. And my dramatization of the distress in myself and the world—this leads to the 'evangelical' pattern."

Robert appreciated critique, for the most part, and used it for his own transformation processes. He also couldn't speak to Dwight about Merlin, and things so arational. Thus, Dwight's critique was taken with a 'grain of salt.' Dwight was terrified of conflict, especially with women and Robert knew it, knew it very well over their long relationship. Dwight eventually wouldn't take

any more of Robert's challenges, and disappeared never to contact him again. It was a great loss for Robert/Michael.

The Nineties: "Decade Of The Turn Around"

Michael wrote and spoke about the 1989-90 turnaround "cusp" in history. Although, he never really was clear about it at the time. He just felt and intuited it, for the most part. Although, he had read lots of non-fiction books predicting this "turn around." He was very excited and ISOF was birthed right in the "cusp," as it should be, or so he thought then. His excitement led to a large volume of writing,⁸⁶ more than teaching, as he felt it was so important to get ideas down on paper. The "word was his sword." This was the era of information and 'knowledge is power.'

The psychospiritual entanglements and crises of Robert's life in these years, and prior is given its due recognition in this long chapter two, but he would not want that to overshadow the political and historical context of the times. Many things were shaping what happened during the conception, birthing and nascent year of ISOF. After moving to Vancouver with Barbara in 1998 to attend graduate school in Adult Education, Robert decided to stir up the ISOF (Calgary) group one more time. He edited and published a "Special Edition" (mostly his articles) of the *ISOF Communique*, July 1, 1999. He had been greatly influenced by what he was learning at university and social movements and politics. He knew he was rather ignorant of much of what happened in the international political world during ISOF years. He wanted to integrate and link the 'inner' and 'outer' of ISOF. He decided to focus on 1989/ISOF. The articles were more academic (postmodern) than in the past articles for the *ISOF Communique*. He wrote,

1989/ISOF: Birth of a Social Movement at "The End of History"

"... social movements can be thought of as learning sites playing themselves out on the terrain of civil society...." - Welton (1998:36)

"Utopia expired in the final weeks of the memorable year, 1989." – Dahrendorf (1997:37)

This fall is the 10th anniversary of an extremely important year and piece of *living his/her*story that I and many of you have shared. We have all in some way been associated with the *first cycle* of the birth and death of IN SEARCH OF FEARLESSNESS (Calgary) PROJECT (although, the Centre Gallery remains a distant and thriving relative of the ISOF Project). In 1989, Catherine Sannuto and I were destined to meet and through a mystical loving relationship, birth the ISOF Project. I barely knew about what a social movement or civil society was, nor did I care. *Civil society* refers to the conception of the political part of a society that is other than the structured governmental [institutional] body—e.g., churches, agencies, non-profit organizations (like ISOF Calgary) etc. To see ISOF Calgary as a political body in civil society was beyond our vision at the time, although we well knew that to live the path of fearlessness would bring about revolutionary changes in the entire capitalist world structure—if, enough people were **living and loving beyond 'fear' and coping.**

⁸⁶ See Appendix I for a full ISOF bibliography of my work. Especially in 1990 I began to produce a series of booklets that ISOF published and sold (mostly gave away), with titles like: "Guided Tours of the Soul—Entering the Path of Fearlessness: An Alternative to Traditional Counselling and Psychotherapy," "Description of the Path of Fearlessness, What is Fear, and How Fear Affects Our Lives," "Drawing Out Fear and Terror: The Principles of Art Therapy in Personal Transformation," "Stories on Healing Fear," "Helping Children Live Beyond Fear: An Introductory Guide for Adults," etc.

Little, at least consciously, did she or I know what was going on in the outside world at the time. We were not aware that the ISOF vision was being birthed exactly 200 years after the French Revolution (1789) which had changed the course of Western [world] history in one of the bloodiest revolutions of modern times—known as the “Reign of Terror” to historians. Nor were we aware of the government’s mass-murder of 200 unarmed revolutionary rebels protesting in Tiananmen Square in Red China in June of 1989. Neither of us was tuned-in to the news media. What was going on inside of us was so overwhelmingly powerful and absorbing, it seemed more than enough to have kept us well occupied in building a ‘nest’ for our emergent and delicate ‘soul child.’

This article is intended to articulate briefly, the environmental, sociopolitical and economic dynamics of the world at the time ISOF was born.... ten years later, I’m delighted to understand better what was going on in the sociological realm of reality beyond (though not isolated from) my own consciousness. (p. 1)

Copies were made of this special edition and sent to Calgary through various channels. Nothing was ever heard back. Calgary ISOF was dead. It was the end of a time period, an event, a community, and relationships, for Robert. Barbara was more connected to people, because she also had an art career based in the Calgary market. This was the last time he would write to ISOF Calgary. He had to move on and see if a career in Adult Education would complement a broken life dream. But that’s another story.

CHAPTER THREE

SOLIDIFYING ALLIES & ENEMIES, 1991: Transitioning

-R. Michael Fisher (formerly Robert)
© 2006

The ISOF Model: Establishing Some Theoretical Grounds

Beyond a doubt 1990-91 was a major transition year. Core relationships I had were shifted and an ISOF Centre was established as Barbara Bickel and I teamed up as Directors. This chapter will examine some of the dynamics of this relationship and others that were forming which, I believe, had significant “leadership” impacts on the future of ISOF for the good and not so good.

However, I want to focus equal attention on the theory or ISOF model that was building. I was definitely doing most all of this theoretical (if not academic) work, and that pretty much stayed the same for the future of the ISOF (Calgary) venture. It occupied a good three-quarters of my time (without pay) in ISOF and still does to this day.

Whether I was successful or not, I was determined to keep ISOF a grassroots movement, run by a populus energetic and sensibility that “people know what they need” and yet, I also treaded a fine

line of not always believing “people” are accurate about what they need. If they were still caught in a ‘fear’-based patterning (distress patterning) they wouldn’t make the best decisions about what they needed. It was paradoxical, until one understood the nature of the (‘fear’-based) coping paradigm that was hegemonic in our society—a society that is structured upon oppression and distortion of information—especially, distorted in terms of information on how we recover, heal, transform and liberate ourselves from the very coping paradigm that keeps us oppressed. Basically, I wanted good (academic) rigorous theory and to draw on and integrate traditions and disciplines of knowledge wherever possible. I wanted a language and theory that would also connect with higher education circles as we could potentially be supported by them and offer mutually supportive knowledge to them because they have such a large impact on the next generation of adults. The last thing I wanted was to be seen as a ‘marginal’ bunch of rebels that don’t know how to connect with the wider society. In later chapters I’ll talk about my experience developing a course called “Basics To The Path of Fearlessness” that I taught for 3 years in continuing education at The University of Calgary. Just this week I sent off an article to a scholarly Canadian on-line journal⁸⁷ which puts “ISOF” on the legitimate map of academic discussions about radical autonomous learning sites.

By the end of 1990 I had begun to settle into several strong theoretical ideas about the way ISOF could be used in the wide world, of which I’ll only mention a few here to open this chapter on 1991. Perhaps most significant to the ISOF Research Institute, which I founded in 1991, with Sandra Cross’s and Barbara Bickel’s support, was the notion that our society, in general, is quite confused with “misconceptions about fear.” I wrote the first (an unpublished) document on this topic in June 1990 (below are a few excerpts)⁸⁸:

Modern psychology and sociology have taught us much about the psychodynamics of the fears that plague us both individually and as groups. Much of modern political and economic theory is based on the assumption that people are best motivated by at least two fears about ‘reality’: 1) there won’t be enough to go around, and 2) if you don’t compete, grab first and work hard enough, you won’t get what you want out of life [to which I’d add today: “you’ll be left behind”]. The existential dimension of the religious traditions have always known that all “evil” arises from the basic fears of pain and death. The “fuel” for obsessive consumerism, materialism, violence and oppression is ultimately fear-based.

During the post-World War II recovery, Bertrand Russel (Segal, 1984, 95) knew “To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.” Gerald Jampolsky (1985) has popularized the wisdom traditions knowing about fear in the ‘new age’ maxim: “Love is letting go of fear.” Based on our research and experience there remains a plethora of misconceptions about fear. The misinformation and dysfunctional cultural rules are extremely detrimental to the health of the individual, the society and our environment. Fear is the toxin undermining all health, Love and peace. The world is currently intoxicated by the wast products of fear-based thinking. Our work is about a post-Environmental movement that goes beyond cleaning up the physical world to include the psychic pollution inside. Our search is not just for “excellence” but “wisdom” itself....

⁸⁷ This is the first time I have sent an article to an academic journal or discussed ISOF in an academic setting period. I believe it is a significant breakthrough in my own theorizing, and it will be even better if it gets published. The title is “The In Search of Fearlessness Project: A radical site of autonomous learning, 1989-1999,” sent to *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and action*.

⁸⁸ Also see ISOF publications (2) “Project In Search of Fearlessness: Assumptions, rationale, philosophy” (Fisher & Sannuto, 1990); (9m) “Some Ideas on the Nature and Origin of Fear” (Fisher, 1990); (3) “Description of the Path of Fearlessness, What is Fear, and How Fear Affects Our Lives” (Fisher, 1990).

Our vision is to see the project [ISOF] ‘take-off’ on a global scale. Our work is not just about quality informing, it is also about forgiveness, commitment and decision-making. We provide the “space” and encouragement for that decision to live and love beyond fear as a ‘gift’ to oneself and the world.... Some Misconceptions About Fear Include:

- (1) *That fear is a feeling or just an emotion* and therefore belongs to the realm of personalistic ego psychology which deals with individual fears or phobias. In this personal psychological context fear is reduced as a phenomenal complex to mere personal problems and tends to ignore the complex structural and historical context of oppression.

ISOF claims that fear is a ‘habit’ of our modernist [coping] culture with at least a 300 year old history. It is a nasty habit that has incorporated the way we think, feel, act and value. The ‘fear habit’ is the source of all forms of oppression. It pollutes with toxins our psyches, families, communities and world ecosystems. It creates all forms of ‘isms’ which lead to fanatical fascism in its many forms from “right wing” to “left wing.”

Fear is an ‘energetic pattern’ which moves inward like a ‘vacuum’ or ‘black hole.’ It dominates the mindset and world view of most modern people to such an extent that they cannot pay attention to any reality beyond a fear-based one. This attention focuses on avoidance of pain and death and yet it sees only pain, suffering and death. This attention creates a hegemony of negative energy and destruction. The people forget to notice the Love, Goodness and Beauty in Life. They lose faith. The ‘fear habit’ is the root of what Sam Keen (1983) called “consensual paranoia.” It is the habit of making everybody and everything around you an “enemy.” [Sounds like the culture of fear in a post-9/11 world]. Fear is the absence of Love. The ‘fear habit’ collectively constitutes the metaphors for “evil.”

- (2) *That fear is real.* Fear is the ‘first lie,’ as Ruth Montgomery, author of “Anne of Green Gables” once said; “Fear is the original sin.” Adult Children of Alcoholics claim that fear is False Evidence Appearing Real. The ‘lie’ of fear is that it actually exists as reality. It is only an illusion. It is created by the ‘neurotic ego’ that has become de-centered from Truth, Beauty, and Wisdom. It has become disassociated and disconnected from the Love-based Cosmos, Reality or God. This is the isolating effect of the modernist ‘fear habit’ with its ability to create “unreal” nightmares of destruction. Nuclear terrorism and ozone depletion are two examples.

Fear is the defense of feeling hurt, abandoned and lost without a home. Like all defense mechanisms it declares all out war if it feels threatened in any way. The ‘war response’ can be overt aggression through projected anger and blame or it can be through covert withdrawal as a means of gaining power over others. Both forms of the ‘war response’ are illnesses of chronic unhealed distress patterns [trauma or hurt]. The ‘fear habit’ is the ‘war habit.’

The biggest threat to fear is Love and peace. Love is the natural Cosmic energetic that fills the void of fear. If the “vacuum” of fear is filled it will no longer exist. Love feels like death to a fear-based person. That is why authentic intimacy and vulnerability are so rare in our culture and world

today. “True fearlessness is not the reduction of fear, but going beyond fear,” said Chögyam Trungpa (1984). True fearlessness is the way of Love. It is not willful heroic bravery that conquers fear, but it is open-heartedness and compassion that allows entry to Love that fills the void.

This rather long excerpt gives the reader the sense of where my own theorizing on fear and fearlessness, and Love, was at the time, which was greatly influenced by books I was reading, the peer-counseling model I worked with and the teachings of Saratoga (mentioned in Chapter Two). I would alter much of that theorizing and give it a lot more nuance today, but there is something fresh and energetic about it that is still inspiring and ‘rings true’ to me today. I’ll finish this piece on what were thought the major misconceptions of fear by just listing the remaining in this unpublished document, without the elaborations:

(3) *That fear is too difficult to overcome completely.*

(4) *That fear is a “natural” response to danger.*

Perhaps most significant, theoretically, still to this day is the re-framing of the conceptualization of fear to what I called in 1990 the ‘fear habit.’ Note, I was still using the word *fear* in its normal looking signification. Soon, I created the word ‘*fear*’ with inverted commas to show this larger conceptualization beyond fear(s), and the misconceptions above. The list of misconceptions would continue to grow in my research as I left the psychological framework of understanding and included historical, geographical, ecological, cultural, sociological, political and philosophical and theological dimensions of the concept and phenomena. All this information was the basis for what we later called a ‘fear’ vaccine. This Fearlessness Information, was one of the major, most easily practiced, of the six ‘fear’ vaccination processes of ISOF.

Recently, in 2006, I was able to put together a better theoretical conceptualization of the notions of fearlessness from the diverse literature and experience I’ve had over the years. I include the entire document of these different, sometimes competing, uses of fearlessness that are possible. You will likely easily be able to match the uses of fearlessness that the early ISOF (Calgary) ran by, and those it was not so interested in (or even critical of).

Use Of The Term *Fearlessness*

R. Michael Fisher,⁸⁹ Ph.D.
Fearologist: rmfisher@shaw.ca
March, 8 2006 ©

Preamble: Context

Since the birth of the *In Search of Fearlessness Project* in 1989, co-founded by R. Michael Fisher (formerly Robert) and Catherine Sannuto and co-led by Barbara Bickel since 1991, the sub-projects (and structures⁹⁰) under that umbrella have been numerous (see the author’s website, click on “Projects” for a brief overview: www.feareducation.com). However, one sub-project has been pivotal to the entire ISOF Project and that has been the collection of data on

⁸⁹ The author is Co-Founder, past Director and Education and Research Director of ISOF.

⁹⁰ A major ongoing publishing vehicle has been the establishment in the early 1990s of a registered Canadian publishing house: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

conceptualizations of *fearlessness*⁹¹ or how this term has been used in different times and places and how it ought to be adapted to our current times and needs. The experiential, theoretical, biological, psychological, sociological, philosophical, theological, spiritual (and so on) scholarly dimensions of *fearlessness* have been continually investigated through an ongoing transdisciplinary study. Until now, these diverse (if not contradictory) “meanings” of fearlessness have not been all written down nor synthesized. That is soon to come and we are looking for researchers to take this project on, with supervision.

This particular document is a bare bones outline of the findings of 17 years of research by the author into this topic. Obviously from the very title of In Search of Fearlessness Project (ISOF), the premise is that *fearlessness* is highlighted as *the most important foundation for a world ethic and cura for the human-planetary tragedy* (“global problematique”). That insight was not achieved from reading about fearlessness (albeit, later reading did confirm that others have suggested this may be true). In fact, the word *fearlessness* had not registered on this author’s mind until late 1989 when a deep mystical loving relationship with Catherine moved our awareness to a collaborative “fact” that humans cannot unconditionally love Others as long as they are operating from a fear-based perspective (worldview). We said together, more or less, “what gets in the way of *Love* [in the most expansive sense of the word] is *Fear* [in the most expansive sense of the word].” The author’s intuitive solution in that moment of enlightenment was to create *fearlessness* as the cura and goal for humanity (evolution). The vehicle, we simultaneously agreed, would be a Project, that no one owned or copyrighted, that would nurture liberation from suffering caused by Fear.

That is the basic crux of the 1989 origin of fearlessness in our discovery and how we articulated it in words at that time. Words are so limited in conveying what we experienced and knew.

Although many significant nuances and later developments have modified our insights, meaning, and purpose of this birth of ISOF, the core of our original meaning and purpose has not changed to date, although the energies and players in this Project have. The cultural ethos has also changed dramatically since 1989 through to 1998 when the ISOF Project (Calgary) collapsed (and has been “underground” since) (Fisher, 1997⁹²). At this point there are some ten different meanings of fearlessness that have accumulated in this research, which are described briefly below.

It ought to be mentioned that the strongest ongoing research has been to develop a ‘fear’ vaccine (FPV+).⁹³ This is not the place to elaborate that work but to point out that such a (metaphoric and real) vaccine has yet been created on this planet with a fully systematic basis in transdisciplinary research, which utilizes the *best* wisdom from pre-modernity through modernity to postmodernity and post-postmodernity (the latter called “Integral age” by philosopher Ken Wilber and others). The goal is to develop and research the impact of this ‘fear’ vaccine from a “higher” *fearlessness perspective*. Thus, fearlessness must also be rigorously developed and researched from a “higher” *fearless perspective*.

Leaving details out for the moment, suffice it to say that the ISOF Project has made *fearlessness* its great ‘love’ and research focus, yet simultaneously (we assume logically) *fearlessness* can

⁹¹ Unfortunately, only the English word “fearlessness” is printed here and that is limiting, although other writing the author has done includes brief dialogue with other languages at times. This however, does not negate the depth and accuracy from the research on “fearlessness” which has been interpreted from other traditions (e.g., Hindu Vedanta, Buddhism, Jainism, and so on) than English or Christianity.

⁹² Fisher, R. M. (1997). Defining the ‘enemy’ of fearlessness. Technical Paper No. 6. Calgary, AB: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

⁹³ The author, early after 1989, preferred to talk about *fear* as a “*fear pattern*” rather than only a physiological reaction, feeling, emotion, and/or thought process. Systems thinking is also useful here and thus “fear pattern virus+” is a (metaphoric) term used to indicate a cycling “positive feedback loop” (see cybernetic theory) where the system cannot self-regulate (or self-correct) effectively anymore and ‘fear’-feeds on ‘fear’—the source of most all of the worst violence/hurting/toxification processes (i.e., oppression-repression dynamics). One goal of this research is to reverse the + to a – processing feedback loop in the system(s).

only be understood in its fullness, practiced in its fullness, applied and lived in its fullness (i.e., full power) if *Fear* is understood equally and also *fearless*. So far, *Fear* has been re-translated the most and has had the most intense effort put into collecting data on it, creating a *new fear vocabulary* for it, and writing about it (see website above and click on “Publications”). There are many terms used for it in the ISOF Project (e.g., ‘Fear’ Project, ‘Fear’ Matrix, fearism) which include *fear* (as normally used) and ‘*fear*’ (as the deconstructed form of the concept) (see Fisher, in press,⁹⁴ for a broad review of the emerging new scholarship on fear and new terminology). The ISOF Project has always been educational, believing that *fearuality* is at least as important as *sexuality* and both ought to further come out of the shadowy taboo of buried knowing into the light of research and improved education (the author has proposed *critical “fear education”*⁹⁵ analogous to good critical “sex education”).

It is predicted that if the first 17 years of the ISOF Project have been focused on research on *Fear* then the next 17 years ought to likely be devoted to research on *fearlessness*. This current document leads that way by summarizing what has been found so far. Before diving into those results, it is apparent that *Love* is not getting a focus in the ISOF Project. That’s basically correct, and the reasons for that are complex and beyond the scope of this short outline. It is incorrect to say we ignore Love and clearly ISOF was birthed relationally from Love. Reality is, that *Love* doesn’t need the same kind of focus of such intense research, according to the founders of ISOF. That does not mean research on Love is invaluable or ought to be discouraged. Critics of this ISOF focused-position have been many and continue to be many, as they believe we are focusing on the lesser important aspect of what is most important to a world ethic and cura for the human-planetary tragedy. We invite that debate, dialogue, and learning together.

Ten Types Of Uses Of The Concept FEARLESSNESS

Our experience has shown there is an immense problem in the loosely ascribed meaning of *fearlessness* used in conversations and written documents. The problem of using *spirituality* or “*religious*” is analogous, as integral philosopher Ken Wilber wrote of that confounding issue nearly 25 years ago and he’s repeated again recently:

One of the great difficulties in discussing religion—its sociology, its possible universality, its “civil” dimensions—is that it is not an “it.” In my opinion, “it” has at least a dozen different, major, largely exclusive meanings, and unfortunately these are not always, not even usually, distinguished in the literature. (Wilber, 1983, p. 55)

... there are at least a *dozen different meanings of “religious” or “spiritual,”* and we need to take these different meanings into account if our discussions of those topics are to make any sense at all. Most conversations about religion and spirituality proceed as if those words were transparent, whereas they are anything but. At the very least, there is a profound difference between a spirituality that helps one translate and a spirituality that helps one transform. Some types of religion [spirituality] obfuscate, some oppress, some liberate. At any given moment, which function of religion [spirituality] are we discussing? (Wilber, 1983/2005, p. 1)

⁹⁴ Fisher, R.M. (in press). Invoking ‘Fear’ Studies. *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*.

⁹⁵ See Fisher, R.M. (2003). Report on the status of fear education. Technical Paper No. 15. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

Substitute the word *fearlessness* for *religion*, *religious*, or *spirituality* above, and you will see why it is critically important to write out, even if in a simplistic outline form, the ten uses of *fearlessness* found so far from the ISOF research work. At this time, it is premature to speculate on the homologous overlap with Wilber's work on uses of "spiritual," or "religious," or "religion," although, no doubt there is some correlation.

This author sees *fearlessness* as another word for *spiritual* but without all (or at least, without as much of) the historical baggage of spiritual and religious institutional traditions (and dogma in many cases); because of this the author sees *fearlessness* as very valuable to a world deeply divided between the sacred and the profane, the religious and secular; *fearlessness* could 'bridge' both sides and lead us toward a world ethic and cura. Research has shown us that both secular and religious 'worlds' have great interest in *fearlessness* (fear, fearless, love, and so on). However, evidence shows that *fearlessness* is also poorly understood by many, and that is largely (but not entirely) to do with the lack of rigorous theoretical and practical distinctions being made in how *fearlessness* is being used (i.e., how it is being understood and meant in particular uses). Note: for simplicity sake as a beginning outline, full scholarly or popular references will not be included to substantiate the sources and uses below (contact the author for more information).

Ten different uses (in no particular order) of *fearlessness*:

1. **Fearlessness as life path;** dedicated by choice towards emancipation, liberation and/or enlightenment—the path travels the territory between (or, more accurately, in and out of) the Land of *Love* and Land of *Fear* (see Trungpa's Shambhala sacred warrior training and fearlessness as radical vulnerability and hopelessness; also seen in *The Matrix* sci-fi film)
2. **Fearlessness as (Absolute) state condition;** when an individual or group experience a moment or state of experience (altered consciousness) that is more or less without fear; a very common ascription to this term (also "fearless" is used popularly and interchangeably, especially in the late 20th-early 21st century in the Western world); most often this is an experience of the non-dual and it is given a spiritual meaning as "enlightened" and such individuals often become overnight 'gurus' or 'teachers' (see Huston's critique of "Neo-Advaitins," "nondual relativists," or Wilber's "Boomeritis Buddhism" and "New Agers"; otherwise known as a variety of the "Born-Again" syndrome)
3. **Fearlessness as stage (level of development);** when a 'centre of gravity' is achieved in the self/system developmentally (*via* evolution of consciousness) that could be called "second-tier" existence (see Beck & Cowan's "Yellow v-Meme,") whereby the self/system, is for the most part not motivated or organized by fear (see Maslow's "self-actualized" personhood and "B-values"); the "state" experience of 2. (above) is not considered so amazing, rather the hard work of integration with the relative world is now the main task of living "enlightenment" (analogous in part, to the Bodhisattva's task in Buddhism)
4. **Fearlessness as "gift";** in several major Eastern religious philosophies (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism) it is of highest ethical practice to give the "gift of fearlessness" to another because it stops the spread of fear by ensuring that one's thought and actions do not make others unnecessarily fearful

5. **Fearlessness as epistemology;** one's way of knowing is "eyes wide open" 360 degrees, 24/7; openness to learning and knowing from all perspectives (see Wilber's "integral theory," Gebser's "aperspectival integral consciousness structure"); seeing critically beyond "blind spots" especially in relation to one's fear education; involves a rigorous critical understanding of fear and ways of constructing knowledge (and teaching) about fear and fearlessness
6. **Fearlessness as behavioral heroics, bravery or courage;** often a secular and popular meaning based on actions that seem to overcome or transcend fear(s)
7. **Fearlessness as archetypal phase in recovery;** this is the location of awareness and practices that constitutes the third phase of recovery from the first phase of being a "Victim" and second phase of being a "Survivor" (and across the 'Fear' Barrier threshold) to "Warrior" and/or "Magician" archetypes as preparing the way for emergence of "Royal Leader" (Lover); see equivalent archetype of "Outlaw" phase/stage in Keen's five "stages of loving"
8. **Fearlessness as fear management system;** this is the Fear Management System (FMS)-7, in a continuum of nine evolutionary (developmental) systems of how "best" to manage fear; based on integral theory and Spiral Dynamics; FMS-7 is the first FMS to recognize the 'Fear' Matrix formation and fearism as the root form of oppression/repression under all other forms of oppression (e.g., classism, racism, sexism, etc.); FMS-7 is capable of acknowledging and validating all other FMSs in the continuum (which the first 6 FMSs cannot); it is the beginning of FMSs that are not 'fear'-based or feeding a "culture of fear" dynamic; it is the foundation for a true "fearless" as FMS-9 and the highest attainable awareness and ethical perspective on the spectrum of consciousness; no organization or society known has ever been centered around a FMS-7 system
9. **Fearlessness as virtue;** in the Eastern spiritual traditions (e.g., Hinduism), fearlessness is the virtue before and above all other virtues and is seen as the source of peace and justice in Gandhian philosophy of non-violent social action
10. **Fearlessness as telos (historical fearlessness);** as distinct from individual fearlessness or collective fearlessness at some point in time, place, event—historical fearlessness refers to a 'spirit' in evolution that works as a telos toward the unfolding of full fearlessness within the drama of history; in this sense it is "instinctive" and "inherent" in life systems as pivotal to an impulse to rebel when oppressed by fear ('fear') in anyway; the impulse is not one of merely coping with, overcoming, or transcending fear but of transforming its very nature

ISOF Journey: Identifying The 'Guides'

Another major part of the theory development was conceptualizing "who we were" (as ISOFeers) as practitioners, and "what services we were offering"—part of the dilemma of talking about ourselves as "leaders" in ISOF. In the early stages (1990-91) this took a development that I began

with what I (Fisher, 1990) called “Guided Tours Of The Soul: Entering the Path of Fearlessness, An Alternative to Traditional Counselling and Psychotherapy.”⁹⁶ Here are some excerpts:

Guided Tours of the Soul : This introductory information brochure is intended to answer some of the questions you may have in regard to hiring In Search of Fearlessness as “tour guides” for your personal development.⁹⁷

What we want: - relationships based on creative expansion (i.e., acting and thinking outside of a fear-based reality) and our inherent goodness as human beings,
- non-professionalized relationships based on healing and not merely coping (i.e., relationships based on community-building and entering the path of fearlessness with mutual commitment),
- a therapeutic relationship in which we act as “midwives” to your creativity and soul birthing, where love, authenticity and wisdom can grow and your consciousness expands attention beyond the ego’s focus on symptom-problems, to living fully alive in a love-based reality,
- is an educational-therapeutic relationship based on liberation, personal and social transformation; not on colluding with or maintaining unhealthy patterns of the ‘status quo’.

As tour guides on your soul journey toward wholeness we are committed to avoiding oppressive patterns of “professional-victim” relationships. You are in charge of your own healing. We will create the attention and space for that to occur. Together we will create the “maps” and “obstacles” for your journey so you can keep moving creatively into potentially healing territory and situations.

It will be challenging! As your tour guides we will assist you from getting stuck in comfortable palces where fear is still controlling you. We will be present when unhealed painful memories surface and the fear will want to push them away. We feel pain is not a problem. Pain is merely a warning signal which calls attention to a hurt that occurred in the past and requires healing. It is fear of being hurt that keeps us isolated in a vacuum.

And so on. The brochure is brash and to the point. What I find most interesting upon reflection is that we were not only pushing for a non-clinical model, we were pushing for an intimacy with people—that is, a joining with them in intimate community. That’s where all the “lines” got crossed. I recall a therapy client I had in the late 1990s, who came to ISOF through a relative. He was a very ‘normal’ business type of person, middle class, and so on. He was very pleased with the therapy work I did with him. Later on, when he saw the problems in ISOF happening, he was disturbed by it deeply. He told me, in a critical tone with words sort of like this: “Your problem Robert is that you wanted to join with the people you served. You can’t do that and keep the distance you needed to lead them.” I didn’t agree, then. Because I saw it was all about community, and even if I was a “tour guide” or “therapist” or “teacher” at times—definitely a “leader”—I was still one of the people of the ISOF Community like everyone else, and I had to be vulnerable, and show my ‘dirty laundry’

⁹⁶ See also published pamphlet (9d) “In Search of Fearlessness: An Alternative Therapeutic Approach” (Fisher, 1990).

⁹⁷ I found some notes I had written from c.1991 “ISOF: Quest For Total Human Presence” (Intent). In that I wrote about “who we are?”: “We are the guides you hire for your own journey. No different than if you were to go on a wilderness expedition, you may want a guide. We usually would want a guide when we feel the territory is too new and unfamiliar combined with our own current crisis which is absorbing most of our strength (i.e., our ability to think clearly, make decisions, etc.). As guide we will always see you as your desire for life, for a treasure, for an adventure. We set up and guide you on a ‘treasure hunt.’ The important point to remember is that we are not the only guides. In fact we are playing a very minor role in your journey. You might say we are acting out a “guiding role.” We are merely focusing and manifesting all the guides to one Source which can act as a mirror for you discovering your own guides within you and within the Cosmos. We are really play acting out what is already real in your and the Cosmos.” (this documents goes on for few pages). One can see our philosophy has similar characteristics to “spiritual direction” work.

at times too. This man wanted a more “professional” and hierarchical relationship in ISOF. He felt people would abuse my services as “free.” Anyway, that is a complex discussion for later chapters. His point is however, well taken, that people in our society are not used to having such intimate access to the “helper” or “therapist” or “guide.” I think there was some abusiveness at times, and yet, who knows. I do know that I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way, and that’s what Catherine and I established from the beginning of ISOF.

We both recognized that some of us had skills and abilities, if not developmentally advanced consciousness, and we were helping others without those. That’s somewhat hierarchic in terms of the basic relationship. Yet, our control of the relationship through the “guides” notion was to be non-clinical and non-professional as possible. We liked the term “guides” and so did most people. Although, only three people came to pay for that service. I know they won’t mind me mentioning their names: Cori, Sandra and Barbara. Catherine was not as assertive as I was as a “guide,” as she liked to listen and provide attention. I was more used to giving “directions” to “push” and “challenge” the journeyor.

Before our ‘marriage’ was breaking apart in mid-1990, Barbara Bickel had attended some of my workshops in art therapy in the larger community (not from ISOF), and she found the “guided tour” brochure and wanted to work with Catherine and I. We had a few sessions, and by then Catherine was lost to her affair and never returned. I continued on the “tour” work with Barbara and that led to our intimate affair and a solid 16 year relationship with ISOF. That story soon to come, later in this chapter. The “guided tours” ended there and never became part of ISOF again, at least not directly. As a “leader” of an organization like ISOF, I was no doubt the “guru”-type at times, and a “teacher” for many, so there was an implicit guided tour going on for many people that came to ISOF and me over the years. Doing liberation work, the “leaders” have to take that kind of responsibility on, because there is no way one can leave the “job” to others—who may or may not be so committed to ‘others.’ If you are going to ‘start’ the fire, then you have to be around to help them ‘manage’ it, so to speak. The life crises on this journey of the soul, are usually quite a few. For so many, the word “crisis” and “soul journey” don’t go together and they’d rather keep the journey free of such “negative energy.” I think such positivists are in a lot of denial.

Meta-Service Healing Model

Filling out one more example of significant theoretical work I was doing in 1991 for ISOF and for Quest Ranch (the latter a treatment facility and therapeutic community for youth and families in crisis), revolved around how to “train care-workers” or “helpers” in human services in general. My one attempt to squeeze the ISOF model into academia came with a letter I proposed to Dr. Roy Brown, Head of Rehabilitation Studies at The University of Calgary, AB. I had taken some courses in that program at the graduate level in 1988-89 and wanted to possibly do a Ph.D. I wrote him a letter (Sept. 5, 1990) outlining bits of the ISOF model (gingerly). At the end of the letter to Dr. Brown I wrote,

I have identified four developmental stages which could apply to the human service worker, and the agencies and institutions of care (also relationships and community of any kind): Stage 1: CARING, Stage 2: HELPING Stage 3: SERVICE Stage 4: COMPASSION. (NOTE: in regard to agencies and institutions, they would begin to dissolve by stage 3 and totally disappear by stage 4). My work will be to elaborate these stages and define them, as well as put them into the context of already known developmental stage theory to some extent. But this is a liberational model and therefore is not just descriptive theory but normative theory based on the awareness of the oppressive-basis of modern industrial society. It is interesting that the four

stages could also be referred to as the four stages of love in human development.

-Robert Fisher

This letter to Dr. Brown, who was a radical in the field of rehabilitation at the time, also looked at the epistemology of Ken Wilber's work, and Matthew Fox's theory on the "fall/redemption" model in Judeo-Christianity's cosmology, Dass & Gorman's (1987) theory of care and compassion, and I even made reference to Sam Keen's radical developmental model of "stages of love" (which actually there are five⁹⁸). I was putting in a transpersonal perspective to my Ph.D. proposal options with a radical political emancipatory direction. Brown was very interested, and we talked, but never did he really allow me to get into describing any of this stuff and in the end I decided not to go ahead with a Ph.D. back then. The next nine years were devoted to ISOF's development, upon which I thought I could make a living and 'career.' That turned out to be a bit of a fantasy but I was pretty sick of "higher education" in (mainstream) university culture.

In many ways, I carried this meta-service model into ISOF all along, although rarely did I teach it directly (I'm not sure why). Maybe I ought to have because when you bring people together in peer-to-peer relations within a healing paradigm, there is a lot of misconceptions and 'habits' people bring with them as to "how to take care of others in need." Barbara and I had both been rehabilitation practitioners professionally, and I a therapist for years in the wide-world. We used to tell the ISOF Community we were "recovering care-givers" because we knew the great toll that a "big heart" can suffer under and burn out when there is no proper healing model and awareness of a meta-service model. So, in brief, it is worth saying a bit about these four developmental stages:

- (1) CARING- is the stage of awakening to the suffering of others by some event and it triggers the desire to "care" (at first in impulse this is inherent and positive but with fear-based patterning, e.g., guilt, it can turn into a negative energy or sympathy without a lot of action). Very common.
- (2) HELPING – this is the stage where the caring impulse moves one to "do something" to stop the suffering of others; people often enter human services as a volunteer or as a professional career track. Very common.

'Fear' Barrier

If the HELPING stage is rooted still in 'fear'-based coping (paradigm) patterning (often in the form of "rescuer") the helper will burn out more or less, all in a matter of time. They will become hurt from caring, and eventually pass that on to give hurtful caring (a paradox), and attack the sources of suffering with the same violence that caused the suffering in the first place.

Once growth from CARING and HELPING continues in a healthy way, if the care-giver goes through their own healing processes, and quits always rescuing "victims" then they will find a new Source of Love and begin to get beyond 'fear'-based motivations to the stage of

⁹⁸ Keen's (1983) book, as I have stated earlier in this book was pivotal in validating my own model of human development on the emancipatory journey. I'll return to Keen's model when I talk about the 'fear' vaccine process (in later chapters) in ISOF called "Sacred Warriorship." For now, suffice it to mention the five stages of loving in Keen's (universal) human development model: (1) child, (2) rebel, (3) adult, (4) outlaw, (5) lover.

- (3) SERVICE-- (a healing paradigm becomes central). At this stage there is less and less need to be on a “career” in one’s giving to others and relieving suffering. Rare in our society.
- (4) COMPASSION-- there is the realization that suffering is part of life, and that one cannot stop it anyway, yet one does the best they can. All rescuing patterns based on ‘fear’ have disappeared and one offers an unconditional ‘gift’ of caring that doesn’t even need to “do something about it”—because at stage 4 it is clear that most of the ways of caring and helping are corrupted by ‘fear’ and a coping culture. Very rare in our society.

Although this is a very cursory overview of some of the ISOF model, it is important to note the developmental pattern that keeps appearing, and the above four stages have a good degree of overlap with Keen’s “five stages” and my own theory of “four stages” to the liberational path which are “Victim” to “Survivor” (across the ‘fear’ barrier) to “Sacred Warrior-Magician” to “Royal Leader.” Also the three basic dimensions of ISOF that I have most recently been writing about are RECOVERY (stages 1 and 2 above) and TRANSFORMATION (stage 3) and LIBERATION (stage 4). All of these deserve a lot more detailed attention, but not until later chapters. To be clear, the path of four stages of growth, change, etc. have a direction but they are anything but clear and delineated in real life, the journey is much more messy, with advances and retreats, and flips forward and regresses backward, but there is some ‘centre of gravity’ in the human soul (self-sense identity) that shifts, if encouraged, across from one stage to the other and eventually the earlier stages have less and less “pull” on or “attraction” to the journeyor.

People And Passages: Looking For Leadership

Time now to turn to some of the people connected to ISOF Project that stand out for me in 1991. Remember I was in deep grief due to the loss of Catherine from my life and the ISOF movement. I knew I had to keep going and Sandra and Barbara were ‘troopers’ at the time who still ‘believed.’ They both contributed greatly to ISOF’s growth for many years. Then there was Larry Sannuto, who wrote this note to me July, 1991:

Dear Robert,

The path of Fearlessness can be a tricky one—watching out for all the sorcerers & sorceresses—but I’m learning.

-Larry Sannuto

Larry came to ISOF through his younger sister, Catherine Sannuto (whom I dedicated the last chapter to her pivotal founding role). After Catherine left, Larry stayed on, as we were living in the same house, and he saw so much of my deep pain. He supported me and didn’t take sides. He felt ISOF was too important to let the “split” between his sister and I get in the way of the Project. I greatly appreciated that. However, with time, Larry found the philosophy and my leadership in ISOF less and less palatable and by a year later he pulled out with an angry girl friend who was threatening me with... well, anything that wasn’t really “truth” but rather only more “fear” projections on a leader. I haven’t heard from him since.

Around this time Sandra had met Andrew Zolnai at a Halloween party with Barbara there, as it was related to a rehab event that both Sandra and Barbara were part of. Andrew Z. was quite a ‘solid’ kind of guy and eventually married Sandra. Him and I were not that close, but we had our moments of trusting. I felt he had sort of joined ISOF because of Sandra, and he

ended up taking a huge ‘rescuer’ role (see Stage 2 above in the meta-service model) and never got passed the ‘fear’ barrier in the six or seven years he was a core member of the ISOF community. In other terms, he was the ISOF “Doubting Thomas” keeping the ISOF community “protected” from my teaching and power (seemed he had a deep fear of “cults” as did Sandra and so many others).

That’s not all of what Andrew Z. did, and clearly, he gave a lot to ISOF. But it was evident early on in his challenges of my writing and thinking, we’d not see eye-to-eye or communicate well at all. I saw we were on different wave lengths, different levels of reality and development, and basically were operating from different contexts. Mostly he would write critical (and judgmental) letters and challenge my writing (and I’d write back similarly); very little did he wish to confront me face-to-face in good arguments or better yet, good dialogue. I tried my hardest to connect but he was eventually unworkable, as I experienced his chronic reactivity to me. He became a a fear-full “barking dog behind the fence” always snarling for a fight. He was always ‘hiding’ from the ‘spirit’ of ISOF. Worst, he came between Sandra and I and our intimate connection that was a carry over from working together and the first ISOF workshop I ever did in 1990.

It was sad, because Andrew Z. truly seemed wanted the best for ISOF, for Sandra, and yet, he had such intense distrust of authority—or was it “radicals”(?) like me. He was a pretty straight middle class “business-guy-downtown” sort of person. Smart. Practical. He never could see me as competent or worldly-wise and he wrote me off as a bit of an “idealist” more than once. I didn’t fit his image of a mature spiritual leader. I wasn’t his perfect archetype. For sure, he wasn’t the only one disappointed in me over the years in ISOF. I did my best to include him in things I did and wrote, and he was an editor on more than one occasion of which I’m grateful. I’ll quote from some of his letters and our exchanges in later chapters.

By sometime early in 1991, Barbara who had been working with me as a paying journeyor on the “guided tour of the soul,” became interested in a “new” kind of relationship with me. She won’t mind that I’m sharing this, but it was kind of cute how she had begun to really start developing “extra-therapeutic” aspects of my being. I was clueless as to her romantic leanings for me, because I wasn’t attracted to her that way. It was work for her soul that I cared about.⁹⁹

Barbara had been just letting go of a romantic relationship with a man that was one-sided, and so we were working on healing that. One of the exercises I gave to her was to write out a list of all the qualities she would want in a man, and to see if he really had them or not. She later told me, that when she wrote them all out, it struck her that I had them all. Oooops. That wasn’t in the plan. She quickly found that hard to deal with on her own and didn’t tell me about it, and all I noticed is that she wasn’t coming to her regular sessions with me and wasn’t returning phone calls when I inquired as to what happened that she missed a session. I was just letting it go to as she didn’t seem that committed, I supposed. Then one day, a month later, out of the blue, she phoned me and said (words from memory and paraphrasing); “I want to keep a relationship with you Robert...”. And I said, oh, good, there’s still more healing to do. She hesitated on the phone, and then said, “No, I don’t want to pay you any more.” Yikes, I didn’t want to hear that. I needed the money, and I wasn’t wanting to offer the service free at that point, as my life was ‘hell’ with the upset of Catherine leaving me and there were a lot of house expenses. Well, the short of it was that Barbara basically got the words out that she didn’t want to continue the therapeutic relationship and wanted more. Oh, okay. I’d have to think about it. I was rather shocked. My heart was so “burnt” I couldn’t even imagine an intimate relationship with a woman right now, but Barbara didn’t

⁹⁹ When people come into a healing and liberative context to do healing work, there is always the pitfall of people confusing heart-to-heart closeness with romantic love. This is a topic I’ll take up in a later chapter.

seem to care that I had just broken up with the woman of my life. Why? Because Barbara was convinced that Catherine was not the woman of my life, but she was. And she was right. The rest is a long story, for another, more biographic, book.

I have a journal entry in January 1991 that gives a sense of the state of my life and relationships in this transitioning time from Catherine to Barbara and facing a great unknown of whether I could keep ISOF afloat, never mind my basic emotional stability. The abandonment wound was horrendous but by this late time of January I was ‘cooling off’ a little. I wrote,

January 28, 1991 - The past few days have witnessed a lot of changes. Wow! I feel I am beginning to crawl out of some of the guk, that has been layered on for sometime. It has not all disappeared for sure but I feel the pain less. My gut still tightens up from time to time. I have been trying to lay back “to muddle and waddle” to be ... though still continuing with many projects and involvements... there is a rich diversity in my life that is for sure... I feel blessed with this richness of activities and friends. I was feeling the real closeness with Sandra last night as she left on her world tour and that her experience with ISOF and me has had on her life. I sometimes am so in the experience that It is hard to know what is going on and how meaningful it actually is.

My relationship with Barb has changed dramatically and I am sort of befuddled by it, staying open to experiencing it and in awe of it. It feels wonderful to be desired again at this loving/giving level.

It is worth noting that the phrase that allowed me to have an intimate relationship with Barbara, beyond therapeutic or as a working relationship in ISOF, was “how can I turn down a blossoming rose in front of me”—Barbara was that ‘gift’-- she offered so much love, and was so open to giving—even though I told her, I really am still very in love with Catherine and if Catherine changed her mind I would likely go back with her. She didn’t care about my relationship with Catherine, she intuited that it was over. I didn’t feel so sure until four years or so later. I’m a little slow that way. Continuing with my journal entry:

It still amazes me the unique timing of it [the relationship with Barbara] and its unfoldment in my life. I had really only just that day prior to Barb and I connecting more deeply, had been with Helene and opened to the possibility of really allowing myself to enjoy the possibility of having another woman partner... I really let go of this with Catherine [sort of] and I now am coming to see myself as more of her “family,” brother than anything else. Barb comes to me, just as is appropriate, with giving and desire long frustrated in her... I am someone who can receive and play with her gifts and I am big enough for it... who won’t be scared off by her energy and love.

Another worthy note, is that one day early in our relationship she came into the house, when I was out, and hung a painting from the ceiling of my studio downstairs-- she had done this painting of a sky on large sheets of paper and she wrote a note with it: “To Robert... your as big as the sky” and that’s why she loved me so much. I didn’t restrict the love she had to give. It was a great complement and truly validated the mystical sense of my being as like the sky, like the cosmos itself. Continuing with my journal entry:

This is appropriate for me as I am low in energy and still healing and want to leave
 the
 directiveness to her a bit more right now, but not totally. I enjoy the touching and
 peace I
 feel with her, she is not neurotic, thank god... I really am absorbing her peace and
 honey
 milk sweetness... she feels like a 'gift' from the goddess—a strong nurturing
 element....
 I am purposely holding back from doing a lot of “work” and “processing” in this
 relation-
 ship, not that I won't want to ... but I want it to go much more slowly this time...
 where
 we can both drink from this well of goodness, without draining ourselves in the
 process.
 There's a silence that we create which gives us the space to enrich our self-intimacy
 first
 and this “glows” upon us... in loving kindness and mutual delight.

Sounds beautiful and wonderful. And as I reflect on this there is certainly a self-critique that
 was emerging in this second “go” with a woman in ISOF. And I mean it, that I only accepted
 Barbara as an intimate partner because she was totally dedicated to ISOF. I wouldn't have
 accepted any woman otherwise—it was just something that I decided, or that decided me.
 That's the way I was going to live my life. I wanted women in my life as lovers and so on, but
 that would have to be in a healing paradigm, on the path of fearlessness, or not at all. Sure,
 I'll be friends, and have acquaintances but that's all. The depth can only come with theory
 and practices—with rigor and a model of something spiritual that is beyond us, that is
 liberational—and ISOF is the best I've found. Barbara was into it. Albeit, she didn't fully
 know what she was getting into but she had a faith and/or naivety that took her to follow it
 ... whatever it will be. She knew being with me was right, and if that meant ISOF too, that
 was fine with her.

It is worth inserting a new piece of theory (2006) writing that I've called ISOF The Great
 Tradition. I realize that when I was describing above my insistence on partners being in
 ISOF, I mean the Great Tradition of which ISOF is a latest version:

ISOF: The Great Tradition¹⁰⁰

From recent experiences and dialogues¹⁰¹ it has been clear that with the girls and Barbara there has
 been a longing for “tradition.” Yet, also knowing they are also not people who easily accept and
 follow tradition. It seems to me that they have not been able to “see” the Great Tradition that ISOF
 is, right beneath their noses. I too have longed for an identifiable spiritual tradition that I could tell
 people about and they'd sort of just know what I'm into, but instead I've had to either not say
 anything about my tradition or clumsily try to tell them what ISOF is in two minutes or less; always
 very unsatisfying and distortive. I prefer to write about ISOF for that very reason.

¹⁰⁰ Barbara and I have been enthralled with the notion of the “Joyful Revolt,” coined by French feminist psychoanalyst and philosopher Julia Kristeva (2003), as the essential rebellious impulse against oppression-repression that is what created the Great Tradition (ISOF) in the first place.

¹⁰¹ The closest I can think of the arising of this notion of “tradition” and our relationship to it today, came from the study of K. Beittel's art/philosophy/education work in spring of 2005 and writing articles, and doing art work (my “Beittel series”), in which Beittel was an artist/researcher/educator of the “Great Tradition” (e.g., *Zen and the Art of Pottery*) and yet always one to modify tradition for our times. This has greatly affected Barbara and I.

I have said it before that ISOF is an amalgam or synthesis of the core of many traditions from secular to spiritual. However, only in the last few days have I actually really found myself teaching ISOF as a Great Tradition¹⁰² (i.e., the esoteric core of many traditions of healing and liberation). Furthermore, I have mapped out a skeleton model of the post-9/11 ISOF work, if you will, whereby the Great Tradition is identified as consisting of say 15 paradigms or so, and then summarizing each of them in documents, so when people are interested in ISOF they can pursue one or more of these 15 paradigm¹⁰³ frameworks that already exist in the literature, and make their own decision(s) about how they want to pursue them as the basis for their practices (or ITP integral transformative practices, as Ken Wilber calls them). I'll outline the most basic elements of these 10 paradigms below. It has also been important to note that once the Great Tradition has been identified, then other terms emerged to capture nicely our work in re-building after 9/11, and they were: "Community of Practices" and "Family of Allyship (Exiles)." I'll leave those latter ideas for another document later on.

15 PARADIGMS OF THE GREAT TRADITION (ISOF)

I'm not sure if there are 15 or more or less, it is just an arbitrary pragmatic figure to show the diversity of emergent attempts throughout time, and across cultures and disciplines, to arrive at a guiding framework for healing and liberation—meaning, for transformative learning. I outline them in no particular order. Note: ISOF, according to my own view, does not necessarily agree with everything the authors and their followers of these paradigms promotes; we in ISOF like to discern and improve upon that which is best in these paradigms and throw away that which isn't. For more detailed information on any of these, ask myself, or search the Internet.

1. Living Process vs. Addictive Process (Schaeff)

Anne Wilson Schaeff, of Wilson-Schaeff Associates, Inc. (Boulder, CO), is the addiction and healing expert with many books. She is a feminist and a leader of the "Living Process System" model and "Deep Process Work" which gets to the deeper traumatic roots of the healing needed to "cure" addiction. She emphasized that once the overt behavioral addiction is 'under control' and recovery work has gone on to establish one's life as 'manageable again' then x-addicts need to go much further and deeper to heal through the "addictive process" itself, which is the motivating 'need to addict' in the first place. The process addiction is much less obvious, insidious, and will find another form of behaviors eventually to manifest another overt addiction or complex of addictions, if the process addiction is not healed through. The pivotal text on this work is her book *"Beyond Therapy, Beyond Science: A New Model for Healing the Whole Person"* (1992). Some addiction workers will recognize this recovery living process work as somewhat similar to the realization that addiction is complex and layered and begins with "Stage-I recovery" and can move deeper to "Stage-II" and so on. Dr. Gary Nixon, addictions counselor and professor, University of Lethbridge (personal communication, Feb., 2006) has told me about the Stage-I involving an obvious substance use/behavior as focus while Stage-II addiction recovery work is based on the problem of intimacy that motivates the "substitutes" in the presenting obvious addiction (of Stage-I).

2. Love vs. Fear (many ancient wisdom traditions)

¹⁰² ISOF is "symbolic" or "expressive" of the Great Tradition, and in many ways I see as very unique because it takes an integral perspective (a la Ken Wilber) in terms of integrating all (or as many as required from) the esoteric traditions that make the "absolute distinction" of healthy and unhealthy or oppressive and liberating, if you will. No other model, program, community, I know of, does that and offers an array of choices for people from different developmental and cultural backgrounds and interests to connect with the esoteric core and do that under an umbrella 'Tradition,' 'Community,' 'Family' like ISOF does.

¹⁰³ So much has been said about what a "paradigm" is. There is a lot of confusion in the popular use of the term (as Wilber has critiqued). For use here it is symbolic more than empirical in the ordinary sense. It does refer to a totally different way of conceptualizing the world, with a set of values, beliefs, preoccupations, sense of reality, and mostly set of practices (which can be validated or not through systematic discernment by self and peers who also utilize the paradigm).

This dichotomy has the largest universal “truth” or historical tracings of a foundational theory and practices of healing and liberating oneself from Fear (what I prefer to call ‘Fear’ Project or ‘fear’ pattern virus). East and West mystical traditions and the mainstream religions of the world usually have this dichotomy well established into its basic system of beliefs. The most popularized, in the human potential movement and new age of the West in the past 30 years or so, has been *The Course in Miracles* (1975, reprinted many times since). This “Bible,” of sorts, was apparently “channeled” by some people (professors in the field of medicine and medical psychology) and produced for public consumption by the Foundation for Inner Peace (Tiburon, CA) for the contemporary world as a moral universal text on Love and fear as opposites. Many volumes of study guide books, and other books by followers/teachers of *The Course* have flooded the market since the original text. The most famous is probably Dr. Gerald Jampolsky’s “*Love is Letting Go of Fear*” (1979). Suffice it to say “Fear” (capitalized) is used here in this paradigm in a more metaphysical sense, including the psychological sense, but not limited to individual psychological fear.

3. Good vs. Evil (many ancient wisdom traditions)

This dichotomy of how to divide the world up, is as ancient as history itself, apparently. The exact meaning of what is Good and what is Evil, of course, depends on different cultures at different times. The most systematic theorizing and philosophy of these polar opposites is found in the tradition of theology and the particular study called “theodicy” which is about how these opposites are related.

4. Sunrise Vision vs. Sunset Vision (Trungpa)

This paradigm is pre-Christian, going back to the roots in the Shambhala culture and religion of ancient Tibet. It has a strong Buddhist tone, as taught by the late Rinpoche Chögyam Trungpa. A master, he brought this tradition to the West over 20 years ago and started up the Naropa Institute (of East-West studies, Boulder, CO). The tradition Trungpa aligned with is that of Shambhala sacred warriorship. ISOF co-founders have utilized this teaching and text (see Trungpa’s 1985 book *Shambhala: Sacred Path of the Warrior*) as pivotal in the core theory of their work from its inception. There are international training centers under the term “Shambhala Warrior Training.” Basically “Sunrise Vision” is love-based and “Sunset Vision” is fear-based. The path from Sunrise Vision to Sunset vision is the path of fearlessness. This book is one of the best works on discerning the core of fearlessness as virtue of all virtues.

5. Benign Reality Pattern vs. Distress Pattern (Jackins)

Late in the 1940’s a union leader named Harvey Jackins began to discover what happens when people breakdown emotionally and how to give them the unconditional attention to heal through their distress and trauma. This grassroots theory and model he put together became known as Re-evaluation Co-Counseling (RC).¹⁰⁴ It is now international in scope and a massive (underground) movement, quite socialist-oriented, and does amazing worldwork for liberation. The basic thesis is that if one is operating in a distress pattern (hurt, or unhealed painful memory) they are operating out of a lot of fear, mistrust, misjudgment and will be “out of Present Time reality” (which is a Benign Reality of love, trust, clear judgment and all the wonderful characteristics of our inherent human nature). RCers have set up networks of peer counseling communities around the world with regular classes. ISOF adapted this theory and practice and called it Liberation Peer Counseling (LPC) and a later version Integral Peer Counseling (IPC).

6. Red Pill vs. Blue Pill (Wachowski Bros.)

The metaphor and narrative of the healing transformative and libertional journey, in contemporary pop cultural sci-fi filmmaking, comes to us today in the Wachowski Brothers’ hit film trilogy *The Matrix* (1999-2003). You have to watch the film to get the meaning of Blue Pill and Red Pill life styles—which are really representative of an existential (spiritual) choice. Blue Pill means you are choosing to stay relatively “asleep” in the everyday world and do what everyone else is doing as ‘normal.’ Red Pill means you are choosing a life of dissent of the “awakened” ones and become a “hacker” or “rebel” for the Revolution.

¹⁰⁴ See also some of its innovative branches that split from RC per se, such as International Co-Counseling.

Once the red pill (path) is taken, one sees that fear drives “The Matrix” of all those of the blue pill. The rest of the teaching of this paradigm is in the movie and in the DVD set commentaries by Ken Wilber and Cornel West (a must listen). I did my dissertation on this work and am slowly integrating it into ISOF philosophy and practices. An excellent, radical, book on this movie is Jake Horsley (2003), *Matrix Warrior: Being the One (The unofficial handbook)*.

7. Heaven vs. Hell (Cohen)

Perhaps one of the most original and detailed mappings of the paradigm of liberation is that of “Hell” (fear-based worldview) and “Heaven” (love-based worldview) that has been created by the guru Andrew Cohen. His work has been to find the contemporary way to “Enlightenment.” He has many books and runs a large community/organization, whose basic home is in the form of an ashram in Massachusetts. One of his main challenges is that meditation traditions have tended to become stuck in a model of focusing on the initiate’s path to the Ground of Being (no-thing-ness, Absolute Unity, non-dual consciousness). That was there only goal. Cohen has argued and convincingly discovered that “Enlightenment” is more than that and involves the emerging paradigm of “Heaven” and the “Authentic Self” as creative-being. See the high quality magazine Cohen edits and produces entitled “*What is Enlightenment?*”

8. Coping vs. Healing (Fisher)

Drawing on many of the paradigms above, and strongly from RC/LPC (#4), I have come to the distinction that a “Coping Paradigm” is how the world has run for thousands of years. The “Healing Paradigm” has always existed (naturally) because the evidence in evolution itself shows that LIFE follows the principle or Law that “when hurt, heal.” However, for many reasons, some natural, some cultural, societies have moved toward “coping cultures” instead of “healing cultures” and the current hegemony of the Western lifestyle leads the way in this mastery of teaching people to cope and not heal. Healing actually becomes deeply feared by the coping paradigm. This pattern dominates and causes immense ‘fear’ patterning in people and organizations. Coping, without healing, literally is a form of violence (oppression) and will produce more violence through the cultivation of a “culture of fear.” I have written lots about this and ISOF philosophy is based on it.

9. Vicious Circle vs. Benign Circle (Robertson)

Drawing some from RC (#4), Jean Robertson, an activist-community leader in Alberta, has created an elaborate model of the “Vicious Circle” (fear, mistrust, hurtful cycle) and “Benign Circle” (love, trust, cooperation cycle) of communications. She was co-founder of Common Ground Learning Community (1980-1989) and more recently “Living Room Context.”

10. Phobos-Thanatos vs. Eros-Agape (Wilber)

Integral philosopher, Ken Wilber, is a contemporary leader of the “Integral Movement” in the U.S. and rapidly spreading around the world. For the last 30+ years he has been writing books and developing a theory of liberation. His earlier work (before 1997) is amazing in universal scope by its synthesis of wisdom and research East-West throughout time and across cultures. He has posited that living systems function between the dynamic forces of “Phobos-Thanatos” (fear pattern) and “Eros-Agape” (love pattern) and his theory says that both are inevitable as part of the development of consciousness (see his pivotal theory in his 1995 book *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*). Of course, as part of that development (through time and maturation and through intense practices) one can move from one level of consciousness to another and thus move more toward Eros-Agape and away from Phobos-Thanatos. Of all the theorists above, Wilber is the most developmental and does not promote the same distinct dichotomy of paradigms that all the other models do. Wilber’s latest work is being carried on with his Integral University.

11. Maya vs. Moksha

Moksha (Sanskrit: मोक्ष, liberation) or Mukti (Sanskrit: मुक्ति, release) refers, in general, to liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. In higher Hindu philosophy, it is seen as a transcendence of phenomenal being, of any sense of

consciousness of time, space, and causation (karma). It is not seen as a soteriological goal in the same sense as in, say, a Christian context, but signifies dissolution of the sense of self, or ego, and the overall breakdown of *nama-roopa* (name-form). It is, in Hinduism, viewed as analogous to Nirvana, though Buddhist thought tends to differ with even the Advaita Vedantist reading of liberation. Jainism and Surat Shabda Yoga traditions also believe in Moksha (from Wikipedia on the Internet). **Maya** is the the fear-based illusory world of form and temporality (duality, self, ego).

12. Fall/Redemption Cosmology vs. Creation-Centered Cosmology (Fox)

In the early to mid-1980's Fr. Mathew Fox, Dominican priest in California, was challenging in his writings and teachings the fear-based "Fall/Redemption Cosmology" behind so much exoteric ('normal') Christian teaching. He believed a truly love-based "Creation-Centered Cosmology" was available in the mystic (esoteric) Christian tradition and he was re-writing 'Christianity' for a new era. His classic work that was very popular on this distinction was in the 1986 book *Original Blessing*. He was ex-communicated by the Catholic Church in the late 1980's but he has pursued his work outside the 'Church' and started various institutes to train people in this tradition. His latest one is the Wisdom University.

13. Mechanistic vs. Wholistic (Hatala's)

Recently, I have been very interested in working with Rick and Lillas Hatalas, corporate leadership consultants and entrepreneurs in Calgary, AB. They have discerned the esoteric literature, leadership development literature, and many other philosophies, and have come up with a synthetic model based on the distinction between a fear-based Mechanistic Paradigm vs. a love-based Wholistic Paradigm (and Organic Paradigm). Their 2004 book entitled *Integrative Leadership* is their first book and is well worth reading for theory, models and practices of transformation and liberation. They claim their model is "integrally-informed" (in the Wilberian sense) but it is very original and a breakthrough in the business consulting literature. They are planning an Integrative Energy University in the next few years.

14. Paradigm of Fear vs. Paradigm of Hope (Lerner)

"For the past several thousand years, much of human society has been torn by a struggle between two worldviews or ways of understanding what it is to be human.... paradigm of fear and paradigm of hope." This claim comes from the American Rabbi Michael Lerner, Editor of *Tikkun* magazine and author of many books and articles. See www.tikkun.org/magazine/tik0603/lerner-fear

15. First-Tier vs. Second-Tier (Beck)

The extensive psychological (values) research of Americans: Dr. Clare Graves in the 1950-70's and his student Dr. Don Beck (later with Chris Cowan); they produced a theory of v-memes, whereby development and evolutionary growth can be detected as a set of values (memes), each adapted to a set of existent conditions (externally and internally). The v-meme theory these researchers have posited is elaborated in Beck & Cowan's (1996) classic book on *Spiral Dynamics*. They have argued that there are about nine empirically identifiable v-memes that have evolved from each other over time in human history, and which are, to some degree, part of the pattern of human individual or group development today. It is a complex theory, but elegant. One of their main findings is that the first six v-memes (or first-tier) are primarily fear-motivated, and then there is a "quantum leap" to the second-tier where fear no longer dominates the v-meme systems.

Summary Point: Living The Paradigms Is A Mess!

There can arise a definite sense that these are paradigms of which one is "bad"("evil") and one is "good." That is not how ISOF configures these paradigms *per se*. Though, on the surface, that is indeed what they appear to be. The point of laying these out and putting them before others as

part of a teaching paradigm is not to make that distinction of “bad” and “good” so overt, it is much more complex than “morals” that is at stake and that is involved. These latter terms also tend to make it sound like one is going to lead to a life so wonderful (“good”) and one is going to lead to a life so horrible (“bad”). Though, there is some truth to that, in actuality, the shifting from the more fear-based paradigms to the love-based paradigms (which all of the above 15 paradigms roughly represent), is actually a painful path of going back-n-forth or what I call going “In and Out of the ‘Fear’ Matrix.” ‘Reality’ is (at the relative level), that in this world the ‘Fear’ Matrix doesn’t disappear (i.e., the “bad” or “evil”). And to chose to live a “good” life, meaning a paradigm out of the ‘Fear’ Matrix, such as to live in a Love-based worldview is really a messy affair, full of danger and terror, because you will be an “exile” from the ‘normal’ dominating powers (everyday world)—and the costs of traveling that path, which I call the path of fearlessness, are immense, and take their toll.

So, you are warned, freedom and justice, liberation and enlightenment, are lived paths in the everyday “real” world and the “real” world doesn’t like them because they contradict the “best way to go” message of the culture of fear. I think you get the point I’m making. Unless you go off and live in a religious monastery or a cave in the mountains to practice a life of the “good” (love), then you will have to deal with being an “exile” from your own culture/society and the world at large, which will see you more or less, as a “threat” and thus an “enemy.” Be prepared. But no need to be over-prepared to the point you are so frightened to liberate yourself. Yes, J-P. Sartre, was quite correct when he declared “Freedom is terror” (at least for most humans).

Now begins the journey of choices, each and every one you make will either support a paradigm of Fear or a paradigm of Love (you can use the alternative language of any of the 15 paradigms to make that distinction). Fundamentally, the ISOF Great Tradition, at least, makes the choices clear and nuanced, and appropriately available. That’s a start and that’s why this document was written. There are no “formulas” but there are traditions to learn from and follow as you see fit. Of course, it helps to have “teachers” and “guides” who know the traditions, and it helps to build community with those practicing them.

[Note: If you know of other paradigms analogous to the above to send me the information: rmfisher@shaw.ca]

Back to the developing self-critique from the letter above: it appears I was realizing that to enter ISOF and leadership in ISOF is something that needs time and patience and I probably was way to forceful and intense for Catherine and thus missed many of the signals that she wasn’t really “ready”—that’s an error of the passion that can blaze between two “soul mates”—but it doesn’t last long. With Barbara and I it was slower and has lasted longer. Lesson learned. But gosh, I do miss the flaming intensity at times. More journaling, a week later:

February 2, 1991— I am looking at the Holy Spirit (Hermes) and the Cosmic Christ (*a la* Matthew Fox’s book cover) on my wall. Clearly, I can feel the power of integration it brings and the importance of going beyond ... I had a dream last night that showed me pulling into a city to park my car and a wind came up and I looked to see several small tornados in the distance causing a storm and I knew I should lock in—i.e, put the car emergency brake on and be prepared for a storm. This dream is accurate as I can see Linda [my x-wife] is not giving up on her path of fear and havoc -- her letter last night did hurt again as I see she is still in survival fear mode and vindictive—trying to undermine my love for the girls in the letters I send them—still

putting salt in the wounds—about my not being a good enough father—no
acknowledge-
ment (total denial) that I have been helpful to her—in fact she is again attempting to
push me away from the girls, by trying to take away the Wed. evenings and
weekends.

I am pissed off at this shit! She is so afraid of us connecting at any kind of deep
level—

and having to face her own shadow cruelty and inability to make that deeper
connect-

ion with the girls herself... I need to limit my dosage to her toxicity... this is not my
only work in life. These women must take their own responsibility!

I thank you Mother Earth & Father Sky for my vision, my eyes, my ideas... I will
bless this 'gift' daily... in my appreciation. Thank you Good Ones!!!

March 17, 1991- [St. Patrick's Day] Spring nears as we enter the cusp on the 21st of
March into *Age of Aries*... this is the yang energy period—or masculine age... this is
where I come to the fore... (NB: So much of the masculine-feminine debate—has no
cyclic historical and yearly seasonal sense to it—it has become so gender
dominated—

I can see why Catherine (in her own struggle to really get in touch with her feminine)
couldn't handle my strong masculine/feminine... she has to find it on her own way...
But as she has become a defender for the women's psychology—she has continued
to split herself in dualisms).

This *Age of Aries* is the continued Solar Energy and its struggle for separate
identity—

differentiation—individuation—not individualism. (Catherine I find is a Libra on the
outside—looking good for others—but very ego-centric and caught in personal
individualism). I am reminded of my sleeping bag dream and exposing and casting
off all the (winter mold) below... exposing it to spring light and rebirth... renewal...
there was a composting of left overs going on below my resting quilt and bed... I have
been sleeping on this leftovers, this compost heap... it has been an emotionally hot

and

decaying time I have been through for the past eight months... I'm still grieving

through

it... my dreams in the past week have shown much is stirring, 'spring turnover', with
much garbage being rolled over up to the surface... again, much loss and re-

evaluation.

I'm questioning now as spring comes round what kind of seeds to plant and where &
who to plant them with... I am not about to go scattering them at random, or in soils

not

fertile either... finding rich soil in my directions and companions is important to me

now.

Last night I dreamt of doing some heavy duty counseling work with a couple—who

lived

next door to where I used to live—and having to work with a man, who was stealing

this

women's child—as ransom—to get close to her again! I never completed my work

with

them but it was improving. I saw my mom and dad but they were apart—and looking

for

new relationships. – New Marriage—I portend there is a new marriage brewing in
my life—it is a setting of a new direction, life style... and way of being in the world... it is
a movement—out of total adolescent, immature masculine—it is kingship and
royalty—it is not having many close friends—it is sacrificing personal goals—for royal goals—in
a court of few—in aloneness—in exaltation of the Sun/Solar—the mature masculine.
NB: This is the first morning I have been up at sunrise and feeling energetic about
working—getting things together again... it is a new start and new energy coming
through
me—a healing very subtle—and is nothing more than tuning-in to the archetypal
energies
and cycling environmental energies of the present.

Eventually, I had to come out of this “spring turnover” and face a public reality and
responsibility to the ISOF readership, friends, and lurkers. It was time to publish the next
edition of the *In Search of Fearlessness Newsletter* Vol. 2(1), Spring 1991. Catherine was no
longer living with me but did decide to type it up and run it off with Larry’s help. But I had
to write the long Editorial myself entitled: “Birthing Pains And Going Beyond”—there would
be the public and published declaration that,

Catherine and I have experienced great joy and sorrow in opening our hearts to each
other and to the world. We have made so many new and important relationships in
the past year. We have also experienced the terror of crisis of identity in the
transformative processes. Suddenly, we realized we do not know exactly who we are in this new
authentic intimacy and we feel overwhelmed that we are losing ourselves in love and
compassion. We take in and feel each other and the world. But we have been hurt in
our own personal lives and being raised in a fear-based culture.... Neither Catherine
nor I could have predicted what stuff would come up. In conclusion, I would say I am
proud of the work we have done not to let fear-based patterns pull everything to
pieces
between us. **In Search of Fearlessness** and the projects are all alive and we will
change forms but the ‘spirit’ will not die. - Robert Fisher, Editor

The glaring absence is Catherine’s voice. Where was she now? And that tells the ‘story’ of an
ending and a new beginning. By early May of 1991, I asked Barbara to “take me away”—and
for her that meant going on a two month holiday traveling overseas. I said “yes.” She looked
after all the details, and I went with her, backpacks and basic survival money. We were
either going to make our relationship or break it, but risk we felt we must. I wanted to leave
my life in Calgary behind.

I pull out my thick journal of our two months travel to England, Spain, Morocco and
Portugal. After three weeks Barbara and I ‘hit’ some difficult times emotionally, and I quote
a postcard she dropped off on my backpack one morning, after she had left for the day to be
on her own in Morocco, in this beautiful mountain village:

Dear Robert (from Hotel Rif, Chaouen, Maroc):

May 30, 1991

Hello from the roof top of the Hotel Rif. This has been my sanctuary today. I have ventured out for a bit—then returned to have peace and “contemplation” as Abdul would say. I carry a heavy heart today as I absorb the things/questions you have raised in the last few days. I also feel coldness from you as you withdraw to contemplate your questions. I have fears around the answers. I am jealous of your love for Catherine and despair in not being able to fulfill all of your desires. My first response is to retreat. But that is not what I desire. I will continue to work in defining my desires—they are not as clear now as they have been before. I miss you. Allah is with you and me.
—In his/her love, Barbara

Overall, it was a great voyage, alone, and together. Travelling backpack in the “Third World” really opens the ‘eyes’ of one born and raised in the “First World.”

When I got back I didn’t want to see Barbara. I had moved out of the house and let Catherine deal with it. I had a small apartment and I wanted to incubate for nine months before deciding what to do with my relationships with Barbara. One day a young (old friend) buddy from my youth came by. When I was a teenager, he was five or six yrs. old, and he lived next door. We used to play football and soccer in our front yard. I used to take him out, as his dad was never around much. We went mostly on nature hikes. He loved it. Now, he was much older, and married (I believe), and we had a long talk. He wrote me a poem about his visit with me this time:

An Experience At Bob’s [that was my first name in my youth] – July 21, 1991

Always a joy
always thought provoking
never boring
never the same
bordering on madness
bordering on brilliance
brain aerobics
food for thought
creativity abounds
ideas arcing through the air
verbal exchanges pleasant
always taking home a
personal warmth from
the experience

-David Reid

I had attempted to make the transition as David got older from the great interest in Nature to the great interest in Psyche and liberation. He was interested, but his wife wasn’t and she let him know that I was a threat to the ‘neat’ reality she had all laid out for their middle class bourgeois life with their soon-to-be baby. David, chose to not contact me any more nor respond to my initiatives to get together. That really hurt, we were so close for at least 20 years.

A New Home: A New Vision

After about three months I saw Barbara by chance. We talked. That was it. We moved in together and were married that fall. Lots of changes were blowing through my life and ISOF.

The biggest of all was the origin (and rental) of the first ISOF Centre—a real place to meet—all 300 sq. ft. of it. Barbara and I were working other jobs part-time so we had a little extra to pay the \$400-500 per month expenses at 4814 – 16 St. SW, just a few blocks from where we lived in a basement suite. It was a long narrow space, in a mini-mall, with a hair dresser's on one side (it stank) and a housing co-op office on the other side (which we used their photocopy machine), in which I managed to squeeze all of my library and desks and tables into, along with art supplies. It was such a great feeling having our own place and putting an official sign on the window, and so forth. The first brochure, Barbara and I designed, of the In Search of Fearlessness Centre & Research Institute (ISOFCRI) read:

The Centre:

- is a place to gather, for people who want to create and express themselves sharing their healing experiences using art mediums and processes,
- is a place to learn the Path of Fearlessness as a way of life that supports the inherent goodness in all people and creation,
- sponsors courses, workshops, and gatherings,
- provides you with access to a Library, Resource information & a newsletter

We even had a 15% discount for Member, which was \$30/yr or \$50/yr per couple and Friends for \$10/per yr. Donations were always welcomed. The Centre

Philosophy:

ISOFCRI is dedicated to encouraging all humans to understand how they have been hurt and oppressed by distress. By committing to the Path of Fearlessness, one chooses to live and love beyond fear. ISOFCRI is dedicated to assisting all people to recover our natural healing processes which have been so destructively oppressed & suppressed. The final stage of healing empowers us to STOP through action, all forms of social and environmental injustice.

So this was integrating some of the language that passed on from Catherine and I but added some new bits, especially with more emphasis on political action. However, Barbara, being a professional artist, just out from finishing her BA, was also very much in favor of forefronting creative expression as healing. The fit for me was perfect. It was a happy time, although stressful paying the extra bills. Barbara and I put in enormous hours to keep it all going. There were maybe 10-15 people in ISOF community at the time that we could count on most of the time to show up at our events, and yet, slowly we made contacts in the community where the Centre was but that was never very many more than a hand full. I do recall some of the very interesting (and strange) people that would walk into our “open door” on the street.

Charles Nabors (and later his wife Susan), who lived down the street, were very special in my life and contributed to ISOF in unique ways. Charles suffered from schizophrenia for years, and he'd often be wondering the streets, then pop in, just to see me, and often leave. Often he would talk about the way the ecosystems of the North are dying and/or he'd draw out his latest mathematical theory of numbers (he used to be a functional engineer and had

severe trauma experiences and “mystical” experiences that sort of “blew his mind”). I kept my unconditional presence on anyone who came in, and they were always welcome, its just too bad that some strangers came in and borrowed my books and didn’t return them. Ouch. I used to trust people way too much, so Barbara would remind me regularly. I figured the ‘losses’ were part of the risk of being an open door on the street venue. For the most part people were curious and friendly, even though the new people took a long time to figure out what we were really about. I did all my private therapy in that office too, and would lock the doors, so for many people they just thought it was a therapy office, I suppose.

One more bit of theory back then, on pain. Barbara and I, with assistance from Larry and his girlfriend Coralie and a poem by Shan Devam, put together the next ISOF Newsletter (Vol. 2, No. 2), Fall, 1991. I talked about a focus of my work in the Research Institute in the following:

I am particularly focusing my attention on the research institute and continuing the work on the decoding of distress, toxicity, fear-based violence, oppression, evil, and the healing process....¹⁰⁵ The normal societal view is that when someone feels pain, they immediately think something is ‘wrong.’ If someone mentions their pain to some- one else, they often respond with, ‘What’s wrong?’.

How did pain come to be seen as ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’... as a moral? Such a question is beyond the scope of this article. It is enough to say that the moralization of pain seems deeply rooted in western consciousness. Apparently, we have a mythology, a story, a cosmology in the west which moralizes life itself.

I have shared this uncovering of the moralizing of pain with many. Once they deeply understand how destructive that moralizing can be, they have experienced great healing and release from their suffering. Life is painful. Pain is merely a signal, a signal to change and adapt. Pain is not a moral issue.

For humans to impose a moral judgment upon pain is to lose ‘magic’. More and more I see morals distancing us from ‘God,’ Creation, and Life. It is fear patterns that attempt to protect us from pain and make us assume there is a way to live painlessly in the world. This is a belief that brings about much suffering and destruction of our inherent magic. The good news is we are just learning how to change with pain, rather than see it as the enemy.¹⁰⁶

[We quoted Robert Masters, 1990¹⁰⁷]: *In a true community, suffering is neither avoided nor unnecessarily reinforced. In fact, once such a community has ripened, the only suffering therein is necessary suffering, the suffering inherent to purification and maturation, the suffering of allowing oneself to be deeply touched by the fires of the awakening process. There is pain... there is also ecstasy.*

¹⁰⁵ Excerpt from Editor’s Notes: p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Excerpt from “A Place for Magic, Not for Morals” (Fisher, 1991), pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁷ Masters was a “guru” for the Xanthi community in BC. This is taken from his wonderful book *Truth Cannot be Rehearsed*. He was a sacred warrior for sure, and I cited his work often in our seminars in ISOF.

Shan was an interesting soul who came around ISOF for a year or so and then disappeared. He wrote this poem for ISOF, published in this first Centre newsletter:

To stand alone
 looking down
 at the cold fast current...
Afraid to plunge
 and afraid
 not to...
Finally immersed
 knowing
There is no better place to be.
 - Shan Devam

The Centre had “Spontaneous ‘Drop-in’ Art Group” every Tues. night and we started “Recovery (Healing) Workshop: Peer Counselling Model” which would be Barbara and I teaching our own version of Re-evaluation Co-counseling (*a la* Jackins et al.), which would eventually be called Liberation Peer Counseling (LPC), which became a significant ‘fear’ vaccine. More on that in a later chapter. Another event we advertised in that newsletter was “Reading and Discussion Group: Exploring the nature of the path of fearlessness and initiation to maturity (Kings, Queens, Princes and Princesses).” Barbara and I, had an interest in the esoteric (archetypal) energies and paths of spiritual initiation. The write up under that heading was “Particularly useful material for developing “spiritual fitness” in these worn-torn times.” –Facilitated by Robert. It was clear that this was not a “big seller” to people in ISOF, but many times over the years Barbara and I would try to bring it in. She eventually became more and more interested in pagan ritual and performance as well.

The ISOFCRI in 1991 had eight things it was dedicated to, which we printed and handed out and advertised where ever we could. They deserve reprinting here (as many still are currently on the top of my list):

Is Dedicated to:

- the
1. the building of a ‘*healing language*’ as a basis for the recovery and development of the
 ‘*natural healing cycle*’ and healing culture,
 2. the research, education, and practice of the ‘*art of fearlessness*’ for all people
 3. the systematic elimination of the toxic shame-guilt-blame, and hurt-fear-violence
 ‘*cycle of oppression*’ that currently dominates and feeds the oppressive fear-
 conditioned behavior of humans on this planet,
 4. breaking the ‘*silence of fear*’ and woundedness that underlies all toxic forms of
 environmental and social injustice,
 5. the questioning of the ‘*false myths*’ that misinform and support a rationale which
 believes that humans are inherently lazy, bad, violent, distrustful, and are best
 motivated and controlled by fear,
 6. replacing a ‘death-making’ coping culture with a ‘*creation-making*’ healing culture
 of
 reverence and compassion for all Life,

7. the *recovery process* and relationships essential to healing through the external and internalized oppression (fear pattern) of free choice and natural responsibility,
8. the essential research into the phenomenon of the '*fear pattern*' and exposure of its true nature so as to unravel its illusion of power over us.

1991 A Very Good (But Vulnerable) Year

With all the pain, loss, grief, there was so much renewal in 1991 for me and ISOF Project. I was extremely productive in the latter part of the year, as Barbara had provided me with the healing support and confidence I needed to carry on teaching. During my incubation period, right after the separation from Catherine, I tended to write for the purpose of healing and integrating what had been happening. I published through ISOF Research Institute (which had just become an official Canadian publishing house with Barbara and I as "publishers"), two of my first "books." They were 45 pp or so, paper cover, and entitled: *Spontaneous Healings I and II* (1991). The subtitle, tells of how I was working through my identity: *A Life as Naturalist, Scientist, Artist, Mystic & Human*. The books were "a collage of poems, dreams, letters, quotes and autobiographical reflections" as it said in the front page, written by 'Many Broken Hearts.' Who?

That was the name that had come to me in this period as a 'soul' name that reflected and voiced what my life was at the time. On p. 2 I introduced the series with a very appropriate and still meaningful declaration of intent (not a lot different to the approach of this book you are reading now):

The best thing the artist creates is the artist. –Matthew Fox

The series *Spontaneous Healings* is about the making of art, or what I prefer to call creations. In birthing, is a new celebration for me; an integration of old and new, of past and present, of ego and Soul. Many Broken Hearts speaks from a multi-center of identity patterns: sometimes child, adult and parent, naturalist, mystic, scientist and artist-human, sometimes physical, and feeling, mostly spiritual. It doesn't really matter in the end, **it is all a story**. In recent years no creation-making has been so totally satisfying as an artist-human than the making of this book-series. It was to be just as I wanted it... real art... not commercialism with a published label. Let Orpheus' voice continue to heal in our world. Thanks to all who helped out in the many, many, many ways.

The new type of humanity... must grow out of those artists themselves who have achieved a renunciant attitude towards artistic production.... The creative type who can renounce this protection of art and can devote his whole creative force to life and the formation of life will be the first representative of the new human type....
- Otto Rank (1932)

I wrote a lot of passionate felt poems, the kind that render from your gut because any rational thought and logic doesn't make sense to speak. One last stanza from one poem is all I will lay on you here:

I Quit! I Quit!
But not in fear
Gandhi and Jesus

Let more than tearful sacrifice
 More a trail of deep desire
 A dying left all stones overturned
 Not a one could turn what they did see
 Not a one could tear their heart any further
 Nor break a back before it retired
 They laid down
 And wept
 Sounds
 Left over from the fire
 I really want to die today.
 Can't help myself I'm dying in Love with you.

- Many Broken Hearts, Sept. 4, 1991

All of that, all of that felt expression and so what? Where does it get one? No human being, including myself could transform the world completely. Not Gandhi nor Jesus, nor all the great one's put together, not all the prayers, all the peace activists, not all the love and caring that exists in hearts today is enough to stop the 'Fear' Project and the violence and suffering we all know is going on in this world. Sometimes, when I think I can do more than I am, I know I ought to die first, and then see what wants to be created.

As I reflect now on this poem and all the "healing" discourse that so occupied my life then (and still is so important), I have to ask "But what has anything in ISOF got to do with what is happening in the world—politically—with real people out there—I mean what can ISOF do for them?" I was journaling this morning:

April 11, 2006 – I scanned the Internet today on "culture of fear" – my old 'friend'—topic, that sure hits me with the bigger international realities of what's going on in this world—I'm struck again by how young "professional protesters" (activists) are out there risking their future lives as "warriors" of peace, justice, anti-racism etc. – for e.g., I'm quite taken with the 5 young people, in mid or barely beginning university degrees, fighting the U.S. gov't and its move to stricter illegal immigration laws and tactics and in particular how they are fighting against the Minuteman organization which is a KKK, neo-Nazi version of vigilante groups out to maim and threaten illegal U.S. immigrants and those who aid and abet them. Definitely a Green meme vs. Blue meme war. And it is 'wide' and going to get nasty in the future—with 500,000 immigrant people in the streets (many illegal immigrants coming out in the open) in a few major cities in the U.S. this past week, pro-human rights groups are hot onto this—well, the fact is, the "borders" are becoming highly contested sites of "battle" of policy and principles—and v-memes. Then I'm reading about an educational consultant/teacher who in the U.S. was removed to another school for her protestation of Open Court (educational publisher's) "dictated

script teaching manuals” that are being pressed onto schools, mainly lower-class/inner urban non-English (as first language) speaking schools, etc. to pressure BASICS and STANDARDIZED TESTING and uniformity. Why? Because those schools are being perceived by authorities as potential sites of “liberalism” (among progressive “soft” teachers) who want to cater too much to individual needs, unique cultural sensitivities and to developmental appropriateness of learners etc.—no, way, that is not what the U.S. gov’t and school boards want—they want “proper” American-speaking standard educated American citizens—not “subversives”—when I hear the fear culture that works like this in schools and oppresses creative teachers who are trying to fight xenophobia, etc. and what constitutes an American citizen?—Definitely I get heated up and things are heating up in this post-9/11 world. Fear and Education are up and front—DAH!!! Who can deny it? I’m thinking of the book I’m writing on ISOF now, and I was self-critical in that maybe I just didn’t include enough material on what is going on in the outside contemporary world—re: culture of fear now! I can even get feeling a bit “guilty” I’m writing about so much ‘inner’ stuff—transformation—etc.—and I guess it seems so irrelevant to the larger world realities now (everyday)—the problems for teachers, for e.g., in the educational systems—purely and simply, how resistance and dissent is squashed in a culture of fear. And so on. Yes, these are definitely issues ‘up’ for me—as I finish off Chapter Three today, and feel that I want ISOF context/mission—the Great Tradition—to be out there in the world, letting educators—or others (anyone)—know, of what we know of the culture of fear—and how we can support them—in their cause not to ‘give in’ and ‘fold under’ to the culture of fear in their workplace (or wherever) to not accept the ‘fear’-based rule!—these are rules of violence—oppression-repression-suppression dynamics. I want to put out ISOF—I want to send them our logo—and any information that would help—offer them free counseling services/24hr healing journeys—and a program in Sacred Warriorship they can join—as part of a legacy of fighting the ‘Fear’ Matrix/Project/Agents. (Define the Enemy)—whether they want to stay and work in the system or not. It is so like evident to me ISOF has a critical role in this work—as a support and educational resource to those who will fight ‘fear’—to the end—and all its rules—[in this moment I think of Neo’s speech to the Agents of the Matrix as the first film ended (1999):

Neo: I know you are out there. I can feel you now. I know that you are afraid. You are afraid of us. You are afraid of change. I don’t know the future. I didn’t come to tell you how this is going to end. I came here to tell you how it’s going to begin. I’m going to hang up this phone and then I’m going to show these people what you don’t want them to see. I’m going to show them a world without you—a world without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries, a world where anything is possible. Where we go from there is a choice I leave up to you.]

If you haven’t seen this film then Neo takes off into the sky... like a bird, like a plane, like superman. In the article I wrote with Dr. Fred Ribkoff (2000) on this movie, we concluded:

This [last] visionary speech [by Neo] is the product of a journey from fear to fearlessness. Neo comes to “know” and “feel” the anatomy of fear and simultaneously the anatomy of love [thanks to Trinity]. Fearlessness arises out of the ability to finally be able “to see it

[The Matrix] for himself.” He has to “know” and “feel” the Matrix from the inside out. He could not “know” and “feel” the Fear Matrix without having first ingested, digested, internalized, and integrated his old, mirror, virtual Matrix self. The integrated self that knows itself as separate and capable of mutual recognition and love is not fearless—it is not a “pure,” cleansed self, divorced from fear (the enemy). Rather, in the terms of a fear-analysis, this is called fearlessness: fearlessness keeps the fear coding as the key to enter and hack into the Fear Matrix. (p. 8).

My own struggle today, not unlike Neo’s, or anyone attempting to bring about the transformation from fear to fearlessness is that the idea is great, the work is hard, and the pain of its slowness in the wideworld is despairing—most of the time, but that doesn’t stop us from the work. I trust this book now, will help somewhat along that way.

CHAPTER FOUR

CREATING SPACE(S) 1992: Transforming Possibilities

-R. Michael Fisher (formerly Robert)
© 2006

Art Spaces, Rebellion & Spirituality

On Sunday I was invited to a livingroom jam session in nearby Victoria Harbour with some AA friends.... we finally closed the evening with them quietly singing all five verses or whatever of Bob Dylan’s songs that were hits before my time, when I was six years old. Music is so spiritual.... How did your [art] sale with Lou go Barb? I hope it encourages you to put out even more work. Next time I see you I would like to be able to make a purchase. I love the art I do have on my walls. It speaks to me at the most unexpected times. Robert, I think about the both of you and your [ISOF] community and the beautiful work you are doing and I wish you continued luck on your journeys.

-Richard Bickel (letter Aug. 18, 1992)

ISOF had always a leaning toward art(s) and spaces for art. Spontaneous-creation making nights were regular practice for transforming our lives. Today, Barbara is in the mid-point of her doctoral research program in Art Education at The University of British Columbia. She is very clear that her research has a hierarchy of values, for her: (1) art, (2) spirituality, (3) education. In many ways ISOF was no different from the start. The art and creativity of people is basic to their recovery from a busy-world of “productivity,” “performativity” (and addictions) that allows people little time to create for creating sake, to make art for art sake,

and to make art for ritual and communion or the evolution of consciousness, as artist/philosopher Kenneth R. Beittel would say.

Indeed, Barbara and I were always touched by how art and religious traditions are inherently connected, and spirituality grows forth from the experience of art—at least, that's the way she and I like to "get our spirituality." Then, we believe, from that spiritual experience comes education; that is, a growth, a change, a shift, a new perspective—a potentially transformative learning about something that cannot be easily taught in the regular ways schooling or even higher education can be done. The education of ISOF is not "book learning" but a learning from doing, from being creative beings, and being in communion, and being alone—and the integration of it all can happen in a conscious community like ISOF that is dedicated to the integration of art, spirituality and education.

For all this to happen, one has to be a bit of a rebel, no doubt. I will share my "rebel theory" that had been building for a few years and became foundational to ISOF and more particularly to the School of Sacred Warriorship (later Neo-Rebel School), I co-founded with Normand Bergeron, which ran from 1993-96 in Calgary, AB. I will also share the first collaborative art show installation Barbara and I put together called "The Rebel's Journey," and how it challenged our relationship, our artist-selves, our rebel-selves and a whole lot more. But now I want to take a moment to stay with the topic: "The Path of Fearlessness is 'Creating Space', Creating Greatness." That was the title of a talk and discussion I facilitated at the ISOF Open Forum June 21, 1992. I began the forum session with two long quotes worth taking in, as they set the foundational context and contemplative mood for where fearlessness arises:

Henri Nouwen wrote,
Empty space tends to create fear. As long as our minds, hearts and hands are occupied we
can avoid confronting the painful questions, to which we never give much attention [space] and which we do not want to surface. 'Being busy' has become a status symbol,
and most people keep encouraging each other to keep their body and mind in constant
[busyness].... We are so afraid of open spaces and empty places that we occupy them with our minds even before we are there. Our worries and concerns are expressions of our
inability to leave unresolved questions unresolved and open-ended situations opened
.... our preoccupations prevent our having new experiences.... preoccupations are our fearful way of keeping things the same, and it often seems that we prefer a bad certainty
to a good uncertainty.

Chöygam Trungpa wrote,

In the ordinary sense, we think of space as something vacant or dead. But in this case,
space is a vast world that has capabilities of absorbing, acknowledging, and accommodating. You can put cosmetics on it, drink tea with it, eat cookies with it, polish your shoes in it. Something is there. But ironically, if you look into it, you can't find anything. If you try to put your finger on it, you find that you don't even have a finger to put. That is the primordial nature of basic goodness and it is that nature

will allows a human being to become a warrior, to become the warrior of all warriors. The warrior, fundamentally, is someone who is not afraid of space. The coward lives in constant terror of space. When the coward is alone in the forest and doesn't hear a sound, he/she thinks there is a ghost lurking somewhere. In the silence he/she brings to all kinds of monsters and demons in the mind. The coward is afraid of darkness because he can't see anything. He is afraid of silence because he can't hear anything.

I wrote after these quotes:

Being with and creating space requires great vulnerability, exposure, openness to what is, to what you are experiencing totally, letting go ... when we create such space often in comes the pain ... before the joy ... when we create attention ... we create the space to heal our wounds and those of others ... when we create space we create a place for fear to arise ... and the wounds to follow ... if we go through the fear with them.

Fear patterning is a vacuum that consumes space... reduces attention... and awareness, and caring...

To go beyond fear is to create greatness, expansion ... space...

Werner Erhard, founder of est wrote,

Of all the disciplines that I studied, practiced, learned, Zen was the essential one. It was not so much an influence on me; rather it created space. It allowed those things that were there to be there.

I responded with further notes,

Often the creation of Self-space is sudden and all encompassing: my example of walking home one night, and I realized I was walking in space, vertical, sticking out from the earth ... it was astounding.

When we connect with space, with Being, we experience the Greatness and Our Greatness, without trying to be great, or successful, etc. True greatness is beyond ego.

Ego collapses space, trying to control it and everything going on in fear of empty space – death—pain—fear itself.

Healing (the path of fearlessness) begins when we allow space in our lives, and live our lives in space. [I then cited an exercise on pain and space by Ram Dass & Gorman, 1987]

In reflection here and now, there is such a ‘solidity’ of wisdom and purpose that was to be the ground of the ISOF philosophy and practices. This notion of space, and how to be with it a high level of contemplation, was essential also to good art, to authentic creation-making and soul-making. The origin of any true community experiences I have had, always came to through space allowed... and yes, as I said, in a healing model, there will not just be busy-work or “doing” that comes from such contemplative space but there will be the work of fearlessness—that is, to go into the fear and pain that immediately surfaces when we “stop” ourselves from our addictive obsessive busy-ness and filling in our lives on a day timer. ISOF was a ‘space’ for all of this spiritual and creative work, and the ISOF Centre was to be a place for contemplatives. But there is no one image of the “contemplative” that we ought to get stuck on. Traditions and religions may provide such images of the “quiet” one sitting in meditation or reading and writing in journals. No, I never have believed that contemplation ought to be only ‘trapped’ in such a stereotypical image.

When art is brought into contemplation, as Fr. Matthew Fox suggests via “extrovert meditation,” then contemplation becomes very alive and unpredictable as well, and the Essential Rebel appears to challenge and contradict the oppressive forces that have kept us from being close to our soul or open to spaces that heal and transform. The Essential Rebel, as I would call it, is that impulse that resists oppression of any kind. It is inherent in every living being and in Creation itself. It is unconscious in some forms and highly conscious in other forms of life.

The best image I have of the nature of our Essential Rebel (and the ‘spirit’ of the warrior on the sacred path of fearlessness) comes from around 1992 when I was working at our first ISOF Centre and I heard a gang of workers and machines out back of the Centre. I walked around to see what they were doing. They were city workers paving over the parking lot behind the mini-mall. The parking lot was a wonderful space of gravel and lots of dandelions and other assorted flowering weeds, and things that were just “untamed.” The next day, I went to the Centre and checked out back to see blacktop asphalt all smooth and paved and clean as could be—all wildness tamed and ordered, beneath the sheet of asphalt. By the next week, when I checked this space again, the asphalt was lifting in certain places and cracking, yet it wasn’t clear why. A few days later, I saw why. The dandelions had burst up through the pavement, broke the smooth black surface and embraced the sun again. At first a few, then ten, and within a few weeks the parking lot was full of these bright yellow heads, green stems, and a lot of wrecked asphalt. I smiled and laughed, as the Essential Rebel had shown itself in living form, right before my eyes. I used this metaphor to teach about the notion of the Essential Rebel.

The Essential Rebel says “NO!” big time, when someone steps on its toes, to use metaphors again. Simply, the Life ‘spirit’ refuses to be held down, buried over, and eliminated from this planetary ecosystem called Gaia. No matter how much death or destruction, no matter how much toxicity humanity can pile upon Nature and Creation, there is always a resistance and a force or vital energy, what the philosopher Henri Bergeron called the *elan vitale*. This vital force exerts immense passion “to live” and “survive” and to “heal.” The notion of healing, from this perspective will be articulated in later chapters as I write about LPC and the healing model of ISOF. The point to remember is that Creation says “YES!” and there is Life force and evolution, and it is directed with the purpose to continue itself and grow and transform to greater and greater embracing forms of consciousness—or compassion and wisdom. Then there is Creation that says “NO!” as well. It says NO! to any force that is attempting to limit it and suppress it—which I have referred to here as oppression-repression dynamics. More on that later. It is very important in the Recovery process to reclaim the “Essential Rebel’s NO!” And if you feel like this is still not clear, then watch a two-year old, that is yet unhurt and unafraid of its parents/caregivers... watch them when

they tell the parent “NO!” for the very first time, after the parent has asked them to do something other than what the child wants to do. The Essential Rebel’s NO! is cosmic, it is unfettered by fear, and purely a spirit of emancipation, and expression of a ‘self’ that wants all other ‘selves’ to know that “I Exist!” and “I am not you.”

The Essential Rebel, in its most highly developed form of consciousness, shows up in an image of a “burning monk” from the Far East. Sitting in meditation posture, in political resistance to the U.S. invasion of Vietnam in the 1960’s, these monks burned themselves to death with gasoline and fire. While people watched, the monks showed absolutely no fear, as they literally “melted down” and left an image of ultimate sacrifice and revolt for all to see. I’m sure there are other images of the Essential Rebel you can think of yourself.

From our Western society’s point of view, the “rebel” energy of any kind was (and is) not really appreciated. I cite Sam Keen’s (1983) theory of human development and the 2nd stage of the “Rebel” (which comes after the “Child”):

Limping, we proceed on our journey toward wholeness. With gratitude and anger we leave childhood behind and rebel against all that has been given and imposed upon us. (p. 61)

For love to exist, there must be two beings who move toward each other but never entirely become one. Loving is a continual dance between bonding and returning to our boundaries, coming together and going apart. The eros is not all urgent “yes,” yearning to be one flesh, encompassing arms, harmony within the bosom of nature. The prodigal impulse [Essential Rebel] calls us to turn against mother and father, motherland and fatherland.... (p. 62)

The context for this “turning against” as part of human development is not only some masculine agentic fantasy or myth—thought up by patriarchy. No, I and Keen are referring to something more subtle in the process of individuation that is usually excluded in psychology books, unless they are psychoanalytic. Basically, ISOF philosophy takes the position that the context of human society (for the most part all societies in the past 5000 yrs.) as predominantly (not completely) oppressive. In healing terms, this means humans are hurt and not allowed to fully heal, or are in fact hurt again for showing and expressing their pain. This theory of “hurting and healing” has been fundamental to ISOF theory, but I don’t want to get into it at depth right here. The “turning against” is the turn against adultism. Adultism, in ISOF philosophy, is core to all other isms, like racism, classism, sexism, and so on. Adults have privilege and power over children and can easily abuse it (see for example any of the books by Alice Miller, among others). The Essential Rebel in any human being attempts to turn against the forces of oppression brought on by adults and culture—especially cultures that chose a coping paradigm and not a healing paradigm. Keen wrote,

The rebel impulse emerges early in the healthy personality. Our earliest cry is a protest against the felt dissatisfactions of existence. (p. 63)

Of course, ‘normal’ development, as most everyone says in a coping paradigm/culture, is all about the individual learning to live with others, to live with rules, with cultural beliefs, and to “normalize” and “socialize” to become one of the group. We all know this. It is not a bad thing to socialize oneself. The question is whether the socialization is healthy or not. The more angry and rebellious the children, the more oppressive the society, and that’s a fact we adults don’t like to look at, especially today with the enormously high figures of “colored”

boys and men in U.S. prisons today. The rebel impulse is trying to break out of what it perceives as a “prison of habit,” says Keen (p. 63).

Unfortunately, through time, the healthy two year old Essential Rebel ‘spirit’ has been corrupted, and been shamed, blamed, hit, and threatened. With that comes a fear-based rebel, and that starts the journey toward two other kinds of rebel patterns I have seen: (1) Twisted Rebel- the kind you see that, for example, drives Harley-Davidson motorcycles and shows their rebel nature for all to see; and (2) Normal Rebel—who has all that same kind of devious and rebel impulses at the Twisted Rebel, but they hide them, and pretend to be “Normal” law abiding citizens and so on. My experience is with many people, and given the right circumstances, each is capable of a “full” revolt or rebellion, in some means or another. The healthy Essential “No!” eventually twists and turns in the repression and oppression of society and psychic dynamics of the soul—and a pathological darkness and “spitefulness” grows with it. When the Twisted Rebel says “No!” to authority, they add “and fuck you!” The Normal Rebel is also equally capable of that spitefulness but they may not say it out loud.

In the Western societies I am familiar with, the rebel is eventually going to move out of the ‘adolescent’ stage to become an ‘adult’—one way or another. Part of it has to do with merely aging. You are seen as an adult after 18 years of age or so. The rebel is angry, and often never gets over having to finally conform to be an “adult.” Then we have a world of angry adults, who show it more or less, and take it out on children and especially on rebel adolescents. The adults don’t want to be reminded of their own rebelliousness that they had to give up reluctantly—and/or through severe punishment (albeit, there are always gains and carrots to get with becoming a conformist adult). But Keen doesn’t leave adult development at the Adult stage—in fact, he shows us it is only half way on the journey to wholeness. Keen (1983) wrote of the next stage (post-adult):

Nature is never on the side of mere survival. It restlessly moves to create novelty and complexity. It provides just enough order for us to calculate the probabilities and enough deviation so we can never predict the future with certainty. There is something wild and lawless at the heart of creation. Being is law-abiding. Becoming is an outlaw. Being-becoming-itself is both.... The mass like the normal ego [adult], is conservative. Its law is a repetition compulsion. Its aim is to avoid the novelty and terror of history. Its code of good and evil is sanctified by the authorities. Then along comes an exception, and individual, a breaker of rules. Prometheus¹⁰⁸ steals the fire. Adam and Eve eat of the

¹⁰⁸ “The promethean remains a warrior whose battleground is finally the self...” says Keen (1983, p. 184). As Thomas Merton wrote, “In relation to the rest of men, he is indeed a giant. For he who has the courage to scale a mountain, even though the scaling be utterly useless, has at least a certain advantage over those who remain in the plain. He has the courage to admit that he is afraid, and he has the courage to do the thing they are all afraid of.... Prometheus is not the symbol of victory but of defeat. Promethean mysticism has precisely this negative quality about it: since it cannot conceive of a true victory, it makes a victory out of defeat and glories in its own despair. But this is only because Prometheus believes in death rather than life. He is convinced, in advance, that he must die.... It is the despairing cry that arises out of the darkness of man’s metaphysical solitude—the inarticulate expression of a terror man will not admit to himself: his terror at having to be himself at having to be a person.... The great error of Promethean mysticism is that it takes no account of anyone but the Self. For Prometheus, there is no ‘other.’” (cited in Keen, 1983, pp. 184-

fruit.... Socrates discovers dialogue and dialectic as the instrument of eros. Jesus smashes the law of tribal morality.... At first the outlaw is declared a heretic, an atheist, an enemy of the people. But when it becomes clear that the exceptional one is the bearer of the genetic promise of the future, he or she is recognized as a hero.... The hero who took the lonely journey beyond the norm... (pp. 128-129)

The Outlaw, is the stage of transcending societies' norms and values, and striking forth deeper into the journey of the soul and the path of fearlessness. Of course, there is "perversion" of the Outlaw 'spirit' as well, and the more wounded the early Rebel is the more perverted and pathological can be the "Outlaw," as in the case of the chronic "criminal" or "terrorist" who has no purpose but to destroy some kind of authority or power or order that it hates. The Outlaw, in healthy form, is anything but a destroyer for the sake of such narcissistic ends. There is a new compassion that emerges with this stage of development.

So much could be written here but the basic point has been made. In my own language, this is the emergence of the Sacred Warrior (Outlaw) in us, and it is where we make the final decision to no longer live in a coping culture of fear—and chose to battle that coping culture of fear as the enemy to liberation. That gives one a lot of life purpose, but it is an enormously lone path and full of despair as it is difficult to see that one can make any difference at all or that anyone will want to hear your message—a prophetic text, and a life that seems to others as one of "isolation" and "pain." It is often terrifying but not merely personally, also transpersonally. It is a place of the terror of all living beings, you might say. This has to be faced existentially and squarely by the promethean spirit, warrior, outlaw, the individual—archetypes. But that is exactly the context and qualities of the learning that makes a Sacred Warrior—and to then move on to the next phase of development, the "last" so to speak, as Keen puts it:

The individual, the outlaw, the promethean, accumulates and uses the power necessary to conquer the fortress of the self. But once conquered, this fortress must be surrendered if the pilgrimage of love is to be continued. (p. 186)

And Keen guides us, as simply as the path of fearlessness leads, to the next and last stage of development of the Lover (or what I have called the "Royal Leader"). This I shall discuss in later chapters.

Not surprising, by late Dec. of 1992, stirrings were forming inside me that something needed to happen to build a curriculum for Sacred Warriorship. On Dec. 28, I wrote in my journal:

NEVER GIVE A SWORD TO A PERSON WHO CANT DANCE...

I was fascinated by sacred warrior traditions and what they had to offer to the work and practices of fearlessness. I also knew the warrior stuff can get really twisted and fear-based. I wanted people to first have a good grounding in spontaneous creation-making (fear vaccine) and then move to apply the skills of "making 10,000 choices" in art processes to warriorship. I felt then, they would less likely be violent as warriors. But it was just a hypothesis. On Dec. 29, I wrote in my journal:

185). This is not a usual reading of Prometheus but it also shows its weakness and that a next stage of development beyond is necessary on the journey toward wholeness.

I would really like to develop a certificate program “Training on the Path of Sacred Warriorship” and advertise it in the new year... I can use a lot of the materials I have already put together... to do this! I’m still curious why Normand has not wanted to study Trungpa’s book longer... The Master Warrior according to Trungpa, becomes totally free from confusion—my god, I really recognize that now when I hear it spoken of—that is validating. And the master warrior becomes identified and totally committed to the Rigden Kings lineage of ancient times... oh, yes, ... I know precisely the battle and yes, I am just starting, still young, and green.... Today, I really felt like I pushed thru some stuff, went deeper into myself, whatever that means, more connected to my own soul, darkness, vastness and unconscious—it is good, it is ensouling producing images and just looking at them for endless hours, no goal, or purpose—but just genuineness that is, that can manifest for me in this sacred space I am creating for myself....

I have always done expressive spontaneous art works to “source” my self—the Self—to get beyond confusion, and arrive at clarity—and yet, it is not a rational process always. The ‘clarity’ isn’t predictable nor easily articulated, but it is sometimes. I just stare at my art pieces when finished at times. Stare more. Stare again. I don’t know what for, nor what is happening. I only know I am attracted to do it. Maybe it is a way to be genuine and recognize “what is” in this creation—in this creator—that reflects and mirrors as the manifest, something ‘Other’ that is also Self—and that I am co-present with and yet, which I am only an observer to—yet, incomplete, and separated from that greater ‘Other’ Source—Mystery—whatever, one wants to call it. I like recognizing that space, that sacred process—that art—that making—that artist—and letting it be and become, and trust that it radically does something that is useful but I know not what. I can’t control what will happen in those moments of staring at art—my art—mirroring myself becoming.

The Rebel’s Journey: Art Show

Something—something... inarticulate, happens when genuine art is shown to others in a sacred space. Barbara and I collaborated, with others, on our first art/healing/ritual project in a public space. The exhibit was entitled “The Rebel’s Journey,” and was exhibited as an installation at The Little Gallery, The University of Calgary, Sept. 7-11, 1992. Our write up for this project was as follows:

Participants: The Rebel’s Journey is an art installation we are putting together with the help of our friends. You are invited to participate in this project in several different ways:

- a. offering support and comments along the way
- b. offering service in the way of helping to set up the installation and/or technical support preparing it
- c. offering artistic direction for the project
- d. collecting stones for the installation

Most of you will be able to participate in this project mostly simply by being “stone collectors.” The stones you collect and paint will be used in the installation to create a pathway in the gallery. One side of the pathway will represent the “feminine,” the other side the “masculine.” Note: Children are also invited to participate.

This was a large invitation to both the ISOF community and to our wider communities. Impressive for our first effort. In our proposal to the professor(s) in the Fine Arts Faculty at UofC we wrote:

“It is the process of the artist becoming an artist, getting in touch with his/her powers of creativity, that is the important thing. When you’re talking about art that would imbue the community, you’re not just talking about art objects; you’re talking about the artist.

The best thing the artist creates is the artist.” - Matthew Fox

The purpose of this show is to create an installation reflecting the “Rebel’s Journey.” The rebel’s journey is our modification and elaboration of the archetypal “hero/heroine’s journey” of mythology. The rebel concept is developed in the installation as an artistic venture/process whereby the masculine and feminine principles/energies are experienced simultaneously and yet individually in a journey motif.

The proposal elaborated the way the installation art and other materials would be created as a Separation Phase, an Initiation Phase and then Return Phase. We wrote,

A new ‘gift’ is brought back and the rebel once caught in their own destructive patterns is transformed to a non-oppressive and constructive leader in world change.

The rationale of Barbara [a BFA art student at the time at UofC] doing this project with her partner/husband is a documenting and synthesizing of each of their lives and art work. The form of this project is one that can assume a ritualized formate for their present and future experience together. As well, it provides a form and ritual that could be useful to others in relationships.

In my journal entry on the day Barbara and I were working on the proposal for this exhibit, I wrote:

April 19, 1992- At one point in the proposal writing I noticed Barbara back off and we talked about it. She was the one to initiate the idea with enthusiasm and I was less excited. Then I got the vision and was totally excited and the concept expanded, then Barbara’s patterns triggered and she was a bit afraid. It was a risk alright, she said, but I don’t experience the risk, I’m just excited. I was feeling pretty brilliant today and was glad we could bring in all our ideas/ and directions into the project—archetypal, personal, and community.

On April 21, 1992 Barbara wrote in this exhibit journal notes as well, as we wanted to save the research behind this project. Unfortunately, I can barely read her notes in pen as they were soaked by the fire hose of the firemen a few years ago when a serious fire broke out in

our co-op just above us. That's traumatic, beyond belief. Anyway, here is some of what I can make out of her notes:

Geoffrey Summers [curator of The Little Gallery] had phoned yesterday and left a message. When Robert told me, my stomach flipped over. I just talked to him, he sounded very busy and offered us the date of Sept. 7-11th. So soon I thought to myself. The first show of the year [for the gallery]. He's doing the write-up now and that's the time best for them. I agreed. Now I'm dying to tell Robert. It's happening! It's really happening and will come together.... My work this summer now has a definite focus. I have an idea of doing more masks with Robert. I'm excited about working in a joint project with art and putting it out into the art community....

Basically, we both wanted to use our art, which we had done for years, as a vehicle to collaborate in public and in the 'art world' in some way. We enjoyed asking others to help us pull this off. Art was and still is a very important vehicle in community-building for us (as leaders, facilitators, as artists, educators, researchers). The rest of our water soaked notes tell of the vision's and ideas for the installation but what most impacts me today, reflecting on this, is the "excitement" of entering our creation-making and healing transformative work all into the same place. What is more amazing is that there was a world open to receive it and display it. If there is one thing that Barbara and I could conclude, since 1992, the 'art world' and options for spaces for these kinds of projects are less and less available. It seems that we had a unique idea at a unique time in 1992, and nothing since has happened for us, though we have done several collaborative art shows since.

Emotional Aikido

You may have heard of "aikido" as one of the refined and most subtle of the 'arts of reconciliation'—in the traditions of the martial arts of the East. For me, ISOF has led me down a path of having to learn emotional aikido as I have battled with other's psyches, defense mechanisms, fear patterns—call them what you will. The Recovery, Transformation and Liberation processes are not pretty. They take a toll on the Sacred Warrior. I nearly also lost a relationship based on my work. I had a woman client seeing me for therapy. She had incest material from childhood to work through and a basic immense fear of men, yet she was sexually attracted to them. I was next in her line up of counselor and therapists upon which she would test all my boundaries. My wife and partner, in 1992, Barbara, was not all that pleased when I was spending so much time with this woman in sessions at the ISOF Centre.

Then when I announced, without her consultation, that I was going to this woman's "family" cabin (she was married with two kids) outside of the city for a weekend to "process"—all hell broke. I decided I was going with my intuition, and I had no 'space' to reconcile with where Barbara's position was at the time. I told Barbara my client was a Christian and mother and married, etc. We fought, disagreed, and left it at that. I trusted some deeper part of myself that I wasn't being manipulated into something I would not be able to handle. That said, of course, I always had a small voice warning me "I could be wrong." Nonetheless, her and I headed off to the cabin on a cold crisp winter night. Below is what I journaled on the second night of our stay at the cabin, a cabin that had all the fears of her father during her childhood. We slept close together on the couch under the same blankets. She wanted to be close to deal with her night terrors and sexual abuse.

Again J. awoke several times in the night, and I was counseling her, it was much different at night, because I got her to express with the drum, energy, I kept saying it is all energy, and she is finally breaking through the terror (fear of fear, fear of

expressing fear/hurts)—and last night she found she could just go with her ‘night terrors,’ her shaking and trembling came and she was able to go with it, not freak out, [nor] sink away inside like before, but she could make a different decision. It was a breakthrough as her voice would also come back and she could talk about her unhealed painful memories [trauma and abuse] more smoothly, going with the flow of energy without the resistance, and it was no longer me having to pull teeth to get details and her saying ‘No’ every few minutes... and going inside... We talked about what the Sacred Warrior is really about and that it is a practice of the art of emotional aikido—battling with fear energy vs. love energy... fear patterns are all just energy... as is a love pattern—it is a recovery of one’s power to defend the truth!

Later in the day, we did an exercise where I literally “raped” her in some conscious and agreed upon way, without the sex part, but a replay of the being forced down physically and emotionally by a ‘superior’ male-figure. I took many chances over the years doing this with clients and students (women and some men). It was always positive in outcome. Below is what I wrote in my journal Jan. 31, 1992:

her J.’s experience with me pinning her down last night showed she is dissociated from
her own power... she would flail to get me off her and have no power... I kept encouraging
her not to look at me as the thing to overcome, to make into a victory, for I am not
her the target—she would then only be coming from a struggle based on coming out of
painful desperation, fear pattern, having given up before one gets started... based on past
it is unhealed memories (fear, distress pattern) in which there is no real power... because
power based on being “against” something—i.e., me, a perpetrator... and the Sacred
Warrior is only “for.” I suggested she fight ‘for truth’—the what?, she would say—[
still in the fright of me pinning her down physically on the floor] the truth of the case
she does not deserve to be pinned down [I suggested to her] and have her face
slapped [which I did]—like in karate, to break through the fear barrier (the brick wall—
whatever)
-- one does not gain by focusing attention on the barrier itself... (fear barrier is an
illusion in truth—it is a lie)—J. had such a difficult time focusing her energy on one aim and
task (like the archer)—directing it through me to its target of truth itself! Even while
playing the drum it was so evident she could not hardly pick up the stick to drum and move
the energy... and she could not yet synchronize a yell with a hit on the drum with power.
I personally am learning so much about this healing process this weekend, learning
how to facilitate the transformation from Survivor to Sacred Warrior... from being
“against” to being “for”... this is the research work of ISOFCRI damn it—and I’m pissed off
Barb’s patterns reduced this research to personal patterned sexist shit—I struggled
with this myself and so did all of us—what a loss of a transpersonal context—which
I knew was occurring all along and I felt helpless to work with Barb’s stuff that kept

reducing it and me, and my experience, she just wouldn't let it in... she is not a
healer,
or a Sacred Warrior yet—so clear.... yes, I am disappointed indeed. I also realize she
has to walk her own journey through 'the valley of the shadow of death'—and
interesting
that in my dream a few nights ago I was with her as we travelled through a lot of the
grungy streets of London... and yet when I passed the threshold down the 'alley of the
shadow of death (cats)' she was not with me, but it was a male figure unknown to me,
and I'd sensed Barba has not died yet—and then once through the other side I met
up
with a figure, a shadow figure of my mother with a 'gun' (the weapon of emotional/
identity death) and she killed Barbara (who must die yet, when she truly exposes her
emotional self). I just had a clear image, it is OK I do this work with her, I will walk
with her through the valley of the shadow of death if she wishes, isn't that what she
came
to me for in the first place—then all the personal-emotional attachments and
marriage
brought some halt to her path of healing—though it turned it into a different path,
that
is all—with different lessons—I see I am still the Hermes, Guide/Magician for her...
It is just right that I offered to do this with J. first, it was what I certainly required to
go through my fears (upm's) around going through "abuse" material with the key
intimate women in my life... they have all been raped and invaded, emotional
integrity
boundaries invaded by men on several occasions—and J. was a great restimulation
for
me—her 'war' 'military family' material stood out as so similar to L. [my x-wife]....

This weekend was most successful for both of us at so many levels... the first 24 hrs
was
hellish, so much uncertainty, so much re-stimulation—and having to work through,
dramatize the feelings (all terror) and only now an we both feel it is OK to express
the
feelings without fear taking over... and old patterns of emotional abandonment
playing
out all over the place, both within and without... what I learned I must do to be able
to
stay present is to get attention on my re-stimulation when working with women's
terror
(hurts) and wow! I did ask for equal time—thus contradicting a key sexist pattern in
my
history with women in crisis and yes, it made all the difference to talk through and
feel through my terrors, to admit them, to share them....

This theme of the role of a "leader" in a healing or liberative community is always "up" for re-evaluation. Crossing boundaries, wearing many hats, it is a complex positioning. I often would let myself have a "double" in these intense experiences with clients or students—so that I was not just normal "Robert" or "Michael" in there with them during the emotional aikido. The flexibility to take on various personas, especially archetypes, and transpersonal identity "structures" ("self"-senses), this is essential practice to get beyond fear-based conditionings and habits that are learned in our societies... and especially, between men and women. Healing and sexuality have to be unwound and clarified, but it isn't easy. The feelings can confuse us at times.

People in therapy “fall in love” (sometimes), as did people in ISOF community. It is all pretty typical ‘messy’ work—emotional work—and fearlessness demands it. I share my own experience of such intimacies, while still rather abstract, not to entertain but to give readers a sense of the intensity of the work I did in ISOF and still want to see happening everywhere. Much of my experience with J., led to the developmental “seed” idea for doing 24 hr. healing journeys as Sacred Warrior practice beginning in 1993 (see in next Chapter).

Teaching ISOF Principles Outside of the ISOF Community

In 1992, I was teaching art therapeutic sessions in several different locations in Grandprairie, AB, and at the University of Calgary (Continuing Education), the latter which was called “Basics To The Path Of Fearlessness.” I was always surprised to find in my assessments from the university course, that always 20% of the class was quite “anger” and “disappointed” in me—and about 10% “hated me” and left after the first or second session. I was an instructor who never played on the “surface” or “games” or “socialized”—I got to the truth—and not everyone wanted to hear it. But then, for me, what other reason would one attend a course on fearlessness?

From course evaluations from the U of C class, I’ve included a couple samples of the more negative ones or questioning ones:

Robert- sometimes it seems to me it would be helpful to have some examples with respect to some of the principle you put forward... in all I’m enjoying the course although I find it moves slow for me (but then, I’ve never found any course that has moved quickly enough).

Robert- I’m finding the material interesting, but on the ‘thin side’... There’s already been a fair amount of repetition. What are we going to do for the next 4- 2hr. sessions and the 6-hr. session? I’m sure there can be some benefits from the course (but I’d like to see more)

Robert- I would like a chance to share experiences with others. [in otherwords:
Robert,
stop lecturing so much]

Robert- I think I am prevented by my lack of spiritual background, from really understanding the “core” of the material.

Wow. Teaching this course was a huge risk for me—especially, because it was a night course advertised widely throughout the city of Calgary, and just about anyone could take it if they were over 16 years old. That challenged me greatly, as they all came from different levels of maturity and experiences, with differing needs and desires. I loved it, but after about three years of it, the adult continuing education scene was becoming more functionalist and commodified, and some of the complaints from the “nastier” 10% really didn’t go over well with university administrators who wanted only “positive” (riskless) courses—and that was the end of that teaching stint.

I usually found learners in these courses wanted more... faster... and I just don’t deliver the ‘goods’ so easily. I teach from the tradition of “practice” and “depth” and going slowly and repeating things... (patience and fearlessness are “twins”) that is part of the work. In fact, people would get out of this course I taught as much as they put into it—and many wanted

things, and experiences “handed to them on a silver patter”—without doing the work, and the establishing the discipline to benefit greatly. I can’t stand courses that have to “tell you” what you will “get” (benefits)—before the course begins. That’s ludicrous, because no one knows what one will “get” from a course before they take it and work at it. That’s the madness of today’s consumer market-driven adult education (more like “training”). One astute student picked up some interesting things from one of the courses I taught at university (1992 letter from the first time I taught this course), from one of the many learning feedback nights I received in the mid-way of the 8 wk. course:

time Robert- In the beginning I felt things got started rather ‘slowly’—perhaps too much
time spent in overview. I wanted some “savvy meat” the first night—not appetizers (I’m
starving). My own particular woundedness and fears allowed me to become terrified
of the personal interactions you spoke of the first night. If it hadn’t of been so much of
an investment [dollars for the course] for me to take the course, I wouldn’t have
returned (I’m glad I did though!!). I feel you are holding back a lot of spiritual goodies. I would
like more “hard core” spirituality—those who keyed into the “sacred warrior” aspect
are probably mostly “mature” enough for it, as many have been reading and
searching to a considerable extent already. I appreciate your realness, your open humanness,
your refreshing approach, and pointing to things that although have always been there,
you can make us see them. Thanks for all the invaluable vaccinations so far!! You are
doing a splendid job. I’m glad I’m part of your “first class” teaching experience.

Another, was a woman, who wrote after one of the university courses I taught in 1992:

Hi Robert! [written on real birch bark], Immediately after the workshop on Saturday
(March 28), I headed for the mountains to spend several days alone. During my
explorations, I came across this gift from a large stately, lifeless birch tree and
immediately wanted to share my thoughts and feelings with you on it. Thanks for all
the risks you took with us, and for leading us to take risks ourselves. The whole
course was very nourishing at a very deep level and I truly believe that all of us who
participated were forever changed one way or another to our betterment and advancement along
the path. I know right now, I feel different inside—there is a solidness and quiet
steadiness that wasn’t there before—a sense of well being and freedom of unexplainable faith in
the goodness of all things, and of the “Master Plan.” It’s as if for the first time in my
life, I can see past and present events from a perspective of absolute truth. The heart
chains I forged for myself seem to be dissolving into feather lightness in proportion to my
degree of comprehension of the absolute purity of truth. You’ve given us the tools I
cam into the course seeking and now, I may once again pick up my zest and continue
on my journey home—filled with a new certainty and prepared to labour and toil,

a uncomplaining, fragment by fragment, finding my way there. To know you has been joy!! With great warmth, appreciation and sincerity, - K.

Writing, Teaching, Arting About Violence

In the *ISOF Journal* (Vol. 2, No. 4), Fall 1991, I wrote a very different kind of “artistic” piece of writing on the topic of violence. It seemed already, that I knew the technical and rationalistic approach to writing which I was raised on and loved, was starting to feel inadequate to express the realities and truths of a healing cultural paradigm that ISOF stood for. The fearless standpoint of rhetoric and poetics was starting to emerge as a way to communicate and teach. I cite the article in that journal issue in its complete form to close this Chapter Four.

The [Fugue] Logic of Violence

most that [Author’s 1st note: One of the greatest discoveries of thinking and writing in a fearlessness context is to understand “violence” in a new way. Automatically, while writing one morning on the topic of violence, I realized the way of my writing had shifted to something less like linear logic of an essay to a music logic more like a Bach fugue. But I will let the reader decide if it is fugue of logic, or logic of fugue that underlies the revelations about violence from this point of fearlessness. What I am excited about is my own discovery (perhaps recovery) of a way of communicating that brings science, logic, and art together again. Hofstadter (1979:9) describes the fugue,

... it is usually based on one theme which gets played in different voices and different keys, and occasionally at different speeds or upside down or backwards. However, the notion of fugue is much less rigid than that of canon, and consequently it allows for more emotional and artistic expression.... The strange loop phenomenon occurs whenever, by moving upwards (or downwards) through the levels of some hierarchical system, we unexpectedly find ourselves right back where we started.

[See more in Douglas Hofstadter’s book *Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden braid*].

Author’s 2nd Note: [beginning with a curiously wonderful tone like a question but less harsh and intrusive... moving within a continuum of this tone to a tone of increasing intensity of grappling to a point, where ever you decide, to “bite” into the composition ... stop momentarily in silence, to experience what you may experience without the expectation of multiple orgasms, and then continue on as you started in the curious wondermental tones of a spiritual quest... also note: that the composer is not happy with the world ‘violence’ at all... and only uses it because it is used in our culture so often... the author would rather replace it with the word/concept ‘hurting’ but that has so much less potential to create art as you can well imagine... so let it suffice to use the word ‘violence’ for now until our culture transforms to see the same ‘art’ in the world ‘hurting.’ I was just imagining for a moment, as you may well want to do, someone going to the video store to pick up a movie that had lots of hurting in it... this would be the end of an industry I would think]. Isn’t the outcome of LOSS of health essentially violence?

Violence is the outcome and cause of the LOSS of health. We have in violence become SEPARATED in crisis from health.

Violence is Loss of unconditional attention (or Love)... Loss of health is the violence of separation crises which go on unattended as if they were intended. Then isn't unconditional attention the mechanism of Love? And isn't Love our willful way to connect and stay connected with Life?

Healthiness is lost when we lose our connection with Love. Connection, is making Love, not violence.

Violence is an expression of grief in loss of Love connections. Loss of healthiness comes with despair of that loss. Violence is a choice which breeds violent loss of health. IF violence is an expression of loss of Love, and loss of healthiness then why do we bring in punishment and laws to settle the issue of violence. If violence is a health issue then why is it not in the politics of Love rather than courts?

Violence is always an expression of a choice to be free, though it is in itself never free. No wonder we have come to fear our freedom. For it has not been ours.

Violence is an attempt to get free of the net of ill health. Ill health is an attempt to
get free of violence. And it is within US ALL.

With violence, LOSS and health LOST like brother and sister they bond. With an offspring of incest comes a caricature of Love. Love is diseased not ME, not in ME, but totally MINE.

Freedom is responsibility said some great person long past. Violence is non responsibility present. That is our woundedness... a non-respond-ability, wherein all health
is lost.

The irrationality of irresponsibility is totally logical in this fugue of violence. Let this
not numb us more. For it is not violence which numbs us most. For 'True Fearlessness' is the many more paralyzing, and terrorizing of the pair... than violence could even
imagine.

That was definitely different. What was it? What is it? I read it today, some 14 years later and I'm not sure it is "good" art or anything... but I have to respect where I was at the time when it flowed out, and more, I respect the process I was working with to bring the artist/researcher/teacher together. Later in this book, I'll talk about the finding of a/r/tography (thanks to Barbara's current doctoral research) as a new way to synthesize these diverse ways of knowing and communicating.

It seems 1992 was a collaborative year for Barbara and I especially, at the core of the ISOF work in Calgary. We completed our first rough draft of our first book *Opening Doors* (see next chapter). I wrote in my journal,

May 18, 1992- Barbara and I finished our first manuscript for a book together and it came out quite well—we both had a sense it would not be our last... we also felt it was worth sending internationally... for reviews... that is exciting... it is simple, yet it is profound.
I like the quality of it.

After writing that book for a month or so, we both were so aware that what came out on the page was not her style nor mine, but a new synthesis—a ‘third’ party voice of text. We both found it hard at first, but it became more comfortable. We knew it was better for the purpose it was intended to find another ‘voice’ beyond both of us, but including both of us—and that is the most satisfying aspect of collaborative art, which to this day, keeps us together as a couple who have not lost their souls.

CHAPTER FIVE

GIFTING & SERVICE 1993: Living As If The Future Really Mattered

-R. Michael Fisher (formerly Robert)
© 2006

Endless Energy/Endless Service

I spoken about the shift that takes place when CARING becomes HELPING and then across the ‘fear’ barrier SERVICE becomes the modus operandi of the desire to assist liberation. As one realizes that service in fearlessness is a ‘gift’ to not individuals alone, but to humanity, and beyond that to evolution of consciousness. That may sound very abstract, but it was definitely very real for me. Barbara, by 1993, was also moving in this direction, and we were leaving behind the career days of being care-givers as a profession. Our service to ISOF was to a much larger vision of our purpose.

This meant that we had endless work to do, but also we were motivated by endless energy it seemed. We worked voluntarily at the ISOF Centre for well-below income and supplemented it wherever we could. Barbara was selling art, and I was doing therapy with individuals now and then as well as teaching part-time at the university continuing education department. One doesn’t usually make money when really doing SERVICE.

The love Barbara and I had and the context of ISOF created some aura of goodness and learning for people that was attractive. We were surprised sometimes to see that people actually came to our events at the Centre and then went further to support us by buying memberships. Neither of us was or is a “salesperson” nor particularly “charismatic” and so we had to rely on people to “give” back what they got. Our job was, in our minds, to “give” the best we could and as honestly

as we could and let the growth of the ISOF Centre and community grow organically. “Marketing” although inevitable, and eventually became more prominent in ISOF, it never was the focus.

By October 1993 we had a list¹⁰⁹ called the “Community Directory” with 20 names on it, worthy to note and remember, and observe how fleetingly some people were around ISOF and how others stuck it out for years. Some people are not even “images” that I can remember but I remember their name: Active Members : Tom Aben, Normand Bergeron, Barbara Bickel, Sandra Cross, Robert Fisher, Madelaine Joss, Ian Watson, Marilyn Welles, Andrew Zolnai; Supportive Members: Mary Aben, Tamarah Antares, Amy Brooks, Carol Hamm, Ron Howard, Barbara Kennedy, Jim Kromm, Fram Moos, Celine Trudel, Richard Warren, Tara Yavis.

Putting ISOF principles and practices together is a tricky thing. People who came and went, or lurked on the margins of the activities of ISOF gained probably very little in terms of real transformation in their lives. Others of us knew that even courses or seminars are not enough to truly live ISOF and its mission—that is, to learn to live and love beyond fear and coping. A more intense experience emerged naturally and another “project” took place in the ISOF Community which turned out to be a vital experiment for all those directly involved, and important to many who were tangentially involved. That was “Community House” (later called “Journey House”)¹¹⁰. This was a communal living experiment that began in January 1993 with renting space to live together. I quote from our first written notes on this venture, notes which are part of the learning and were kept all the way through the two years of various “Journey House” experiments:

Community House: A Project in Learning to Live & Love Beyond Fear

Introduction: In January of 1993 three of us (Barbara, Richard and Robert) decided to live together. This decision began a process of exploring community living as a part of the In Search of Fearlessness Project. This introductory paper is intended to record (not in stone) several of the concepts that we came up with as guiding principles for Community House. What We Wanted: - to bring in one other person to share the house we rented... we were approached by some people in the ISOF community that were interested – each person has to ask themselves why they wanted to live in Community House... although we each had individual reasons there also were common reasons for living together that were consistent with the principles of ISOF – we didn’t want the house we rented to be exclusive to those people who live in it ... we wanted it to be a project, or learning experience to be open and shared with the ISOF community and beyond (a model for alternative living) – a place where we can practice non-oppressive relationships, healing and decision-making that respects and includes all house

¹⁰⁹ Another list at the same time period was “ISOF Friends” who were around but not paid members. This is a long list and I include only some names at random: Richard Anton, Andrew Findlay/Karen, Gordon Sim, Marg Taylor, Tom Anderson, Laurie Cornforth, John Vander Velde, Herman/Helen Bickel, Tim Buckler, Joanne Boley, Tom MacLean, Trudy McCann, Trudy O’Brien, Rieneke Kuhme, Fran Lamond, Linda Lewis, Charles Nabors... etc.

¹¹⁰ Late in 1992, Richard Bickel, Barbara’s older brother and dog, moved to Calgary from Ontario, and we offered them a place in our apartment for several months until he could get himself settled in. This led to us renting the house that is talked about as “Community House,” where others were invited to stay in a 3 bedroom bungalow; Barbara and I lived mostly downstairs, and others upstairs. Then after a year or so this fell apart and Barbara and I wanted to live alone completely in our own space. We moved into a basement suite of a house and eventually the upstairs two bedrooms became available and other ISOF members moved in there, and that project we called “Journey House,” with weekly meetings and conscious relationships.

members when required... where no individual is to be discriminated by gender, age, sexual preference, religion, race.

Ideas We Looked At: - Community House is open to people who are in temporary transition or crisis to visit and possibly stay for a short while with support from Community House residents – open to the ISOF community to drop in (no appointments or invitations needed)... just to be around, and/or to consciously share with us in what we are learning in the project – Community House residents buying some living items in bulk and using them communally while other items are of individual choice – a house with private areas and multi-purpose common areas – some communal meals, taking turns cooking, cleaning, etc. [the list goes on]....

So many amazing things, not all pleasant, happen when people live together. That was our challenge, to live together based on fearlessness. Well, we didn't do all that well, overall, but there were highlights of great successes. I won't write about this experiment and its successes, but rather I'll focus on one event that turned out to demonstrate for me the kind of compassionate energy I had for people and their woundedness and problems related to addictions.

I recall we brought in Marg, a mother who had just left her relationship with her husband, and her two children. She had a 24 hr healing journey with Normand and I and she knew at the end of it that major changes in her middle class "happy" life in the suburbs was going to change. She enlisted in university classes (upgrading) and stayed at Community House for a transition. She visited her girls daily, and sometimes they came to the house, but mostly she needed to get away from a life style that became soulless. Marg had several addictive issues, and mostly was hyper-active and easily distracted. Although, she participated in some ISOF courses and 'fear' vaccines, she never fully engaged with the practices and learning that was available, and basically she didn't have the time or energy to do so, having to take care of so many logistics and be a mother at the same time.

One of her addictions was smoking cigarettes. Although she made various commitments to stop when she came into the house, because ISOF principles were such that if you are still practicing a dependency addiction you will have trouble recovering and then doing deeper healing work. She tried, and we did everything to support her we knew how. But the healing model had limitations and eventually we had to get "tough" with her, although as lovingly as we could. We didn't want her to be afraid of us catching her smoking in her room. But day after day, she would say she was stopping and would only smoke outside, but in the cold days of winter she blew smoke through the "holes" in her bedroom window, and the smoke would somehow drift through the heating vents and come down into Barbara and my bedroom. That was hard to take. Promises of Marg's never meant anything. Before out and out "battles" took place in the weekly Sunday meetings of the house, I had the idea to help her in an extraordinary way—and I just felt it was what I had the energy to do. I am compassionate with people who suffer with addictions and I know the consequences, but I saw she would go outside and smoke if it wasn't so cold. I decided to build her a heated tent out of blankets and cardboard on the outside back porch. After three days of working, just before it snowed that year, she had a place to smoke, and a desk to do her homework and a light and electric heater to accompany her while she smoked outside. This lasted pretty well for a couple months but the heavy snows began to break down the structure I built, and the landlord and neighbors

were less than thrilled of this “ugly” attachment. Eventually, Marg didn’t use it any more and she decided to leave the house altogether.

It was a fun and crazy attempt to “solve” a problem that I didn’t want to see escalate if it didn’t have to. I believed that we as people practicing ISOF principles ought to be creative—and more creative—and more creative—to solve the problems of the world. I saw conflicts in the world and their violent outcomes due to people not being flexible and creative. And so, this was a small “world model” to work with, and I was willing to do whatever it took to solve the problem—even if it was a coping solution and not ideal. I guessed, in my initiative, that Marg would see that we (at least I) was willing to go that far for her and her issues, and maybe that would help her come further along the path of liberation. I was wrong basically but I didn’t think Barbara and others in the house were right. They weren’t willing to accommodate her addictions period, or so it seemed to me at the time. We all learned lots, and more than was ever articulated out of that. I don’t regret it for a moment but damn it was hard work, and the “endless” energy of SERVICE gradually broke me down and others—and we had to break up the current model of communal living. That’s when Barbara and I said, “living close is one thing but living communally is too much.” In retrospect, it all depends on the level of maturity of the people involved. But to this day, you never can tell someone’s maturity until you live together with them 24:7.

One of the ISOF Community Meetings (Nov./Dec. 1993) was on the topic “GIFTING AND SERVICE,” and Barbara and myself summarized notes from that meeting:

- you have to give to receive, you have to receive to be able to give (this paradox continued as a theme) – I was able to receive after I gave ... when I give I am able to remind myself that I have something worth giving, then I realize I am worthy and that helps me build my self-esteem, especially when I am not feeling very worthy of anything, especially when I am feeling and acting out self-destructive patterns – when I give to myself (in self-Love, not fear-based narcissism) others are attracted to give to me, and my life is rich – a great gift to myself is self-expression, to expand my space [the list goes on for pages]....

Yes, indeed the paradox of giving and receiving was a common theme in the struggles at Community House, and in the ISOF Community-at-large. We never solved it, and it obviously is a paradox unsolvable. At times Barbara and I saw others in ISOF as so not giving—and rather self-centered. We needed a lot more help to keep it running, especially the Centre. People are amazing, and as Normand used to say: “everyone wants a free lunch.” Even in the most therapeutic and spiritual communities, I have seen this over and over, people are getting so much “free” and yet “want a better deal.” The consumer culture we live in has made us addictive to “getting a bargain” rather than giving more than we receive. I think one could argue that ISOF (Calgary) fell apart because most of us were not able to hold this principle of Gifting and Service in our everyday consciousness with each other and with ISOF itself. Barbara and I didn’t want people to give to us so much as to give to ISOF—but we learned, not everybody felt they were part of ISOF in terms of “being parents”—and that turned out to be highly problematic in the end. I link that to the kind of adultism with Catherine abandoning being a parent of ISOF (see earlier chapters).

In the *ISOF Journal* (Vol. 4, No. 1), Fall 1993, I wrote an article entitled “How We Have Learned To Not Be Accountable.” I’ll quote a few fragments from that long article to give the reader a sense of that article and how accountability is similar to the responsibility, gifting, and service, in the above discussion:

I focus on not being accountable rather than being accountable, for the same reasons as I focus on fear at times rather than Love. We all know that it would be nice if human beings were all accountable and loving. Our experience shows that no matter how much you talk about these nice things, humans are hurting too much to actualize them in most cases. I am more interested in what gets in the way of Love or being accountable. Then we can learn to heal that woundedness which prevents us from actualizing our “goodness” which would manifest in us being totally accountable (responsible) for all our thoughts, feelings and actions in the world. Wouldn’t that be great!

A common use of accountability in the ISOF Community is:

- “own your own stuff” and don’t blame or dump your distress on others
- begin with the assumption that “I attract that which occurs”
- “look at what you are doing to create the reality of your experience”
- “mind your own business first... then look at what others are doing”
- “quit playing victim”
- “be at cause”
- “quit making others and yourself ‘wrong’” [or building a case]

The jist of the article shows that humans, especially in coping cultures, learn to not be responsible for healing their own hurts. It is a complex argument, and I won’t enter it here, but ask readers to read the original article. All of this leads to a pattern of being unaccountable for how we hurt others, or merely are lazy, self-centered, and maintain denial patterns of our “goodness” to “give” effectively to others (and ourselves). People end up in distress patterning that leads them to feel “used” by others “taking”—and focusing on that rather than what they can “give” to ensure others don’t need to “take” so much. Well, it is all theory, of course, and the messy-ness of being in intentional community and living together is not so easily theorized, I found.

To be successful as community, people really need to find a healthy sense of “responsibility” for their own actions and the consequences of their actions. I am amazed over and over how rare it is to see someone actually understand the consequences their actions have on others and the environment—and I mean the most subtle behaviors and thoughts. Anyway, it is rather despairing to see how far the mass of society has to yet develop to get to basic “empathy.” However, the path of fearlessness requires so much more than empathy, it requires accountability, and that was a hard lesson to learn for most. Andrew Zolnai, one of my “doubters” wrote in an article entitled “Fall Of The Untouchables” (*ISOF Communique* No. 2, May, 19993) of his own difficulty with “idols” (which of course he denies that I was one on his list) and how he had to learn to be accountable for his projections on them:

I consider ‘untouchable’ a number of people in my immediate vicinity who I cannot dissociate myself from; I do not for example get angry or look at them in a critical fashion. Whether I adore them or hate them, I do not communicate with them healthily. I put them on a pedestal. In typical rebel fashion, I reach out for them whilst pushing them away; my untouchables are like mythical creatures, the faster they are pursued the faster they recede; these include my parents and ex-wife, and almost did Sandra. A key issue lies in projecting my anger onto others; while all may be subjected to it, an untouchable in one respect (say, my parents) may not be in another (e.g.,: I dumped my ex-wife’s anger onto my parents). My ultimate responsibility lies in that my idols are only untouchables when convenient for me; lack of resolution is key to my pattern

as my world is divided in two—ordinary people vs. a chosen (untouchable) few squeeze me out while I sit on a wobbly (read: shifting as mentioned earlier) fence of my mind's construction. The only way out is to jump off the fence (or is it my own pedestal?) and be truthful to myself. Sure I can look at myself and expurgate my deeds, but I thus only sweep my parents under the rug! I expect for example a certain amount of attention from my friends and relatives, which may arise from my perceived lack of attention from parents and peers in my youth. Problem is, can I rightfully project my past hurts onto my present milieu? No, that army of ghosts is only perceptible to me, and I alone can face it, acknowledge it and grieve it. Instead of waiting for others to heed me (and get angry at them if they don't, without showing that anger), I must step out and give others attention. I know I can reach out, but I procrastinate....

I so appreciate someone like Andrew Z., and there were others, could learn to “expose” their vulnerability to the ISOF community. It was a start to Recovery, to coming out from hiding their inadequacies and distress patterns, from hiding their fears. But of course writing it out and having cognitive insight into one's problems is not enough. The practices of the ‘fear’ vaccines must be consistent, balanced, and intense, to make it through the Recovery to a Transformation and on to Liberation. Andrew Z. was like so many that came to ISOF, they were stuck in the “childhood” patterning of their youth and were still living with their parents (not physically) but as “idols” that could not be critiqued and “torn down” as ideals. Of course, some people were the opposite and couldn't see a thing ‘good’ about their parents, and their Recovery work was different. But so many were attached and enmeshed to lives/identities that their parents still controlled and they both hated it and loved it. I used to teach that we all, sooner or later, have to “unattach” from the enmeshment with our family's of origin. Sometimes that meant severe “divorce”—but clearly this was the hardest to do for the middle class people like Andrew Z. And my experience was, these folks as “adult children” continued to project anger at “idols” throughout their life, while feeling inadequate they couldn't meet up to the expectations of their “idols” and eventually—as all “Golden Shadows” will, these “idols” are undermined systematically (often unconsciously) until they fall completely in the eyes of the “adult child”—but that doesn't heal anything, and there will only be another string of “idols” to come along and be “trashed” at the moment the pain and inner conflict gets so intense. It is a difficult thing to ask people to “let go” of their biological families, and their culture—to free themselves from the ‘Fear’ Matrix—to “unplug” as Neo had to learn how to do in *The Matrix* trilogy sci-fi film. People don't like to hear about this kind of work and often they accused me of being a “cult leader” who asks people to leave everything behind and join the cult and make the “cult leader” their new parent. Yes, I see the similarities, but there are many differences too, and these discussions about “is ISOF a cult” or “religion” came up time and time again throughout the years. My simplest answer was, that “cults” operate on a separation motivation based on “fear”—where they scare the initiates/learners “to death” by telling them if they don't separate and join the “cult” then they will never make it to salvation. Something like that. And even there, I would be criticized because I would teach that if they don't unhook from the enmeshment with family of origin patterns they will never be a Sacred Warrior. The similarity is still there, yet they are so different. I never forced or scared anyone, at least not intentionally, to make such a dramatic healing decision. However, people do perceive what they want and that's where lots of conflict arises in community processes.

I wasn't maybe the best teacher, but that's hard to say. I knew that modeling my commitment and responsibility was probably the best “teaching” I could do. My point with doing “family work” was that virtually everyone who came to ISOF and enjoyed it (more or less) would have a parent or sibling or friend in the wide world that would be “against” any such ISOF movement. That was a fact. In the end, even Barbara's parents, who admirably explored and supported ISOF for years,

eventually by about the mid-90s turned “against” it and returned to their traditional church beliefs and values and/or those of Alcoholics Anonymous, and basically “rejected” much of what Barbara was doing. Her own sister, in writing, wrote of how I was a “cult leader” and had turned Barbara into someone who she wasn’t—meaning, Barbara had changed too much for her. That is a common pattern when people outside of ISOF do not understand what is going on inside ISOF and they don’t really try to learn about it with an open-mind. They simply, in ignorance and arrogance critique it—and won’t even engage in the critical dialogue around what is “good” in ISOF or “not so good” in ISOF. I don’t expect everyone to agree with everything ISOF is about—but hey, let’s at least debate it as respectful citizens with differences. Even my enemies are worthy to debate with. I have never seen anyone who was “against” ISOF actually engage with me in conflict and critical dialogue—mostly, they spewed out their distress and rigid thinking—non-curiosity—and defended their own position without curiously learning about ISOF further. I could feel they were threatened by me and what ISOF represented.

As I look back on my journals of 1993, I was having such a great time. I was really finding my ‘path’ with ISOF and feeling confident I had finally found my truth to share and debate with the wide world. That was not very successful. The wide world didn’t like hearing about my confidence in the theories I espoused. One of my first “enemies” (as it turned out) was Dr. Rona Jevne, a postmodern feminist educational psychologist from the University of Alberta, Edmonton. I wrote her a letter (August 4, 1993) inviting a conversation into the nature of “hope” and going beyond it to “fearlessness” and offered critiques of her work (she was Pres. of the “Hope Foundation” for cancer survivors). The long correspondence (which she eventually cut off) is on file, and I’ll only give you a brief snippet of her first response to my first letter, where she wrote:

August 10, 1993- Dear Robert... as I respond to your letter it is not without ambivalence. Even your offer to collaborate was cloaked in the agenda of “correcting” our [i.e., the “Hope Foundation”] understanding of the human condition. Perhaps it is a statement of fearlessness to extensively critique that which you admittedly state “you have no idea about.”

Well, fact is, she was twisting the meaning of my intention already in the first paragraph. But of course, letters are hard things to interpret. I merely was pointing out in my letter I was critiquing the “text” which their “Hope Foundation” brochure was based on, and some of the assumptions I saw in it I thought needed to be challenged. Then, I told her I do that without knowing exactly who or what you are doing as people. Which is still true. She misconstrued that logic. She continues:

I actually thought of several humorous responses. “Do you always point out warts on the first date?” “Thank you for a C- on my life’s work. How absurd of me not to have noticed the errors of my thinking?” My humor, however, perhaps like your critiques, could be experienced other than it is intended.

Fact is, she was livid, and was holding back her rant, and rather letting her toxic “humor” take over. I felt little sincerity or curiosity in her correspondence. She never took up invitations to meet in person or talk on the phone. She took everything personally, as the above quote shows. That was strange to me because she was known to be quite “Buddhist” in her writings and teaching and caring. No doubt, she was an amazing support for cancer survivors. Her letters then went on to critique me for not being postmodern or feminist—and on and on. We never came to much agreement nor did I see she sought to find common ground, other than she said, “I share your curiosity about fear.” When I shared this rather “failing” communication with her, with Andrew Z. one day at the Centre, he listened to my view, and read a bit of her first letter, and then

with a cutting cold tone said, something like “you deserve it.” He meant it. He had no empathetic response for my position, and only could see that I was “inappropriate” in how I was approaching her. Barbara saw it similarly as did Sandra, though the latter were not so cold and cutting. I couldn’t agree with their position, although I could empathize with it. I was not middle class, nor brought up to be “nice” like they were and thus be “appropriate” at all costs when communicating with others (like a stranger or professor, for example). They (much as Catherine and Larry Sannuto) wanted to “protect” the good image of ISOF with people like Dr. Jevne, and I was only interested in the “truth.” Keeping up a ‘good image’ was never my forte. I wrote in my journal at the time, with a lot of righteous anger:

August 18, 1993 – Thinking out into the world—the people like Kelly Tobey and Dr. Jevne, and Sandra’s, are all giving me feedback that I sound like I’m “right” and they are “wrong” and I apparently sound very absolutistic to them—it amazes me, I guess I come across confident ... fear sees it as too confident—well folks, I can tell you I am not interested in playing your let’s be nice games, to make you [or others] feel good... and puff you up—forget it! If you are to be a leader as you claim you are—let’s get beyond petty games... and let’s get beyond your own guarded and fear-based feminist agendas... and academic oppression. I can’t believe the adolescent tone... at some level I want to go slicing through her shit! It would be easy!.... I don’t play cute games.

Perhaps, some would say I was just hopelessly naive of “how to win friends and influence people.” Social “cute” games, or whatever we want to call them, was not my interest. I’d done that for all the years of my life, but after 1989 and the birth of ISOF, I was on a different transformed path—so few in ISOF could see that but some did. Sandra and I had been very close together since the beginning year of ISOF, and we wanted to connect more deeply and support each other. That faded rapidly over the years, and I recall by 1993 it was dissolving to a point of pathology and severe projection. I had done a 24 hr. healing journey with her (with another Sacred Warrior but I don’t recall who). She had requested me to be there for her. I wrote in my journal about it:

August 18, 1993- Wow. A great 24 hr healing journey with Sandra, I can see now how I am put by fear patterns in the role of an “enemy” in very subtle ways, for e.g., Sandra honestly shared how sometimes she just wants to disagree with me, or see someone else have a more rational argument than I in order to “beat me” [that was Andrew Z.’s job for her]—even this hidden inner jealousy shit in the nice “Sandra” and I feel it is in many people. Barbara is just beginning to admit jealousy patterns around me....

Yes, jealousy—very toxic—very real, in community living. More on that later. I’ve also grown very mistrusting of “nice” middle class people who are trained to be so “appropriate” in social encounters. What a bunch of b.s.! They have always been the “nicest” and “nastiest” oppressors in my life, of which Dr. Jevne and Sandra and Andrew Z., were only a few of many. They are (or were) the deadly “Normal Rebels,” as I wrote about in the previous chapter. They “leave” intimacy and “abandon” the very “hope” they strive for. I learned long ago in my own transformation in 1989 that “hope” is usually always ‘fear’-based and a thing best to leave behind in order to come to the present reality we live and need to face full on, with “radical hopelessness,” as my long time friend and colleague Dr. Gary Nixon, University of Lethbridge, would say.

Larry Sannuto was critical that I was trying to “lead” ISOF (Calgary) without making people feel good enough. He wrote, in the *ISOF Communique* (No. 2, May, 1993) “appropriately” (with suppressed rage, I’d suspect¹¹¹) about my way and his way of handling people (applied to ISOF, as if it was “normal”):

Dear Robert, I appreciate your letter. Its reassuring to know you’re wanting to clear up all these personal relationship things.... Lately, I have been working on nurturing myself and finding boundaries, solidifying the avoidance of doing things for myself. So, I have tried to not ‘analyze and project/excuse the people in my life. It’s a very hard thing to do. I’m also trying to stop giving advice unless it is asked for, i.e., get permission.... Trust. It’s true that I have work to do on trust. But I think WE have come a long way in it.

Larry, as so many others in ISOF, would continually try to have me give people more credit for the good things that have been accomplished in ISOF, and so on. I don’t doubt them, nor did I not see them. I trust myself around that perception, but I did have a very different “level for the bar” about which ISOF was about. All the people who thought I was too hard and demanding as a leader, to me, were always holding “the bar” of progress and success in the context of a ‘normal’ coping culture of fear. They were not holding ‘the bar’ of referent of measuring progress and success in a world of fearlessness—following ISOF principles. That irked me continually, because they decontextualized what ISOF was all about—to conveniently “reward” themselves or others but they did it outside of the ISOF context. I could simply address this problem as how difficult it is to “sell a medicine that tastes bad but works.” Larry continued to challenge my way of leading (which he had every right to do) and my notion of a “radical trust” and “faith” in higher principles and not individual pop psychology and everyday friendship notions:

I think trust is built out of getting to know someone and that takes time. Sort of like sign language. You get to know what the moves mean after awhile.... Vulnerability. I wish I could define what you mean by that in friendship. I don’t really know what you expect. I don’t give it much thought to be truthful. What I would like in a friendship is what I call ‘thoughtfulness.’ A surprise gift, a donut, a coffee, a phone call....

I think you get the sense of how people in ISOF would subvert the context of our relationships and reduce them to what is ‘normal’ and ‘familiar.’ I constantly critiqued and challenged people in ISOF to challenge their own social notions of friendship and revise that to “allyship.” In the School of Sacred Warriorship I presented a list of characteristics of “allyship”¹¹² to attempt to

¹¹¹ I know he was very upset at me because of how I had treated his girlfriend Coralie at the time—where her and I disagreed vehemently about the “public” vs. “private” fear-patterning we all had learned—and I was wanting us to challenge it in the ISOF community—it was a healing community and where else would be such a good place to try something different. Coralie never saw it that way—and that was the end of a relationship with her. Larry doesn’t mention any of this directly in his letter (article) but it was there, as he was defending her, co-dependently (unhealthily and fear-based) as far as I saw it.

¹¹² Allyship- (see original document June 1993 by RMF)... excerpts: “An ally for me would: -never give up on me; that is, never give up on having faith, and more than faith in the Goodness of Human Nature in themselves, in others and in me, and never give up on the Goodness of my nature no matter what... and therefore they would never attack me, blame me, attempt to discredit my integrity, shame me or invalidate me... but rather they would tell me the “truth” of what they see in me and what I am doing when it is both useful and when it is not so useful. An ally would never let me get away with running my distress patterns unconsciously...”. Basically, an ally is involved in healing, not coping (as friends collude with so easily).

subvert the social conditioning around what is a ‘good’ relationship and what is ‘intimacy.’ Larry continued,

My experience is that people need to discover the talents they can bring into an organization. You can help this by defining AND ASKING for their help. Then you need to trust them enough to fail in order to get it done.... volunteering is an art. I don’t pretend to be an expert, but what I try to do is appeal to a person’s self worth, their value. Give them an identity. Give them, above all, hope....

By this time, I’m “choking” on his words a bit, because they are decontextualized in meaning (symbolically violent actually) from what ISOF is all about, and from my expertise in ISOF as founder and theorist and leader—etc. Larry, like anyone has a right to critique and be heard. It is just too bad he didn’t stick around long enough to learn more of how he would subvert ISOF by this decontextualizing discourse he used (that is the ‘familiar’)—and thus, his efforts to “help” me and ISOF, which he sincerely thought he was doing, turned out to undermine it. I have seen this repetitively, when people are not tuning into the ISOF context, at least as I had written and taught about it. I admit it is not easy to learn a different context—it is not like learning a new or different “technique.” No, shifting context is a transformative experience and demands a lot from us—most people are not willing to do this shift at the contextualist level of reality. That’s the sad part. I continue to look at how to assist people to do that more effectively. That means I need to learn better how to teach it. At the time, I was often just frustrated with the process of learning in ISOF, and perhaps, I was too critical. Who will know? Hindsight is always easy, but not much good to change things in the past.

Another complexity that arose a lot in the years of the ISOF community was that some people are addicted to being “caregivers” or “mediators”—that is, always helping others at their own expense. Admirable on the surface but I saw it was often pathological deeper below. The problem is, these people end up in crisis in their lives because they are giving and helping so much they never get nurtured; and in fact they have learned to “hate” being nurtured because it has not been unconditional attention they received from others (often it was a type of abuse in the name of “care” and “love”). Barbara and I as professional caregivers learned that lesson well, and we always reminded ISOF people that we were conscious “recovering caregivers.” The balance of nurturing oneself and others is an endless process of learning. Way too many people in ISOF suffered and then left the community because they were “burnt out.” I saw they burned out because they felt the only way they were valuable to others is by “helping” and “caring.” That is not the basis for fearlessness (i.e., Service and Compassion), at least, not when Helping and Caring was based on narcissistic needs to be accepted and to be seen (hopefully) as a “good person.” So many of us are addicted to “being good” at our own destructive cost. Sacrifice can be a very high spiritual and sacred act, but it has to be coming from fearlessness not fear. The task of Sacred Warriorship is to distinguish this motivation behind our giving to others.

I end this section, with a lot of talk about addictions, which I think is essential to any healthy community or relationship, with citing from the beginning of Richard Bickel’s article “My Journey Into Fearlessness” (*ISOF Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 5, Winter, 1993):

I was a child in a home where there was not much attention but there was a lot of talk about God’s love, especially from my father [a minister]. All of us children did our best in this environment where we were expected to be ‘good.’ When we were ‘bad,’ we were punished, myself often physically. When I grew too large to be beaten by my parents, I began to act out my rebellion in self destructive patterns.

I was addicted to sugar. I compulsively searched out sweets in the household, took them for myself and ate them. I stole some small change from my parents to support my habit. As I awakened sexually, I was drawn to pornography, believing love and attention to not be real between human beings. I began using tobacco, alcohol and cannabis as soon as these substances were available to me.

To the extent that my family was aware of my activities, I was aware of their disapproval, but I perceived my addictive behaviours as the only source of pleasure and I turned to them for their false illusion of comfort....

In ISOF philosophy, theory, I taught that “substitutes” for healing attention¹¹³ are going to be part of our conditioning in a coping culture of fear. They take away pain momentarily. Until we deal with these basic coping addictions, there will be little chance of deeper healing and liberation. Spirituality is no cure for addictions, everyone who works with such victims knows that, but it is a good starting place. One has to truly admit to others they are not “in control” of their lives anymore. Then, with support, “truthing” becomes the avenue of self-responsibility and accountability for one’s actions upon others. Richard showed us all how to do this but in the end the complexity of living relationships and community was more than he could handle and he left ISOF completely in a rage and very hurt, leaving many others hurt in the choices he made. Gladly, some 13 years later, Barbara and I have a reasonably good and potentially growing relationship with him and his wife and child. Yet, he would be the first to remark that there is still so much healing and liberation work to do to live a life based on fearlessness. The problem, he laments, as do my own daughters, is that the context for such communities isn’t existent today. It seems everyone is so “isolated” and community living of this intensity is so unappealing to people.

Maybe someday, they will realize there is no other way if they truly want to *learn to live and love beyond fear and coping*. So many of the ISOFer’s, if not all, have ‘sold out’ in my mind—that is, from a Sacred Warrior perspective. I’m convinced, they know it, deep down inside, even if they would defend their “reasonable” choice of how to live (cope) in the world. Fact is, none of them are powerful leaders “standing up” and challenging “the world” and its sickness and destructivity—none of them (besides myself) are challenging the “culture of fear” that has become rampant since 9/11. Where are the Sacred Warriors among them? Non-existent. Through writing, or conversations, I remind them all, when I connect with them, it is still possible and the learning just hasn’t happened yet to convince them of that. No one is ‘wrong’ or should be ‘blamed’ for the learning not having happened yet—it will happen when we are ready, as individuals and as collectives. I look forward to that day once again to live in intentional community under the principles of ISOF, The Great Tradition.

A major issue, which got me in a lot of ‘hot water’ over the years of leadership in ISOF, was how fearlessness is a ‘place’ where public and private overlap, if not dissolve. Few people saw this, and I was pretty alone putting it out and practicing it. Mostly, I was seen as putting people’s “private” or “dirty laundry” out in “public”—as if, so the distress pattern would put it, I wanted to humiliate them into changing their “stuckness” or “excuses” for not transforming and liberating faster. Hey, I always want people to do it faster, but that doesn’t mean I am unaware of the

¹¹³ In a later chapter I’ll take up the exact nature of this type of unconditional attention, which is really the essence of Liberation Peer Counseling (LPC). It is attention directed to our “true nature” or what I would now call our Being outside of the ‘Fear’ Matrix of conditioning in a coping culture of fear.

sometimes very slow (suffering and dark) process of transformation. I trusted myself on my initiatives, but I got threats and nasty letters too. I won't lay them all out, as most are published in the *ISOF Communique* or *Journal*... and because I was editor, people didn't like that I included things without their permission. This was a "test" for us all... I used to teach, and still would, "what have you to hide?" Albeit, in retrospect, I do think somethings don't need to go into the public domain (even of ISOF), but mostly this information never got beyond the ISOF community. Anyway, fear came up when people felt they were being potentially "humiliated," as one letter from Debbie indicated in May 1993 *ISOF Communique*, p. 2:

I don't think we know what community is, and we have very different ideas about it. I think we need a workshop on it Robert. I have a lot of childhood fears from my background growing up in a small town. It was wonderful in some ways and negative in other ways. My parents weren't involved in the community and because of lots of dysfunctional family patterns we were isolated and I felt a lot of shame and vulnerability in the community. ISOF community is positive because it contradicts my past distress. But sometimes, when I am with community and sharing, I feel like it is all a lie, an illusion and doesn't fit into the real world out there. I want to work with people who have a like mind. I would like to work in the ISOF office more but it is useful if I have very concrete things to do and practical, then I get more ideas of how to help out creatively. I do have boundary issues and getting involved brings up fear patterns of over-commitment and being overwhelmed. I am open to feedback. I just want people to give me feedback gently. I don't want to be publicly humiliated.

Right. No one wants to be publicly humiliated, but is that even possible in the ISOF context? I say no. Debbie, like Larry, and others, still could not make the context shift, and they wrote and argued, and made their opinions based on feelings and thoughts and concepts that are meaningful only in the coping culture of fear. ISOF was a contradiction to all that and unfortunately, was not used entirely to heal the old patterns, rather people got re-stimulated and often left ISOF for good. The value of intentional community, like ISOF community, is that a person can't sneak around in their "hiding" patterns (guilt, shame, fear). True enough, that is terrifying and we all had to come "clean" with our "stuff" eventually, in public (i.e., in the ISOF community)—and sure, that may feel like "public humiliation" at times, but it is nothing of that sort at all, because the purpose of such communal truthing is sacred and for the purpose of healing and liberation—which is certainly not the case for the everyday communities and organizations that exist in the wide world.

Re-Organizing To Get Serious: Nasty Classism

By 1993 the ISOF organization was growing in complexity, developing written policies together, and managing a very interesting experiment. In the August issue 1993 of the *ISOF Communique* (Vol. 3) we published the financial record of the ISOFCRI and how the organization was governing itself—it basically came out to on average an income of \$170 per month from courses and workshops/drop-ins and so on, and expenses of \$587 per month. Donations made up for the short-fall most of the time, but Barbara and I put in a lot of our own money as Co-Directors to keep programs afloat. We all knew we were in trouble financially and so re-organizing took place at an exhaustive but inspiring scale. We had to plan more seriously for our future sustainability. We put out financial and management scenarios and had many groups running ISOF:

The Current Organization is divided into: ISOF Community- the body of people to

whom the organization serves (includes membership in the categories of active, supportive and friends); Vision Council (still forming) – of several people interested in the future work and directions for ISOF on a world-wide scale; Central Gathering- the management group who keep the organization functioning; Co-Directors of the Centre and Research Institute- Barbara Bickel and Robert Fisher; Financial

Manager-

Normand Bergeron; Managers of the Fear Vaccine Process: Fearlessness Information & Research- Robert Fisher, Liberation Peer Counselling- Sandra Cross, Community Building- Andrew Zolnai, Spontaneous Creation Making- Marilyn Welles and

Barbara

Bickel, Sacred Warriorship- Robert Fisher, Coordinator of 24 hr Healing Journeys- Normand Bergeron, Public Relations Coordinator- Joanne Boley, Volunteer Coordinator- Madelainne Joss.

The excitement and growth continues in ISOF and the calls from the people of Calgary are increasing. ISOF is beginning to be heard of in many corners near and far. The Interim Gathering sees the demands for our services increasing dramatically in the next year. The support the community gives us in staying organized and clear is most appreciated. We can see the need for a larger Centre with more flexible use coming soon as well... please keep us informed if you hear of possible community or cooperative ventures for renting or buying a new space. It looks more and more like we will be applying for a non-profit society status for ISOF soon....

We have a vision of ISOF Centres all around the world. Why not? We are thinking beyond usual limits as Truth calls us to our Mission. Are we sounding like religious zealots? We are responding to what is happening in our own lives and in the world that is all. There is a lot of energy around creating livelihood for people in our community happening too. The ISOF Centre and Research Institute provides a focus and clearing house structure for the needs of the ISOF community and world at

large.

Members of ISOF can also build creative businesses in and around ISOF so everyone is supporting everyone to make community living viable.

There was the ideal—a sustainable living intentional community called ISOF (Calgary) and nobody had to “starve” or be chronically distressed about finding work and livelihood at the same time. We all had bills to pay. Such an ideal, as we shall see in the rest of this book, was not to be and was systematically denied by several members of ISOF (Board to be). I recall an ISOF community meeting (May 2, 1993) on “Money” as the topic (citing excerpts from the notes):

MONEY: is energy... to do work... a tool... a bridge to get somewhere; money is not oppressive itself... it is how we use it... and how we value it and let it value or devalue us that is critical.

- early experience was that money was somehow ‘sacred’ as it had the royalty’s portrait... and it was a crime to desecrate it... this association of money with ‘power- authority’ and ‘hierarchy’ and close to the ‘gods’ (through the royalty)... set up a distorted view of the original function of money to be a vehicle/tool for exchange of goods and services

- without community (and bartering/trust systems of economics) ‘money’ gets used as a fear-based form of symbolic power, money reflects the false self... the powerless

who use the concrete money as a symbol for status, etc.

- lots of early painful memories around money and our family lives... e.g., parent's fighting, battles over funds available, use of money as a reward system... we constantly

- over-emphasize the importance of money and forget to see it is only a tool...

- idolatry of money... when the symbol becomes the value (simulation).... I don't trust anyone around money... or how accurate when they tell me their money situation.... money is the greatest hurtful thing, beyond even sex.... [pages go on and on]....

We also did a community meeting on "Work" and all the distress people have around that. Clearly, we were not clear of our distress patterns, coping patterns around these basic issues of life and they would impact ISOF work and economic sustainability. In retrospect, we were gallant to raise these issues but we never devoted enough time and attention to them—why not? We were too busy doing other things? There's only so much time and energy to go around... etc. etc. What was really the case? I still wonder. I think the topics were too much of a "taboo" to most ISOF people and they got left behind, denied, and ignored until it was too late, and the pressure was on and they couldn't be ignored. By that time so much 'fear' was operating that the level of irrationality was gross. That's my experience of ISOF and money issues and work issues. Classism, in my view, was the overall big problem. Ownership, and power and status, and privilege of class never got fully dealt with out in the open with everyone. I held a few workshops on it but never enough in my mind. There is such hurt in classism—no wonder a Marxist critique often appeals to me, even to this day. I still saw people in ISOF with lots of capital (including owning land and houses) and others with no capital at all. That 'gap' was never bridged and no meeting ground seemed possible between those getting wealthier and those getting poorer—and I and Barbara were sure on the getting poorer side, but that was not dealt with by the ISOF (Calgary) group. It is classism by any other name. In later chapters this will all come out in more detail.

Scared Warriorship?

I remember the day in 1991 when first mounting the sign on the first ISOF Centre in a mini-mall in the suburbs of Calgary, Alberta. I was with Barbara and her mother cleaning and dressing up the physical space for "business." Barbara and I had no idea who would be interested in the programs we had in mind for the Centre but we had enthusiasm galore. But putting up the additional sign on the window in 1993 "School of Sacred Warrior" in large dark pink letters curiously brought out one of my fears.

I always had this image from the start of the first Centre, of sitting in the office, drapes closed, and not knowing who might enter the door, that there would be these "thugs" of some kind, kick the door in and stand there at the entrance with machine guns and yelling out "OK who is fearless?" Then as I raised my hand, they blasted me and everything in the Centre full of holes and then left as mysteriously as they appeared. I felt that the sign on the big front window reading "In Search of Fearlessness Centre and Research Institute" would attract some violent energies as well as those who were questors on a soul journey. Well, it never happened. However, on a couple of occasions big guys walked into our Centre and asked: "What is scared warriorship?" I kid you not. One of the guys was just a working class dude, and the other were two firemen from the local area, dressed in uniform nonetheless. I quickly pointed out to them that the sign said "Sacred Warriorship" and they quickly closed the door and left, all with a no problem. But none of them ever asked what is "Sacred Warriorship?" That has stuck with me as a most curious "reading" and "interpreting" pattern

in our society. It was further reaffirmed over the years that people couldn't "hear" the combination of words "In Search of Fearlessness"... by the time that came out of our mouths, in person, or on the phone talking to someone, inevitably the listener unfamiliar with ISOF would ask: "What was that?" And often, we had to repeat it several times, and I mean more than twice. They couldn't hear "In Search of Fearlessness" together as one phrase. What does that say about our society?

Often people criticized our "name" because it didn't seem like it was giving off very positive energy because the word "fear" was in the name. Many didn't like that we were too masculine and patriarchal because we used the word "warrior" or "leadership." On, and on, and on, I was continually amazed at how the language of our society was so against what we were doing. But there was still a small proportion of people that "loved" our names. And the most impressive over the years was Normand Bergeron.

Normand, a French-Canadian business man, become spiritual seeker in his 50s-60s, was living near the first Centre. I can't recall how we first connected in 1993. But when I met him in his apartment, I recognized the t-shirt he was wearing—it was black with big white letters that read: "Beyond Trust" or something like that. He stood out in my memory with that t-shirt because he was (independently) at the same "Final Elimination of Fear" conference that Catherine and I went to in 1990. I had not seen Normand since then.

One day I was called over to visit Normand. He had hit rock bottom. He was contemplating suicide and his life was going nowhere. It is hard when you are in your late 50's, nearly 60 and you have no income, have divorced your wife and your kids live in other towns, and nothing seems 'soul'-meaningful. That was Normand then, in 1993. He'd been to every type of spiritual group and workshop and nothing seemed to have "worked" or at least there was little real "community" he could relate to. In fact, as I got to know him, his isolation was because Normand was a "community of one," as I use to tell him. He wanted to be with people but he so often turned them off because of many "anti-social" type behaviors that he seemed not able to change. They had buried themselves in his personality. Once you knew his "story" being raised in strict pedagogy of fear by nuns and priests for years in schools and boarding centers, you could forgive his quirks. But then, I admit, I was a man, and for women there were other issues. Normand was always giving women 'money' or 'something' and they couldn't figure out the context—because he wasn't doing it in normal socially appropriate ways. He was living from a soul perspective (or trying to)—and this world didn't appreciate it—especially feminists. Sure, he would have slept with any woman that offered anytime.

He was a "strange" duck but I loved him and he loved me. We talked that day and many days after. We walked at nights and in early mornings day after day, tirelessly asking what we wanted from our lives. We wanted to follow our bliss, do what was in truth, and the rest would follow. And we suffered, and struggled in those conversations with the reality of neither of us making much money—and I would quit my paying steady job at Quest Ranch this year of 1993, as well. It was an important risk-taking time.

In August 1993, Normand did a 24 hr. with me, as my offering to help him through his crisis, and/or to help even end his life with dignity if that is what he wanted. After the session he wrote on a card to me:

Dear Robert, You did a good job—indeed Merlin! Through your directions and insights,
while assisting me during this 24 hr., I see more clearly now what becomes important for me to give attention to. If empowerment of myself is paramount to me, then my

soul work is all cut out for me in the days ahead. Through your skills and insights, I am now much more clearer as to my life priorities since it helps me locate the rudder. In Thankfulness, Normand, ISOF Devotee.

Yes, Normand was then, and for several years, an ISOF Devotee (disciple). He was unique that way, as he had nothing left in his life but to serve. Many people, including most of the ISOF community felt Normand was my Devotee—as if I was his ‘guru.’ But they didn’t know the kind of conversations Normand and I had, and he and I admitted we were teacher-student in relationship but never was I attempting to claim to be an “enlightened master” and Normand never saw me as that. Basically, Normand was so devoted to me and ISOF, because he saw me and it as so “real” and “everyday” and made up of real relationships that go beyond the seminar, workshop or course.

He was never competitive with me and always a learner. That stands out as one of the things I most enjoyed, and have not enjoyed so much since (although my last year with Vanessa and her transformation is similar). To have two males together, with neither of them competing or ego-inflating or bashing, is a great bliss. I wish every male could experience it.

Normand certainly listened to me and tried things I suggested, and he healed lots, but he was also nearly 60 years old and he didn’t do everything I said, and he never found the same books and guides interesting that I did. He was a resistance rebel too. He was very pragmatic but being with people “in truth” was the most important thing in life to him at this juncture. That latter characteristic made him come across as idealistic and not pragmatic at all. It was a strange combination and people couldn’t ‘read’ Normand well. He disturbed most of them. He had seen a lifetime of people bullshitting and being false. He’d had enough. But at the same time, he was very lonely, and I understood why, so we became best buddies, and eventually started the School of Sacred Warriorship together. It was to be one of my “business” ventures—a new school—a new curriculum for people who wanted to become “sacred warriors.” That was faith alone that led us on to a semi-successful business and educational venture, that ended in 1996 or so.

There were times in the school, with eight to ten students full-time, that we would all huddle around the small coffee table in the ISOF Centre, barely 8 feet wide with all my books in there. And we would process our “stuff” three mornings a week (usually starting at 5 am to 8 am)—then people would go off to work. It was incredible that we actually attracted people and they paid (mostly not very much) to attend. Normand was treasurer and bookkeeper, assistant principal and I was principal and main instructor and administrator. Our first serious brochure read:

The School: ‘A place that encourages the healing and liberation of the wounded adolescent and rebel-leader within.... This private school was initiated to promote recovery of the essential rebel, healing of the twisted rebel and development of non-oppressive leadership. A new level of healing and liberation work is required for the chaotic and transitional times of rapid change, increasing violence/hurting and oppression as humanity enters into the 21st century. The rebel is the origin of Sacred Warriorship and the evolution of Royal Leadership beyond any ‘fear’ or victim patterns.... The focus of the School program is the integration of a healthy body, mind, soul, and spirit, without any religious affiliations. Non-oppressive leadership is a primary aim of post-adult education promoted by the School.

And one student quote we used on the brochure read:

The raw honesty of all of who we are is so rare to experience in this fear-based

culture. I was stretched. The healing context of Sacred Warriorship makes all the difference for deep healing, truthing of oneself and others, and a growing place for the creation of 'True Justice'.

Normand, in an article in the *ISOF Communique* (No. 2, May, 1993) wrote of his experience “... In Sacred Warriorship- So Far” (p. 4):

I begin the day by taking a deep breath and I look above: The sky is dark, there is a full moon glowing, there are shining stars and the dawn chorus beckons. What a sight to behold in an early morning when the clock shows the hour of five! Time for sacred warriors to greet each other. Starting from the Centre, five of us are now ready to embark for that traditional one-hour walk in the surrounding park. The exercise is brisk and invigorating. Who are the five of us?... While the walking takes place, there is talking sometimes, very long silences at other times. There are stops along the way to take time to admire the natural scenery. I like to share myself that I have been deliberate in simply observing, without the usual judgments, the various thoughts and feelings that take place in my mind. We are now back at the office, where space is provided to do some sharing from the walking experience, or anything else for that matter that wishes to surface. There are also exchanges of talk about our vision relating to what it means to dedicate our lives to living and loving beyond fear, which is our stated objective in the In Search of Fearlessness philosophy. We also put forward what we would like to get done or accomplished for the day. While the training is now in its formative and exploratory stage, I am already finding these early morning sessions to be honest, genuine and uplifting. I know that for myself, this is the place where I need to be at this time of my life. My direction and dedication is clear. When that clarity comes, action always follows without fail.

A whole book could be written about the School of Sacred Warriorship and its evolution. But I'll rather share one funny story of what kind of thing would happen in our “sacred warrior” mornings. It's a curious thing to come into a Centre at 5 am. and sometimes meditate by a candle light alone, with minus 20 degree F. snowy weather outside. Sometimes, we would walk in the snow and stand under the black sky and stars, each far apart from each other, and in awe of the cosmos—then return to the Centre and process in a group for two hours. Men and women, young and old—there were 19 year olds and 65 year olds. Wow. It was amazing. I facilitated most of the time. We used the aboriginal “talking stick” although we used a “talking feather”—and for good reasons, as I'll explain shortly. I had seen volcanoes of angry energy in many of the students—and the longer they worked with each other—at those early hours, they eventually lost their cool with each other completely, now and then. Here's what I mean, as I reflect on one particular group session:

One day, early on a cold winter's morning, we gathered, six or seven of us. The tensions had been growing between a few people, and especially Normand and Marilyn, both who were 60 years old plus and had traveled long paths on the recovery and healing path. Marilyn a recovering alcoholic, and Normand a recovering human. They both triggered each other a lot. The large eagle feather was being passed around and people were at least not interrupting or talking when another had a turn. The ceremony is supposed to go deeper than that, whereby we

were to listen unconditionally with respect to those holding the feather. However, the School of Sacred Warriorship never held too rigidly to any “rules” and it seemed better to deal with what happens when one breaks a rule than to have everyone obey it all the time. In such sites of disruption, and rebellion, we could learn the most about our “rebel” patterns. This one morning I think it was Marilyn or Normand (I can’t recall who) that was speaking with the feather, and as soon as they put it down the other one rushed to pick it up and tell the other what they thought of them and what they had just said. This went on a few turns and the anger grew. Eventually, one of them picked up the feather and hit the other one several times with it and it was all in rage, and yet, the rest of us looking on, somewhat stunned, began to smirk and eventually broke out in laughter. So much for the sacred feather—but it was a good thing we weren’t using a ‘talking stick’ or ‘talking rock’ that day.

Well, all this Sacred Warrior stuff can sound very abstract and abstruse to many who were not participating with us at the School. So, for readers sake, I’ll give an example of myself practicing Sacred Warriorship in a unique situation, but one that some of you may recognize, to some degree. It had to do with the “difficult” person who comes into your life and organization because the door is wide-open and no one is excluded. That person, Mr. F. by name, was quite the loud and assertive character, a woman-charmer, and spiritual astrologist (so he claimed). He loved the ISOF philosophy and seemed to know everything about it right from the start, and so he was already wanting to teach others what it was all about as well as everything else. He demanded so much attention. He was a man from Egypt who had lived in Canada for many years but he was in his late 40s, about the same age as I was at the time. It took everyone awhile to figure out what his agenda and purpose was. Eventually, we found out from others in the city that he was a bit of a “new age” group shifter—going from one group to another. He had left a trail of ‘enemies’ as well, apparently. But we, especially myself, tried to keep an open-mind and stay flexible with him, allowing things to ‘stir’ and dealing with them honestly as we went. However, one day, at the ISOF Centre in a group process, he got upset with something I said, and came over and threatened me physically, as I encouraged him to discharge his energy as he needed to. I recall:

Mr. F. stood right above me with the meanest look on his face. He was explosive. I sat perfectly still, my hands down at my side, and I kept full eye contact with him in as non-judgmental space as possible. He was pushing me emotionally to react, and I refused to give his distress pattern (violence and fear) what it wanted. I was doing the atypical and turning the meaning of what was going on into a healing context. I had to. I was very gross otherwise. It upset people horribly. I too was upset below, but I held the awareness that he needed to “get this out”—which was his jealousy and angry at the power I held in the group as its leader/teacher. I was not afraid and I challenged him—I asked him to let his anger rip at me verbally—“go for it” I kept saying.¹¹⁴ All the time I was on high alert, high adrenalin, because I wasn’t sure how far he would go. He was still a stranger. But then he didn’t know either what I would do. It was a stand off. He eventually backed off with his pissed off look and harsh words for me. We carried on the group, somehow. I don’t recall what happened next but no big deal was made of it. However, that night when I got home I shook and trembled in terror with being assaulted verbally and threatened

¹¹⁴ I guess I believed what is written in the esoteric Gospel of Thomas: “If you bring forth what is within, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”

physically in my own space at the ISOF Centre. I felt he was out of control, and this would happen again. He continually told people how he had beat someone up or attacked a cop who was treating him unjustly. He wasn't a big guy or anything, and yet he had the emotional charge to attack anyone or anything it seemed. But was it all his front—his defense. I figured he was quite terrified but totally could control that and turn the fear to anger and rage—if not violence. I knew I couldn't just have him come back to the Centre the next day or at another event without something having happened that dealt with this event of the assault on me and my leadership. No one seemed to know what to do. The ISOF community values were about inclusivity, but what then do you do, based on what principles of justice, to someone who is terrifying everyone. He was a “terrorist” of his own. I knew, so he said, he served in the Egyptian military for years. What was he capable of? I wondered. But the Sacred Warrior examines the worst scenarios and then doesn't hold on to them and create a paranoia. But this situation with Mr. F. added to the terror many in ISOF were feeling around this man. They didn't feel safe in process groups with him around, and he had no respect for boundaries, and especially he was wanting to read every women's hands (hold them) every moment he could get. He was hard to connect to, outside of his own inner reality. There was little intersubjective sense that he could empathize, never mind respect others. He must have been severely abused I thought. OK. I had a plan come to mind. I think I phoned him, shaking all the time I was talking, and I told him he is not welcome back in the Centre without first having to confront me on what I called an “assault” to my character and being. I wouldn't want him to do that to anyone, and I was going to challenge him on it and called it “violent.” That didn't mean he was rejected from the ISOF community, but I told him he has to learn to be a Sacred Warrior by following the traditional rules of Sacred Warriorship in many countries throughout time. He listened to that kind of talk. I told him he has to learn to respect his enemies and if I was one, he had to face me in an honorable battle not just a raging reaction. He was to meet me in the park out back of the ISOF Centre on such and such a date and time, and that he could bring allies with him from the ISOF community or anyone else he felt would be there in his best interests to heal and liberate himself from fear. I told him we would have to have a physical fight. I told him it would be ritualized and controlled—it is not about hurting each other but about respecting each other. He slowly agreed, and I'm sure he didn't know what he was getting into. He showed up as did four or five members of ISOF (mostly from the School). He had an ISOF person to be his ally. Fine. I started by explaining what I had in mind and that Mr. F. was going to have to deal with me in my power and force physically and mentally—as I would no longer accept his threats without me challenging them. He agreed to the basic principles and seemed to like the idea. He had to also perform for the crowd, as did I. That was difficult for both of us—because no ‘guy’ wants to be “beat up” and be shown as “weak” in front of the social group. I talked about that fear before we started and that all the witnesses were to not let that kind of ‘normal’ everyday coping pattern enter this scenario. We were practicing a healing culture not a coping culture. They knew what I meant but surely, they were all as scared as Mr. F. and I. We started the ritual based on an exercise I had seen (although modified by me in this case) done at a men's retreat I attended years ago. I got down on my back on the grass and asked Mr. F. to lay on top of me and pin my arms down with all his might. His job was not to let me up for any reason. My job was to throw him off me as soon as I could. We both got into position, and there he was my “enemy” staring me in the face and I him, me the underdog, and him on top—the rest was full of surprises.

The details of a few exercises of physically battling are left in the memories of those that attended. I cannot translate them well in print, and it would come out probably sounding all very male adolescent and immature, if not violent behavior. I was very pleased, as was Mr. F. that we had come to a mutual understanding, and he never threatened me again. He also didn't always like me, and many other incidents happened that were unpleasant for many of us in ISOF, but eventually he left and knew he wasn't appreciated for his actions and values. That means, he was not really doing ISOF work, and it wasn't the right place for him. He returned to his family of origin in Eastern Canada. What a walking 'nightmare' of a "difficult person." I am not a fan of the popularized books on "how to deal with difficult people" but I admit, I learned some hard lessons, and I learned that you have to manage people (without healing) sometimes, because they are so disruptive and violent. I don't like doing that, but it is part of the reality of limitations of resources and skills, and conditions sometimes. In an ideal strong intentional healing community with many highly advanced leaders, we could have likely handled Mr. F. and assisted his transformation out of those nasty violent patterns—but who knows. We had limited resources, and so decisions still had to fit those limitations. Yet, we always kept ourselves open (I hope) for critiquing what we did with Mr. F. Any community, has their Mr. F.'s and they show up in all genders, I assure you.

In ISOF philosophy, much of which is based on the premise of the healing model of Re-evaluation Co-counseling (and LPC), we would say: *Everyone is doing the very best they can with the information, experience, and wounds they carry with them in a situation.* True enough that may be, but there are times when you have to "boot people in the ass." Maybe, even there are times when you have to "blow their head off." Peace-loving and "new age" people don't like to think these things. The Sacred Warrior has to. Look, I'm as "soft" and "humanistic" as the next person, and more so. I'm very sensitive and highly effeminate emotionally. I was a physical fighter in my youth, and I've done more harm to animals and people than I would like to recall. But there was always a sense, as I got older, that I wanted to be non-violent in every possible way. In the ideal, and spiritual sense, that is worthy. I also am a human living with limitations and conditions I don't always have control over. The other thing I learned just this year, which is related to how I had to manage the ISOF Centre and community (aspects) at times, is that I had avoided any kind of "management" or "leader" role all my life. Although, I was a supervisor one summer job doing duck counts in the prairies. I didn't like being the "boss." I found other people really slack off when they have a boss around, and they become irresponsible and unaccountable for what happens, as they like to let the boss take the blame for screw ups. Believe you me, I had avoided these kinds of positions forever. Until, I was elected on the Board of Directors of our housing co-op in Vancouver. A year into that job and I was elected President. In those years, especially as president, I had to "take a hard line" on members in the co-op who were very destructive to the good of the co-op (and of course to themselves).

The details are not important, but I became known as "tough" to my colleagues, and I had to do unpleasant things and I even had to threaten people with evictions, and carry them out with sheriffs. All very unpleasant, all very terrifying at some level. I had more than a few thoughts of x-tennants coming and burning my apartment down. I know one cut my bike tires, and I'd heard of other incidents of revenge that can happen to "landlords." I realized that I had a very skewed sense of reality and working with people all my life because I always chose to be on the rebellious side of power and authority and structures. I was the non-management sector and I never "walked a mile in their shoes." I have now, and I respect management/authority a lot more. There are really difficult things that someone (like a "president") has to take care of because no one else does. You only get critiqued when you don't manage like they would—but then, they never take the management position. That's what it was like in the co-op and I'm sure many other places in this world. ISOF, despite our liberative philosophy, also needed a "tough manager" at times. There are in the wisdom

books of traditions, a peace-loving as Buddhism, advice on how to be “compassionate” but “with a boot”—popularly, although not in a sacred fearless context, the “tough love” movement of parents and caregivers in North America has some of this same wisdom.

I had one more experience, with Barbara directly this time, which I want to share as another example of a less “successful” event of Sacred Warriorship in the wide-world. Barbara and I had been invited as Co-Directors of ISOFCRI to give a “free” talk to the Calgary Singles Council. I don’t recall how that got arranged, but we agreed, as it was important to share our journey as a couple on the path of fearlessness with anyone, especially people looking at creating new relationships—different than the past ones. We were both optimistic that we would be well received. I have the note card that the woman in charge of those talks for the CSC sent us after. She wrote,

March 8, 1993- Barbara and Robert, Thank you both for the stimulating presentation and dialogue you gave to our “Drop-in” group on March 4th. “Living and Loving Beyond Fear” is topic many of our members are very interested in.

Yeah well, what about the members of your group that weren’t so enamored with our presentation? Too bad she didn’t mention them. After about ten minutes of presenting to a very large group of “singles” a group of three or four hulky men came in to the audience and stood up and out. Barbara says, she never saw them or heard them. I heard them and saw them. They wanted to be heard and right in the middle of the talk. They mocked me, (or us?)—I think they were much kinder with Barbara than I. They heckled during my sharing. I had never been heckled in public before. I guess that’s what politicians experience. It was awful and terrifying.

Barbara was oblivious to it until I told her after the talk as we were packing our things. My god, I was so terrified these big guys were going to be waiting to heckle and threaten us as we tried to leave the building. They couldn’t stand that we were talking about such deep and intimate things in relationships, like healing, and fear and fearlessness. Surely, this was not part of their vocabulary or expectation in dating women. I had faced the working class rage... I was now a middle class professional, and that’s the way their criticisms came across as they yelled them out at me—they questioned that I was there only to get “therapy” business from them. They basically disregarded everything I said, and my personhood was insulted beyond belief. Again, Barbara didn’t experience any of it. I have never forgotten what it feels like. But whether it is a nemesis of Andrew Z., or Mr. F., or someone woman irrate that I have crossed her private boundaries by publishing a letter she sent me in the *ISOFC Communique*, there are going to be ‘attacks’ that a liberation leader must face. If you aren’t up for that, then you don’t belong in politics.

What? Is ISOFC about politics? Who said so? Where is that in the ISOFC principles, and mission? Well, I know those are exactly the kinds of questions that the ISOFC community members would throw out at me, or they held them inside and didn’t share them. Why? Because recovery, healing and liberation work is political but not everyone in the human potential movement or new age would see it that way, and most would not. That is what I believe made ISOFC different, unique, and still does. It also is what made ISOFC hard to understand for so many people as well. ISOFC doesn’t fit any “box” or “category” or “market.” Thanks be to god for that!

I guess the point of much of this chapter is to say, I have had boundless energy for ISOFC’s growth, but I also have many bruises to show for it.

CHAPTER SIX

1994:

-R. Michael Fisher (formerly Robert)
© 2006

[to be continued... incompleted ms.]