

sea. I also enjoyed realising that I had learned a lot more than I realised at Chi-

ron and that only some of the ideas and concepts were new to me.

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1995 Transpersonal Conference

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The Asilomar Conference Centre is on the Pacific coast, part of the Californian park system — hence no alcohol. It was designed by Julia Morgan in the early years of this century, but has been completely updated as far as facilities are concerned. It is laid out in a seemingly random distribution of wooden living quarters and meeting rooms and halls, with all the emphasis on curves and unexpected vistas. From some of the sites you can see the ocean.

The programme was entitled 'Imagination and the Arts: Gateways to the Soul', and there was an emphasis on art and poetry and music and dance and theatre. About 500 people came. At the end of the conference, when people were asked to put up their hands if they were first-time attenders, it looked as if getting on for half the people were there for the first time.

The first plenary session consisted of a piece of theatre presented by a men's group — interesting but a bit amateurish — followed by a poetry performance by David Whyte. This was absolutely riveting and spellbinding, and I was amazed I had not heard of him before.

An interesting idea for this conference was that before it began you had to sign up for one 'in-depth workshop' (2½ hours)

and one 'institute' (6 hours). This made a very good variation on the usual length of workshop, which was 1½ hours. One nice idea was that for each presentation there was a percentage figure given, to show how much of it was lecture, how much discussion and how much experiential.

My in-depth workshop was presented by Huston Smith, whose work I had known about for some time, and it was lovely to meet him. He had some very good things to say, as for example that both the absolute and the relative had an upside and a downside. For the absolute, the upside was transcendence and the ability to go beyond the accepted and the obvious; the downside was dogmatism and fanaticism. For the relative the upside was tolerance and open-mindedness; the downside was nihilism. He suggested that the conservative typically saw the upside of the absolute and the downside of the relative, whereas the liberal typically saw the downside of the absolute and the upside of the relative.

For my institute I went to a day on mask-making, which was fascinating and very good for me, though it was not quite what I expected, because it was all done with paper bags!

One of the most interesting sessions I

went to (from 9.30 to 11.30 at night, which will tell you how tightly the three days were packed) was on Kali-Shakti, by a German who was involved with a Kali ashram in Florida. It involved stories, discussion, slides, meditation and song, and went on well beyond the finishing time. One result of it was the poem which follows this report.

My own presentation went well. I used the ten ox-herding pictures of Zen Buddhism to illustrate three journeys: from the mental ego to the centaur; from the centaur to the subtle self, and from the subtle self to the causal self. A decent number of people turned up, and I sold a number of copies of my book of poems on the pictures, with illustrations by my daughter Peri.

I went to a very good workshop on poetry therapy, showing how a guided fantasy could produce good poems which could then be discussed either in individual therapy or in a group. My poem was written in this workshop.

One of the most unusual aspects of the conference — in addition to the unusual mixture of different disciplines and approaches — was the inclusion of a group called 'Teens Acting Out'. This was a group ranging in age from 14 to 18 who put on an event called 'Initiations'. But it was not just the event, it was the presence of these young people all through the conference which definitely added something to the atmosphere, and made it fresher and more alive. I wonder if there is a group in Britain like that?

There were some excellent presenters there — Angeles Arrien, Frank Barron, Julia Cameron and Mark Bryan, Allen Chinen, Meinrad Craighead, Christine

Downing, Dorothy Fadiman, James Fadiman, Christina Grof, Stanislav Grof, Willis Harman, Oscar Janiger, Dwight Judy, David Lukoff, John Nelson, Carol Pearson, Natalie Rogers, Anne Simpkinson (editor of *Common Boundary*), Charles Tart, Luisah Teish (Sue went to a marvellous institute led by her), Miles Vich (editor of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*), and many others of note.

Sue went to presentations on mountains (Edwin Bernbaum), gardens (Marilyn Barrett) and the inner landscape (Anne Simpkinson). From England it was nice to see Ian Gordon-Brown, and Sandie Ritter. David Whyte also comes from England, and I would like to see him invited to a conference in this country.

All in all, it was a very good event, and I hope I have conveyed some of its qualities. The food was good too.

Poem: Safety

'In my workshops I try to create a safe space.'
(Anon, Anon, Anon)

Safety is a white-walled cell
Safety is a lavatory with white tiles
Safety is a cut-off
Safety means not connecting
Safety is cold and isolated
In safety I can't hear the screaming
In safety there is no one there
Not even me
I am free to write, but not about danger
I am free to dream, but not about hate
I am free to think, but not about the cuts
in wages, the cuts in my fingers, the cutting-off of the conversations
Here I am alone in my cell, open to my
experience of safety