

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY TO SKYROS

Bryan Andrews

For me 1984 wasn't the year when Orwell's grim vision of the future materialised but the year when I discovered a personal paradise.

All these years later not much of the life I led then is the same now and most of the seeds of change were sown on that first visit. In just two weeks I had begun to change my life. This has always been one of the biggest claims made by the Skyros; that it could change your life. In my case it really did.

Back then I was a director of a marketing consultancy in one of London's top advertising agencies. I was drawn to Skyros to have a holiday on my own, choosing it in preference to an apparently much more appealing Club Med largely because I needed to let go of a relationship and find a way of getting some perspective on my life as a whole. Innocent as I was, I was only vaguely aware of what a gestalt workshop was or what a holiday based community could possibly be for but I liked the idea of two weeks in the sunshine of a Greek island.

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From the first day at the Skyros Centre I was profoundly affected by the place. The new ways of relating to others in a group, openly and sharing each other's life stories; the encouragement of a caring, democratic community, an ethos that encouraged people to take risks, do something new, the openness that led to hugs and tears both flowing naturally. All this was new and gave me a taste of how much better life could be if this were the norm in the outside world rather than the necessity of keeping our persona masks and stiff lips in place to deal with the world. Skyros island was the perfect setting for this self-exploration. Dream-like in its ancientness, its old Greek culture still there with donkeys in the narrow streets and greetings of 'Kalimera' from and to the locals, even staying in the homes of Greeks all added to the other worldliness which encouraged numerous personal Odysseys.

As if to underline that anything could happen to really surprise you in this environment, Paul Rebillot of Esalen, California led a workshop, 'The Hero's Journey', which provided the perfect template for anyone like myself who was there for a bit of serious self discovery. At the end of five days I recall looking out from the balcony to the sea and feeling what I later

discovered was called a 'Peak Experience'. I have been back many times since and, although nothing quite compared with the impact of the first experience Skyros still exerts its siren call.

I then trained with Dina Glouberman, (the owner and visionary founder of Skyros) as an Imagework Practitioner. This was another thing that emerged for me from my now long term association with Skyros - becoming Secretary for a few years of the wonderful Imagework Association. We practitioners were able to find new ways together of using the Imagework process (which directly stems from the visualisation classes originally taught by Dina at Skyros) to enhance our own lives and to bring the wonderful guidance of the unconscious to others who had discovered the process. For a while my enthusiasm for the Skyros idea led me to work in the London office where I helped develop a new holiday concept called Greek Mythological Holidays which were held on the Greek mainland and, once again, Paul Rebillot of Esalen reappeared as the group facilitator to run a mythological holiday session at one of the ancient Greek sites. The concept didn't survive as an ongoing project but typified what Skyros had been for me, a kind of personal odyssey leading to all kinds of unlikely adventures and insights, including a lot of unexpected twists and turns in true mythic fashion on the journey too!

I guess this marks how far I had come since the first visit when a gradual process started which led me to do two years' training in gestalt therapy, and to develop my own business idea inspired by my experiences and training called 'Creating Your Life' which combines the process of Imagework/visualisation with creativity techniques which I had previously used in my business career. I have since run several personal development holidays in France for small groups. One of the most amazing fruits of my encounter with Skyros was to hold a vision of achieving my dream of owning a place in Languedoc. I remember a Skyros session in 1996 where I played out with the group a psychodrama of my imagined future with people coming to my place in France. In 2000 the dream materialised unexpectedly when my friend Clare, who I had met through Skyros, got together six Skyrian friends to buy a house together in this magical part of France. The power of holding a vision for your dreams and let the power of the unconscious help you get there was certainly never better demonstrated! Now I am using what I first learnt at Skyros to help people live their lives more creatively. This in a way is what Skyros offered me; the opportunity to unblock my life, to try the new, to experiment - but all within the context of a community which led to deep friendships with like minded souls on the amazing journey of the rest of my life which started when I first returned from Skyros 21 years ago. I think I hear the sirens calling again!