

# ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION<sup>1</sup>

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION ..... 3

    Learning to Walk ..... 3

    Before ..... 4

    The Journey ..... 5

    Being “At Cause” ..... 8

    The Gulls and the Carcass ..... 9

    Stress Management ..... 10

    Napalm Ice and the Heart ..... 11

    Exploring the Unconscious ..... 12

    Eggshell over Sludge ..... 14

    Yoga and Meditation ..... 16

    God was in this Place and I, I did not Know It ..... 19

    Meeting Smiley ..... 20

    Iron John and Finances ..... 22

    The White Stallion ..... 23

    Smiley’s Final Advice ..... 24

    The Family Council Meets ..... 27

    ... and After ..... 29

    A Transition Paradigm ..... 30

    Three Views of What Happened ..... 31

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

### Learning to Walk

At the start of therapy or a transition, I once read, there will be a dream that lays out the journey you have to take. Shortly before my 48<sup>th</sup> birthday after my total hip replacement, while still on crutches, I had the following dream.

*I am in San Jose. I have gone for a walk without my cane into a crowded part of the city. My doctor finds me and is very upset; he threatens to put me back on crutches. We start back with me holding his elbow for support.*

*He tells me, "You need the cane because you need to learn to walk again. I don't mean you need to learn to walk without falling, or need to learn to walk fast. I mean you need to learn to walk correctly." I assume he is talking about walking smoothly, without jerking my torso around.*

*But it is clear that he has more in mind. As we get to the Hospital Clinica Biblica (the Mission Hospital founded by grandparents and led by my dad), he turns to me and says, "You walk this way." But instead of walking, he mimics me making an intense speech. Having made that point, he wheels as if in a musical and glides into the clinic arms swinging and head bent forward. I follow along quickly so as to not miss the punch line. "You want to learn to walk this way," he says. He then begins to talk in a low, slower voice and looks at me more warmly. I feel a rush of excitement and insight; I feel high.*

*At that point Dr. Arturo Cabezas (the Medical Director of the Hospital and a mentee of my dad) comes in through the main door and we shake hands. He asks me how I am. I reply lightly but with enthusiasm, "The doctor is teaching me not just how to walk, but how to live!"*

*He does not laugh as I expect. Instead he tells me that dad has had a heart attack. I know instantly he will die and try to keep from crying, my mouth grimacing with the effort. I say, "Arturo, with this attack and his advanced cancer you know this is the end. I must see him."*

*I awake still feeling the euphoria of the insight mixed with overpowering grief.*

In my subsequent analysis of the dream I recognized the obvious message: that I must learn, not just to walk again, but to live correctly. Furthermore, the dream suggested that this required slowing down, reducing intensity, perhaps bring more dance into my life.

I remained puzzled, though, that the energizing insight of the dream was so violently juxtaposed with grief regarding dad and asked myself,

Is the dream saying that part of learning to live is having dad die and disappear from my life? Is the dream telling me to say good bye and stop grieving. Or, is the dream more indirect, trying to get me to remember something Dad once told me that will be a clue to living well.

I recall in high school, once standing with Dad on the edge of a lake at twilight. We were looking across the still waters to trees on the opposite shore line. He pointed out the symmetry between the height of the trees on the horizon and the depth of their reflected images in the water. "Have you ever noticed, Harry, that the capacity to experience the ups seems to be related to the ability to experience the downs of life."

At the time, I felt Dad was telling me something profound, perhaps related to mood swings. Now I wonder if he was referring to intimacy. In my desire to avoid rejection or abandonment, have I have perhaps cut myself off from the pleasures of deep love and intimacy. (Dream Journal September 23, 1989)

### **Before ...**

During the next four years, 1989-1992, I went through the most important and difficult transition of my life. After two decades of success at work, I simultaneously hit potholes in my body, my work, my marriage and my finances.

My body, which I had always thought of as a trusty donkey, taken for granted and abused, broke down on me. My left hip had to be replaced and I had frequent gout attacks. When I stopped taking the heavy dosage of aspirin for the hip, I had my first heart attack. This was treated with an angioplasty and when that failed, I spent a month at the Pritikin Institute, undergoing a drastic regime of diet / exercise and stress management programs. This led to a loss of weight, a reduction in cholesterol, and a healthier lifestyle, but half a year later I still had to undergo a triple bypass.

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

Bain & Co, the consulting company of which I was a partner, began to implode. Our decade of meteoric growth and profitability ended as the economy entered a recession. As our growth slowed and the terms of an ESOP (employee stock option plan) were revealed, conflict between the active partners and the founders came to a head. The founding partners had paid themselves a very high price for their shares and loaded the firm with debt. The slowdown and the debt now coming due meant that bonuses were significantly reduced. Many of the partners felt betrayed and began to leave the firm, some even setting up competing companies. As a recently promoted Executive Vice President, I was supposed to provide positive leadership but powerless to change a financial and governance structure I felt was unfair.

On top of that I was not enjoying my new management role and felt blocked from starting the “public service” I had envisioned for my third decade of work. Our portfolio, which should have given us the financial independence for public service had taken a big hit as the value of the firm evaporated and the recession hammered our assets. To make matters worse we had significantly increased our standard of living, against my better judgment, buying a lovely house in West Newton double the value of the one we had lived in for nearly ten years. Neither remaining in my job nor quitting felt right.

My marriage was in equally bad shape. My wife and I had increasingly built separate lives, dealing with our conflicts by creating space between us. Our jobs took us away from home frequently. There wasn't much holding us together as our kids left for college. My desire to return to Central America for my decade of public service conflicted with her allergies and career in Boston. Each of us was aware of our personal unhappiness in the marriage, but neither of us understood fully the other's unhappiness or the extent to which we were meeting our needs elsewhere.

### **The Journey**

What exactly did my life look like during this four year period as seen from the outside? I continued to work full time at the firm and participated actively in the negotiations with the founders, except when short medical sabbaticals were forced by the hips and heart. Our family continued to live in Newton, Massachusetts, our kids completing high school and starting on college.

Following the heart attacks I read many books and did what evidence-based medicine suggested: changes in diet and exercise, medicines to lower cholesterol, workshops on stress management, and Dr. Benson's relaxation response. The doctor was pleased with my regime, even though it didn't seem to be reversing the

heart disease. When I described my plan to change my personality from an aggressive Type A to a more laid-back Type B, he laughingly told me, “You know, Harry, we cardiologists have a saying. ‘There is only one type of person under more stress than a Type A personality – that’s a Type A trying to be a Type B’. Take it easy, it could be genetics”.

Though recognizing that he might be right, I decided to take more seriously the idea of looking at my heart problems through a different set of glasses. Illness, several books suggested, may be the body trying to tell you what is wrong with your life. Instead of trying to make the symptoms go away, amplify the signals and try to hear the messages your body is giving you.

Without stopping the healthy practices the doctors recommended I did additional “inner work.” This involved writing journals, trying to get in touch with my feelings, analyzing my problems, inventing options, and worrying about them like a dog chewing on a big bone. These journals described my anxieties and frustrations, they contained long debates over the root causes of my problems and occasionally fleshed out ideas for curing them.

I also began to analyze my dreams in a more disciplined fashion. As soon as I awoke, I would write down the dream using the present tense as if I was still in it,. Then I’d jot down all the associations with the characters and settings. I also considered the possibility that each person in the dream was really a part of myself. Finally I’d complete the sentence “I think my dream is telling me ....” writing whatever came into my mind.

The residue from all this work ended up filling eight large three-ring notebooks. Rereading all of them, as I did prior to writing this piece, was both painful and enlightening. It was interesting to note that very early in the process, 1989, I had a pretty clear picture of the future work and living situation I wanted in Costa Rica. An early visualization pointed me at the most important issue.

*I entered the main artery in my neck and descended down into the inner chambers of my heart to talk to my heart. “Why have you let me down?” I asked, expecting it to complain about my long work hours, the strenuous travel schedule, the bad eating and drinking, the lack of exercise and the irregular sleep.*

*Instead, my heart talked about my marriage. “Harry, you have problems of the heart. There is no real love in your marriage. You believe you don’t need it, that you have worked out a satisfactory accommodation in your marriage. You are good roommates, you don’t fight, you both care about the kids and are good co-parents, you keep up a good couple front, and by*

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

*giving each other lots of freedom, have ameliorated your financial conflicts, your lack of common interests.*

*You think you're getting the intimacy you want. But I'm trying to wake you up. We all need love, are desperate for it, and the lack of it is killing me and you!"*

This led to my focusing on the following five interconnected issues during most of the four years. It hindsight it is interesting that I didn't highlight the spiritual as an issue, though health I did define as both physical and mental.

**Marriage** (What drives my relation to women? How do I learn to get in touch with my feelings and love another well?)

**Career** (What work fits my talents and is meaningful? How do I do it and help my firm?)

**Health** (How do I integrate mind and body and live with awareness?)

**Finances** (How do I simplify my life, align with values, and live hassle-free?)

**Social and Friends** (How do I have fun and create community?)

I also did more prosaic work fleshing out other job options. I met at one time with deans at the Harvard Business School and INCAE exploring the option of returning to teaching. I prepared an elaborate financial analysis comparing the cost of continuing in our expensive house or selling it at a loss.

I read and transcribed parts of my mother's letters to my father written during my earliest years which gave me snapshots of myself as a little boy and illuminated my early relation to my mother. I made trips to Dallas and Central America, used the consulting and teaching opportunities to test the market, collect information on the needs of the region to determine whether my emerging vision was feasible. On these trips I consulted with friends in Central America and in Boston, often preparing for them documents which summarized the options I was considering and the issues I was facing.

When in 1992 these issues began to require decisive action, I took a four month sabbatical. One month I used for a trip to Costa Rica to teach and test one of the options I was considering. The rest of the time, though, I used for therapy in Boston. I attended a Psychosynthesis Workshop and then began to do visualizations with a Jungian therapist. I found a wonderful yoga teacher and tried

to practice meditation. Parallel to this Deirdre and I also undertook intensive couple's therapy.

### **Being "At Cause"**

Prior to this transition period a Bain partner's workshop around people management problems put me in the right mind set for the "inner work." The seminar was called "Human Factors" and helped me see I had to take personal responsibility for all my problems, be more willing to confront my own mistakes and admit I knew myself less well than I thought.

Three exercises in this seminar were memorable.

In the first the instructor asked us "How much of what goes on in Bain, in all Bain's office around the world, can you directly influence?" We were asked to place ourselves on a continuum that ran from 0% to 100%. Most of us wrote down a number significantly below 50%, but in later sessions the instructors persuaded us that the right answer was 100%. Anything in the firm, for that matter in the world, which we chose to directly influence, was within the zone of our impact. It was important to recognize this and "be at cause", not victims of things beyond our control. If I was to be "at cause" regarding the conflicts at work or problems in my marriage, I need to start asking how I was contributing to them and what I could do to make a difference.

The second exercise was to answer the questions, "When an airplane is on autopilot how much of the time is it on course? When your body is healthy, how much of the time is your body temperature at 98.6 degrees?" We all assumed the answer was some very high percent of the time, above 80 or 90%. The right answer was somewhere around 5%. Both the plane and the body were almost always veering off course or off the ideal temperature. What worked was that as soon as they were off course, they recognized and self corrected. Most of us are not "at cause" because we avoid recognizing we are making "mistakes", are off course until it's too obvious to avoid seeing. We need to learn to reward ourselves when we recognize we're off course, encourage ourselves to recognize this quickly, so we can self-correct. My fear of failure was getting in the way of acknowledging my mistakes.

In the third exercise the instructors lined us up against one wall and then gave twenty of us the following instruction. "We want the group to arrange itself from the least to the most aggressive. Therefore if you are more aggressive than the person on your left, change places with him or her. If you are less aggressive than the person on your right, then change places with them." (They went on to define



## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

what they meant by least and by most aggressive. Someone who wants to change the rules of the game is aggressive; someone who just wants to understand them so they can figure out how to win is less aggressive.) I, who thought of myself as relatively easygoing and obliging, immediately moved over to the right side of the room with the less aggressive. To my genuine surprise, my partners kept moving me down the row to the left until it was clear they considered me the most aggressive in the room. Given that Bain partners, as a group are predominantly type A personalities, not very shy or retiring, this was a powerful statement. With other tests it made me more aware I might not know myself as well as I thought, that the behaviors which had served me well in the past might need to be modified.

### **The Gulls and the Carcass**

In late 1989 and early 1990 the main focus of my journals was on the deteriorating situation at Bain and my anger with the founders. At times I felt like the monkey caught with his hand in the jar, unwilling to take the radical step of leaving because I would not let go of the “peanuts.”

A dream at that time told me that if we were to save Bain, we had to rebuild it on solid values, that none of us could do this alone, we had to do it as a team, and that I need to be ready to detach from Bain if our efforts failed to change the governance structure or be sufficient to rescue the firm.

*We are at a big roast of a pig or cow (on the sloping lawn in front of a large building of white sandstone that reminded me of Blanchard Hall at Wheaton, the Midwestern college I attended). A large group of white gulls have gathered around. They carry the carcass up into the air and onto the roof of the building. I notice that they don't get the carcass all the way up on roof but only onto the ice that has formed over the gutters.*

*Sure enough, as soon as the gulls stop flying and settle down to pick at the carcass, both the carcass and the gulls come tumbling down. I expect to see the gulls fly off the carcass like a cloud of mosquitoes but most don't. The carcass with about 7 or 8 gulls hits the ground rolling over and over down the hill. I awake convinced the gulls have been killed.*

In the entry analyzing the dream I reported on a meeting the previous day among the Directors/EVPs in which we discussed the negative momentum in the firm, and how tired and burnt out most of us were felling and the issues of equity and governance came to a head.

## Life Stories

The mass of hanging ice on a gutter has an association of real danger for me. At our house at 122 Temple, hanging ice used to form above the side door and I always entered the house expecting that at any minute it could fall and if I was under it, an icicle would pierce my brain. It also strikes me that ice is a metaphor for the values of our firm – cold and ultimately not very solid...

What is the message? It feels like a clear warning to me about how Bain & Co could fail in the conflict of the partners over the division of the rewards. When the partners stop flying and start fighting over the results, the firm will come crashing down and the birds who stay will get killed.

The dream I thought was telling me that the key thing is to keep the birds flying and make sure that the meat is placed on the roof of the building, on solid values, the non-flashy excellence of the Midwestern schools. I should join with others to try and save it, but if I could not get it placed correctly on the roof, I needed to be ready to leave. (Dream Journal October 13, 1989)

## Stress Management

My heart attack in April of 1990 was a big wakeup call. I had been having shortness of breath and other signs of angina which I had not recognized for several days. I left a Bain meeting in the Four Seasons at lunch time to see my doctor. In his office I had a heart episode which caused him to immediately send me to the Hospital. Blood tests confirmed the next day that I had been having heart attacks. A subsequent angiogram confirmed blockage and the first intervention, a balloon angioplasty, was done while I was still in the hospital. Tests showed my cholesterol at 288. I was overweight by about 20 lbs.

The doctors put me into various programs designed to get me on a reduced fat diet, to start exercising on a regular basis, and to learn stress management techniques. The stress management program of the hospital, influenced by Dr. Benson's research, taught a framework and techniques that made a lot of sense to me.

“External stressors” kick off the “flight or fight” response. This response was very useful for our ancestors faced with a tiger but is often inappropriate to our situation. The physiological reactions, particularly if too frequent and prolonged, begin to cause health problems.

Stress management means first reducing to the extent possible the external stressors in your environment, the things that set you off. Next, it requires you to recognize and modify the self talk that converts the external stressor into the threat

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

or crisis that triggers the fight or flight response. If you come to a long toll booth line, your self-talk can be, “Shit! I’m going to be late!” or you can tell yourself “This is one of those uncontrollable and unexpected vacations, an opportunity to take some deep breaths and put some soothing music on the radio.”

The most important step in stress management, though, is learning to shut off the fight or flight response, to learn the “relaxation response.” Once the adrenalin is surging through your system you need to learn the deep breathing and meditation techniques that restores balance to the body.

### **Napalm Ice and the Heart**

Dreams began to give me a sense that “anger and hostility” were among the big stressors in my life and that there might be a direct connection between that hostility and the buildup of cholesterol in my arteries.

***Dream #1** We are in an elegant high ceilinged first floor apartment in New York with marble, fine woods and chandeliers. Some black kids break into the apartment and pull guns on us. They begin looting. I am filled with a deep rage and through trickery get the drop on them. I have one young, round faced kid with glasses up against the wall with a gun in his mouth. He and the others are terrified as I consider the best way of killing them.*

*The scene shifts and now the entire apartment building is under assault. People are shooting in from the outside. I get everyone up on the roof of the complex; it is then I realize that the black kids are really my allies. We repel the assault by throwing down fire bombs, little pink packets of napalm. I no longer feel a murderous rage, instead feel that these kids aren’t so bad.*

*The scene shifts again and my group is now at the top of a high mountain looking down on the apartment complex. The sun is shining on a steep grassy meadow. Being up this high somehow puts everything into perspective. The rage and anger are gone and my mood is expansive and altruistic. However, I recognize that the mountain is very steep, in some places like the sheer wall of a building and that I have to be careful to get everyone down safely. I awake. (Dream Nov 5, 1990)*

***Dream #2** I’m down on the New York waterfront. It’s dark and cold, as if we are in an ice age. The river is like a giant glacier disgorging itself. We cast off into the ice river on a barge carrying garbage and toxic chemicals.*

*To my surprise we are carried up the river. Along the way we see buried in the ice much larger, fancier ships. We arrive at a bluff in which long tunnels and rooms have been carved. It is lit up inside but feels unused like a derelict ship on Star Trek. I have the sense that this is a staging area from which the heroes will be chosen to go off on a dangerous quest. I am eager to show that I am qualified, but underneath scared that I won't pass the test. (Dream Nov 7, 1990)*

I came to believe that my hostility and anger was like the pink napalm that was clogging my arteries. The ice river, liquid moving upstream was also a picture of my arteries, frozen, buried feelings and empty tunnels. My body was telling me dealing with anger and unfreezing my feelings was a life and death test. I wondered if there was some creative way to use the napalm to unfreeze the river.

### **Exploring the Unconscious**

I also began to assume that the people I encountered in my dreams, particularly if they recurred in several of the dreams or visualization, were actually parts of myself buried in my unconscious. In this way I began to identify the group I later came to know as “my family council”.

One of the earliest was a little boy of about four or five years of age. In several of the dreams he showed up as an urchin in tattered clothing, eager to be hugged, desperate for attention from his busy parents. In another visualization he was a deep blue and blurred, sitting arms wrapped around his legs, chin on his knees. He looked like someone trapped in blue ice “lonely” and “hurt” from whom I could get no response.

Later I recognized the same little boy described in a letter my mother wrote my father when I was about four years of age. “Last night Harry was so humiliated at wetting his pants that he had tip-toed out of bed, walked in the darkness to the bathroom and was quietly sitting hugging his knees on the cold floor of the bathroom in his wet pajamas when I found him. It broke my heart to see him so sad.”

Another was a girl about 9 or 10 dressed in a beautiful white Easter dress. She was black-haired, looked Eurasian or at times blond like my sister Clare. In one dream

*The little girl falls through the ice of a pond and comes running underneath the ice toward where I am standing. She is trapped and will quickly run out of air. I frantically try to break the ice with my hands, bite it, beat it to no*

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

*avail. I know she is running out of oxygen. Finally I grab a steel bat with hook on the end and drive it through the ice like a harpoon, fearing that it may impale her. It breaks the ice, barely missing her head. She pushes her head through the ice finally able to breathe. I awake. (Dream Nov 6, 1990)*

I paid particular attention to the women who appeared in my dreams. I assumed they were part of my unconscious anima or feminine side. Some were young and attractive, often faceless, seductive, but too young for me.

Others I intensely disliked.

*There is a very unattractive lady, she has thick glasses, she is ugly, no chin, sharp nose, rough skin, very unattractive personality. Around some incident I begin to give her a tongue lashing, laying out her faults in a severe manner, more and more vehemently.*

*Then a strange thing happens. She turns toward me, asks me to kiss her, promises to be a different person if I kiss her. I feel awkward in front of all the people who have been my audience as I berated her. Although her outward appearance hasn't changed, she has become more attractive to me. I wonder if a lot of her unattractive behavior stemmed from not being loved. I recognize that as I had gotten vehement, I had become unnecessarily cruel. (Dream Nov 8, 1990)*

In another dream I met the classic wise woman.

*I am in Ecuador and have to get to New York for a critical client meeting by the next evening. No direct commercial flights will get me there on time, but by heading south and connecting to an overnight flight out of Brazil I might be able to make it.*

*Flying south my plane is forced to make a crash landing on a rural airstrip in the jungles of Brazil. Among the villagers who come to see us is a middle aged Peace Corps woman who is involved in a development project in the village. I explain my urgent need to reach New York in time for the meeting. She tells me that there is no way I can make it; the very quickest route out is overland and will take at least two or three days.*

*But she advises me, "You really need to journey out by water though it may take several weeks." I sense that she is suggesting the journey is not about reaching New York but what happens on the way and that it will take more time than I want to give it. I associate water with feelings. She has an aura about her that seems very centered and wise.*

*I find that I am also attracted to her. Teasingly I ask her “If I go by water, will you be willing to come with me?” She acts shocked by my bold proposition, but from her answer I know that she will join me and that we will make love on the trip. I climb on the boat that is to take us up the green river through the jungle and sit at the bow inside a large coiled rope feeling an enormous sense of well being and excitement.*

The message I took away was that thinking (traveling by air) was not as likely to take me where I needed to go as getting in touch with feelings (traveling by water), and that when I did, I might find the love and intimacy I wanted.

### **Eggshell over Sludge**

In traditional therapies earlier in my life, I felt I had manipulated the therapists with “head trips.” So when it was suggested that visualizations might be more useful, I signed up for a weekend workshop led by Ramsay Raymund to test the process.

One of the early exercises in the workshop was to take out a sheet of paper and with words or phrases answer the question, “Who am I?”

*I was aware as I started to answer the question that I felt tired and sad and very quiet inside. My answers came out in something like the following order: Consultant ... Sad ... Last in the line of Latin American Strachans ... 50 ... Empty ... Unformed ... Tired ... Burnt out.*

*Mid-list I thought “These answers are all so discouraged and empty of energy. Where is the Harry that is known for being an enthusiastic promoter? He will probably appear shortly.”*

*But I did not try to change or guide the answers and they continued: An empty enthusiast ... The hole in the doughnut ... A frenetic seeker... Owner of a big empty house ... A fake, a synthetic person.*

*I wondered, “Boy! is there no end to these negative images?” But the phrases continued among them ... An unraveling string figure in a New Yorker cartoon ... A blinking husband, in and out of communication ... A dancer, who misses the music ... An apostate of the church with no desire to return but wanting to talk with God.*

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

*With more than fifty words or phrases, not a one of them positive it dawned on me that perhaps my highly developed persona was a great illusion, a narrow thin shell sitting on a vast, deep, dark, sad, ugly unconscious. The denizens of my depths were, in this moment of quietness, making a very profound, serious and strong statement. "Who is Harry? He is not what you think he is and we are not going to give you the satisfaction of thinking he is even a little bit like what you've always imagined."*

The next day we did several exercises drawing pictures with colored pens with our non-writing hand. The first drawing was to be "What most wants to emerge in my life now?"

The picture that came to me was an Eiffel Tower, a structure of huge rusty iron beams, up through which came a pipe spewing contaminating and defiling sludge and oil over a flat plain of yellow wheat and green and red flowers. It was much bigger than your normal oil well but looked like one. As I looked closer at the gushing sludge it was not just black and blue, but full of all sorts of colors – red, brown, green. The words I wrote under the picture: Sludge ... oil ... Dark, smelly, greasy ... Black blue purple, red ... Heavy, sad, tired, valuable.

My picture of "What will most help to bring this into being?" was a tiny black inner tube with a rider head back in bright red trunks on a vast ocean with huge rolling and crashing waves. The words underneath: Floating ... head back ... Going deep ... Trust the current ... Feel the water in every pore ... Happy swim trunks.

As I started the exercise I was still in the grip of the quiet tired mood but found myself loving my paintings, full of enthusiasm, very proud of them in ways that reminded me of myself as a little boy when I felt I was doing well in school. "Damn, these are good pictures; this is fun!" I kept thinking.

The last exercise was to identify those most likely to be distressed by what is emerging. I drew a woman sitting at a desk labeled "School Teacher Mother." On the table was a big trophy for a perfect boy. The words describing this teacher: "orderly ... overwhelmed ... ambitious ... needing a strong man ... afraid of failure." I thought I was describing my mother but realized I was really describing an inner part of myself.

In psychosynthesis, we were told in a lecture, there are several key assumptions. There is a transcendental personal self or soul which is an inner spring of health and life that can be trusted. There are also many sub-personalities in the unconscious which need to be heard, understood, integrated, whose energy then becomes available to the orchestra director. There is also the observing "I" whose

task it is to take the script of the soul and direct the various players. Body, feelings, mind are all vehicles of this personality and integrating them holistically is a work of the self. The task of therapy is first to help strengthen the "I" in his awareness of all the players and his ability to integrate them in pursuit of the script of the transcendental Self. The second step is to then tighten the link between the Transcendental Self and the "Personal I".

While still somewhat agnostic about the framework, I came out of the workshop motivated to do further visualization work with a therapist. I had been struck by the amount of sludge and sadness in my psyche. I was also beginning to see how my mother had affected my relation to other women, why I had both a deep desire for "unconditional love" and a deep suspicion of that love. My fear was that the only way to achieve love was to be what they wanted, rather than what I wanted for myself.

### **Yoga and Meditation**

Along with stress management I was encouraged by many to learn yoga and practice meditation. My many attempts mainly convinced me that my body was inflexible and my mind unruly. I was lucky, though, at Pritikin to be given the name of a yoga teacher in Boston, Dassa Oppenheimer, who was described as "a wonderful teacher but who only worked with other teachers of yoga." Miraculously she was willing to meet with me for four two-hour sessions, and she taught me much more than some good positions as a journal entry from that period captures.

Dassa is an older woman – I think she must be close to 70 – but she is obviously in great shape. She is South African, speaks English with a heavy accent, an odd but pleasing speech. She gets very animated talking. I think that Grandmother Strachan may have been tiny and dynamic like her. She has strong opinions and is one of Iyengar's pupils from way back. I noticed a full shelf of all Jung's books: "He is my guru," she told me. She is also a devotee of Kirshnamurti and lent me one of his books that is copyrighted 1970 and has been stained brown around the edges by the sun. She uses the Indian names for all the positions, and I have trouble remembering them. She has been working "too rapidly," she protests, to teach me some positions that I can use in Central America. I learn the "ta tano" or how to stand properly, like a mountain, also a corpse-like posture, lying on the ground with a pillow in the center of my back, opening up the chest. The painful positions for me are those sitting up or trying to lean over forward. My hamstrings sing out and ache.



## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

She watches me, seeing things in my body I cannot imagine how she knows. But she is very soft and encouraging and makes me feel that I am doing well. Every now and then she will read to me a passage or give a long discourse. She is unapologetically religious about the yoga. I am enjoying our sessions and like her very much.

She said yesterday, "All you need to know you will find in yourself: you do not need to become dependent on any therapist. As you get above your feelings, you will gain perspective on them and they will solve themselves. It will not help you to get down and bury yourself in your feelings. You will just get lost down there." (Journal April 24, 1992)

Several weeks later, in one of the most painful and turbulent periods of our marriage, while I was down teaching a course at INCAE and living in a simple little apartment on the seventh hole of the Cariari golf course, I described how I used her training.

It's 7 a.m. and already I have had a wonderful day. I woke up at about 4 a.m. worrying about Deirdre and the activities of the day. I began thinking about the month ahead and the routine I would like to establish, which would include regular meditation, exercise, yoga positions, some "spiritual reading" like Krishnamurti or "God Was In this Place ..." Decided at 4:30 a.m. to get up and get started.

I have brought along my rubber mat for Yoga, and so I went through the rooms of the apartment looking for a good place to sit quietly, a place that might take on restful connotations. I ended up deciding on sofa pillows in a narrow area under the stairs. It felt like a safe, cozy, quiet place and I must have sat for about 15-20 minutes with my back straight and head down.

I scanned the body and noticed the pressure under the side of my feet, the feel in the groin of stretching, the stomach, the heart. I watched my breath and did some paranya breathing. I recited the 23rd Psalm in rhythm to my breath and several of the phrases took on new meaning;

"Thou restoreth my soul" in the sense of putting it back together, helping me integrate the different pieces.

"Thy rod and thy staff comfort me" – not a punishing rod used for whipping or prodding but the wizard's staff of magic and power for protection and all sorts of energy.

I was quiet for a while. I began to think of Deirdre and then laid the thoughts gently to one side. After sitting for a while I got up and experimented with lying on my back, butt up on the couch feet against the wall, a folded towel in the small of my back. I grew roots out of my shoulder and stomach down into the wood floor. I lifted my legs up over my head and felt the tension ease and the stretch in the small of my back.

I went out for a walk and noticed the flowers along the path for the first time. There were red, yellow, white and purple flowers on bushes and in a bed under a tree. The only names I knew were roses and bougainvillea and I thought, "I should get a book with the names of flowers." Then I wondered if knowing the names of flowers helped one see them more freshly or got in the way of that. It was just before 6 a.m. and the morning felt fresh. It had not rained during the night. I walked down the road, the mountains were very clear against the pale blue sky.

I noticed the grass, the great variety of color in it – silver yellow, blue, brown, purple and green – the first tinges of color after the dry season's end. Under foot it felt uneven and hardy, tough in the sense of hanging in there.

I thought about the delight I am having in the simplicity but comfort of the apartment. It almost feels too big. It is nice to have only a couple of things in each drawer. It is nice to have only a few pieces of clothing and books, so that each takes on individual personality and feels special. I felt grateful for what I had, undeserving. This is a very beautiful place I am in right now, I thought.

At one point thoughts of Deirdre and our relation came into my mind bringing a deep sense of pain. I thought, "At least I am feeling alive, feeling things deeply. I remembered reading somewhere that you have to hold delight and pain as neither being more significant or better than the other; you must let them both come and go with the same spirit of gratitude and wonder. (Journal May 7, 1992)

On another walk I experienced the power of living in the present.

Coming back down the hill on the other much higher side of the golf course with the sun at my back, I noticed a beautiful bougainvillea bush, set in a winding path along the edge of a ravine. I walked toward it and found beside it a gnarled tree that looked like something out of a Japanese garden. Beside it was the thick blackened trunk of a tree that had been struck by lightning and decapitated. Each different bush or tree seemed incredibly

beautiful to me. Big boulders squatted beneath the trees. I could imagine them muttering to each other about the agitated humans that walk by.

I thought, "From the time about 10 minutes ago when I noticed the bougainvilleas, I have been absorbed in the present, in the beauty around me. I have also been at peace. I have not been living in the past or the future. That, a guru would say, is progress. The guru would probably drily note that I have also been watching myself watch, thinking I need to remember to write that in my journal, evidence I haven't gotten free of thought and desire. But I am happy I have at least lived in the present these past 10 minutes. I am grateful for the beauty and the quiet. (Journal May 13, 1992)

### **God was in this Place and I, I did not Know It**

During my time in Costa Rica I read a book by Rabbi Kushner on the multiple ways Jewish teachers have interpreted the words of Jacob after his famous dream.

The chapter I read this morning was based on Rabbi Rashi's interpretation (one of Kushner's favorite) of the verse. "Wow! God was in this place and I, I did not realize it." It is about how spirituality is waking up, recognizing that the spiritual and the material are not separate, and that if we pay attention and listen, God is always speaking at Mt. Sinai.

I read the chapter twice slowly, underlining and chewing on the story. Then I sat down to meditate with a strong sense that "God is in this place" in my apartment. The words marched through my mind in a stately dance. "Feel his support and safety, the solid rootedness he gives your bottom as you sit here. Feel the safety of this place; feel his energy tingling through every nerve in your body. Be quiet. Be patient. Listen.

Rabbi Kushner makes the point that I am not reading about Jacob, I am reading about me. I have some important parallels with Jacob. Jacob came to the Place and to God tired, scared, running away from a strange family. I woke up this morning scared, the adrenalin coursing through my veins, running away from my strange family situation.

In Jacob's dream God talks to him about his grandfather Abraham and father Isaac. He promises to be with him and his descendants. Sitting here quietly I hear God telling me, *"I was in this place, Costa Rica, with your grandfather Harry and with your father Kenneth. I have brought you to this place to be with me... No, I did not bring you here to tell you what to*

*do... No, you are not here for what you will do in your teaching at INCAE, although I will be with you in that... I did not bring you here to fill your mind with new insights, although there is much you will learn. I brought you here to be still and know me, to feel me with you, to feel my love for you, to heal your infirmities, to wrap you in arms of great strength and love.” (As I write the above, the tears are streaming down my cheeks and I feel like a very small and very lonely little boy coming home).*

The thoughts continue their march, *“I am in this place with you, the place as Rabbi Kushner says, just an inch behind the chest bone. You, Harry, feel a great need to remember every word and thought, to get up and write it down in the journal before you forget. Be still and listen. This only feels miraculous and special to you because you are now listening. But I am always here and we can always talk, and you can always find me. (A part of me doubts this will always be true, but knows that this is the message the scared little boy needs to hear precisely because he cannot control or always be sure of his father and mother.) I AM ALWAYS HERE. WE CAN ALWAYS TALK. YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND ME. YOU CAN COUNT ON ME. Why? Because I am the Lord your God. I am not your father, your mother, or your wife. And I am in you. I have been here with you for the last 50 years. This feels special only because you are listening. Don't worry about writing it down. Just listen in your body, in your feelings, in your mind, in your soul. I am here and I am energy and I am love and I am in you and in this beautiful, green, fresh, alive, bright morning.*  
(Journal May 5, 1992)

### **Meeting Smiley**

Following my trip I found a therapist, Sarah Conn, to help me do guided visualizations. She suggested in the first session that we go down and find my inner guide. After a period of guided relaxation she sent me down a set of stairs that would take me into safe place.

*I started down noting the stairs were of good wood. They were very steep. At the bottom they led into a paneled library with a fireplace. I sat in a high-backed winged easy chair facing the fireplace. To the left of the fireplace was a leaded window looking out on a walled garden.*

*When I was comfortably set, she told me a special guide would appear, a wise helping figure would approach me. I thought I saw a tall beautiful woman in long regal white robes, but this figure never came into sharp relief and I figured it must be the lace curtains blowing in the breeze.*

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

*Outside a robin sat on the branch with its head cocked to one side looking at me. When I asked the robin if it was my wise guide it just continued to look at me with cocked head.*

*As I waited for the guide, a hunchback old man in gardener's overall came around the corner. He had a crinkled smile on his face. The therapist suggested I ask him his name. "People call me Smiley."*

*I thought "This is ridiculous. What a stupid name for a spiritual guide."*

*She suggested I ask "What do you do?"*

*He answered, "I am responsible for the garden, making sure the birds are happy, the sun has a chance to get in, the dampness doesn't get in the house."*

*He asked me "What do you do?"*

*I felt a wave of confusion. "I don't do anything worthwhile. I am just sitting here looking at the garden, feeling sad."*

*She suggested I ask him for help. He handed me a shovel and took me to a corner of the garden where there was a rose bush bed and said, "I'm going to help you pull up the grass your dad wanted you to pull out of the flower bed which you couldn't." (I immediately knew he was referring to a painful incident in my early childhood. I was weeding in a flower bed with my father. I tried to pull out the grass, but the blades broke off in my hand. My father exasperated said, "Harry, come on, pull it up by the roots!" I knew I was failing, my hand was cut and raw, I felt terrible.)*

*With Smiley's guidance, I stood on the shovel top, felt it cut through the grass and sink into the ground, and then when the shovel was half buried, leaned back and rode the shovel down while it tore up the grass. Then I reached over pulled up the grass quite easily, shook the dirt from the roots back into the bed. I felt childlike and happy. This was not hard work; it was fun. I quickly finished my job and sat down on the bed in the sunlight. I felt good and a little tired.*

*The therapist suggested I ask him one more question about my current life. "Why am I so sad and depressed and fearful? What is down there?"*

*He gave me a big hug, I felt tears on my cheek and he answered, "You're the only one down there." His next remark I didn't quite get. It was either "You don't have anything to fear," or "You have only yourself to fear!"*

*"What should I do?" I asked.*

*He answered "You can never untangle down there where it's all matted. You're going to have to use a sharp knife to cut it. You'll be surprised how easy it is." (Visualization June 12, 1992)*

I interpreted this as advice to be more drastic in my approach to the marriage. The therapist wondered if perhaps I was being advised to "cut to the core," go down even deeper.

### **Iron John and Finances**

At this same time I was reading Robert Bly's book Iron John. A statement in it struck me, "Man gets to his feelings through grief and most men do not learn to grieve until their forties or fifties."

Bly also talked about the need to develop the warrior inside. I recognized a figure from my dreams, a young man totaling encased in armor, whom I had noticed was very idealistic and rigid. Bly believed that it was critical that the warrior be task oriented in the service of a cause greater than himself, the service of an inner king. My journal records some of the messages I took for myself:

Descent into grief. Manhood will only come when I go down rather than up and the gateway into feelings for me will be grief. But grief of what? My parent's early death? Being left, brushed off as a child? Conditional love and the message that some of the most important parts of me are unattractive, unwinsome.

Cutting loose from Mother is the first stage of initiation. The image of the knife cutting and the need to leave home come together. I don't know in what ways I am still tied to Mother, but I feel an urgency to cut free from Deirdre or some parts of our psychic relation.

Warrior defending the boundaries. I sense that in some very important ways I have not done that enough. The king inside me needs to mobilize and train the warriors to reestablish those boundaries, to fight fair with Deirdre.

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

The next week in some notes I prepared for the marriage counselor, the angry warrior showed up, mad about many things, but it seems to me, his angriest over finances. I described how our inability to get together on spending and management of finances over the course of our marriage had created in me an enormous sense of anger, and un-alignment.

The entry describes our conflicts regarding finances and the decision that had put us into an expensive house on which we would lose \$450,000. My diatribe which I read to Deirdre and the marriage therapist described my “tremendous fury whenever I think of this history in finances.”, my sadness at not meeting Deirdre’s needs, and my refusal to stay in the marriage without a system in which we agreed and abided by a plan for spending and saving.

Deirdre was surprised at the outpouring of anger, at how I experienced things. We agreed to separate finances. We set up a trust fund jointly administered for the kids. We each contributed from our salary and/or estate to an agreed budget of joint living expenses. We replaced the joint checking account with separate checking accounts and agreed that any expenditures outside of budget would come from the estate or earnings belonging to the spender. If we divorced, the property settlement would be based on our net worth at the end of 1992. Drawing clear financial boundaries and being willing to defend them, not because they were necessarily right, but because they were important to me, also felt healthy, positive, and cleansing.

### **The White Stallion**

As I approached the end of the transition period, I began to develop an ambitious picture of what I hoped to do. However, it was not clear that I had the body and health capable of the travel and effort it would require. I approached my friend Dr. Bill Wood, the surgeon who had given me the odds for an earlier bout with melanoma. I asked him what my odds were now, given my history of cancer, heart disease and hip problems. What sort of work load was it reasonable for me to undertake?

His answer showed a lot of wisdom. “I’m not going to give you odds, Harry. Let me say that your three diseases are not multiplicative, they are independent. Your arthritis doesn’t increase the severity of your heart disease. I’m going to give you scenarios and suggest that you make your plans and decisions as if any one of them could turn out to be your reality.”

## Life Stories

In one of his scenarios I lived twenty years with good health and full energy. In another I had a stroke after eight years and lived another ten as an invalid. In the last I had a heart attack and died after two years.

My health and capacity for work was on my mind when I had the following visualization:

*I am walking down a stream bed in the mountains of San Jose on a farm that reminds me of the orphanage (a ministry of my parents' mission). I turn left and come up on a large field. A handsome white stallion gallops over to me. I grab his mane and swing up on his broad back. He wheels and begins to canter across the field. I am delighted, filled with a sense of well-being.*

*Then he starts to gallop up the mountain. I begin to get apprehensive and then panicked at the thought that he is galloping far too hard and is going to have a heart attack, (This is similar to my father's experience on Boy, the white horse that galloped up those same hills and then had a heart attack and died under him.)*

*I try to slow him down but he doesn't respond, just charges ahead until we come out into a meadow overlooking the valley. I slip off his back, trembling from my fear. The stallion leans over and says, "Harry, don't worry! My heart is strong! I can carry more than a full load! You don't have to fear."*

I took this as a confirmation that my heart, which in the various attacks had suffered little damage, was still capable of a full work load. If I got my life fixed right, I didn't have to worry about my body.

### **Smiley's Final Advice**

During my last therapy session, the therapist suggested I let the time machine we had used earlier take me among the possibilities for the future.

*I go into the machine and type on the console keyboard, "Please take me to the time and place to get what I need for my journey." I shut the door behind me. I sit down in the pilot's chair and strap myself in. I take a deep breath and hit the red button.*



## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

*There's a whirling, a gray mist at the edges of the cabin. The green light goes on. I don't have any sensation of having gone forwards or backwards. I unstrap myself, get out of the chair and come out.*

*I'm up on a bluff next to the seashore. There's a bracing wind blowing and waves are dashing down below. I sit down on the grass facing the ocean, cross-legged in a lotus position and take some deep breaths. I want to recapture the sense of happiness and freedom which I had on my previous trip into the future but I can't. I remind myself that the only place to be is right where I am in the present, to be aware, to be detached from the past or the future. There are some birds wheeling in the sky. It seems to be early morning and I must be facing southeast. The sun is rising in front on my left side.*

*When I'm ready, I cross a pasture and go through some woods. I come to a larger macadam road and take a right. A pickup truck comes along behind me and pulls over. The driver is Smiley (the gardener in my first visualization) who asks if I want a ride. .*

*Finally I say, "OK Smiley, where are we? Where are we heading in this pickup truck?"*

*"We're heading to a town in the interior of Brazil"*

*We come to what looks like a new town cut out of the jungle with wide roads, wooden houses, lots of mud, and high sidewalks. I am totally baffled at what we're doing here. He pulls up and we go in to a little restaurant to get some breakfast – gallo pinto and huevos a la ranchera (rice with beans and fried eggs).*

*Smiley sits across the table looking at me with an impish grin on his face, watching and waiting, as if there is a big joke coming up. I find his high spirits irritating. I say, "What are you looking at? You're supposed to be helping me figure things out."*

*He says, "Look around. What do you see?"*

*"I see a little restaurant in what seems to be the boondocks of Brazil. Smiley, I give up I have no idea what this is all about."*

*"What would you like to talk about?"*

*"I'm worried about my health, my marriage, my work. I'm feeling pressure to make the right decision. If anything, I am feeling more confused than when I started out."*

*"One of the reasons I brought you here is to give you some sense that your little world isn't all there is. There's a lot happening in the big world. Maybe you're taking things too seriously."*

*"That's easy for you to say."*

*"Well, have some patience, let's pay the bill and get in the truck again."*

*We get into the truck and start down a road deeper and deeper into the jungle. He stops the truck and we start walking into the jungle and suddenly come out in the clearing with a waterfall. It's Iguassu Falls where in a previous visualization, I had sat on a rock, the water flowing through my chest, and felt the sadness of the world.*

*He asks if I recognize the place. I say yes. He opens a canteen and fills it with water and passes it to me. I start to drink it. I splash some on my face and hands. It feels very cool and sweet and clean. There is still an enormous sort of sadness in it, an impersonal sadness.*

*Smiley says, "Part of what you have to do Harry is sit in this water a lot more. Feel it down your back, on your head, feel it going through your body until it goes right through you without obstruction."*

*I ask Smiley if he knows where the water is coming from.*

*"Harry, if you look at the amount of that water, you know it's not just one thing. It's not one night on the bathroom floor in Asheville feeling humiliated. It's not one trip of your dad's. It's not that time as a kid being humiliated at being so small. You are just a part of this river. You can't love because you can't feel. You can't feel because you're so micro-focused on just yourself. Learn to feel for others, not just for yourself. Don't treat the boundaries between yourself and others as so permanent. Don't be afraid of the sorrow."*

*I ask Smiley, "What's your secret of always being in high spirits and happy, as if life is a big surprise party?"*

*He starts laughing, "It is! Life is a surprise party! Just think of it, I got to drive with you today instead of working in the garden."*

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

*I ask him if he has any idea where the garden is located in which I'm supposed to work. He tells me it's a much bigger garden than the one at the foot of the stairs. He waves his arm, it seems to me, over all of Latin America.*

*"Smiley, do you know what I ought to do about my wife?"*

*He looks down at the ground and becomes very pensive. He resists answering but when I insist, he finally says, "You've got to learn to love her and leave her."*

*His words shock me but I sense they are exactly what I need to do. I ask him what he means by that: to love her and not need her in some psychological sense, or to make her feel loved but to separate from her.*

*He says, "I don't know, I just feel you've got to learn to love her and leave her, but I'm not a pro in things of love." He continues, "We'd better hurry back or the time machine will leave you."*

*We walk back, get in the truck and drive to the bluff. The sun is now at our backs. It seems to be about 4 in the afternoon, although it doesn't feel as if that much time has passed.*

*"Smiley before I go back is there anything I should have asked you?"*

*"You should have asked me, 'How do I learn to love?'"*

*"How do I learn to love?"*

*He laughs, "I don't know but that's the question you should be asking."*

*He gives me a big hug and drops me off.*

*The therapist closes our session saying very quietly, "It's all there!"  
(Visualization Aug 7, 1992)*

### **The Family Council Meets**

At the end of my sabbatical, having to decide whether to divorce and return to Costa Rica or stay another year in Boston, I decided to call together all the parts of myself I had identified in the course of analyzing dreams and hold a "family

council”. I think I hoped that there was more wisdom in my unconscious than in my frontal lobe. I expected that if I asked the people in my unconscious they would tell me what to do.

I convened the council in the room at the bottom of the stairs next to the walled garden and sat them around a big table. The four or five year old urchin was there, his ten year old sister, the knight in armor, the ugly woman, the Peace Corp worker, my Grandfather Harry whom I had interviewed in a visualization, Smiley the gardener, even the white stallion. At the last moment I decided to call in my mother and father, realizing they were also a part of my unconscious. While the others sat around the large table, I brought in two easy chairs for my parents; I wanted to honor them in a special way.

When everyone was seated, I explained that we had to make a decision. Should I divorce or stay married? Most of the other decisions were dependent on that one.

We started with the little boy who immediately began to cry, “I don’t like it here, let’s leave.” It was apparent to all of us that he was terrified. His 10 year old sister rushed over to comfort him. None of the others as we went around the table was willing to take a concrete position and most of the answers I got from the knight, the women and my grandfather almost felt irrelevant. One urged me “to be decisive but not get too far out in front of the troops.” Another urged me “to be bold but involve others.”

To my surprise my parents also seemed far more indecisive than I had expected them to be. I sensed they were confused. They felt that divorce might be the right decision, even though it conflicted with their principles. My mother showed a lot of concern for Deirdre, “You have to learn to listen to her feelings. She’s scared.”

Smiley had no new advice, “You have to learn to love her and leave her.” His main concern, though, seemed about the somber sad mood in the room. He told the group “This is a wonderful group! Life is a surprise party! Why don’t we all hold hands and your dad can lead us in singing the doxology, ‘Praise God from whom all blessings flow!’” We did what he suggested, I wondering throughout what, if any, link the doxology had to my divorce decision.

During parts of the meeting I had felt frustrated at the indecision and irrelevance of many of the comments but by end of the meeting I realized that my unconscious could provide insights but was not capable of making the decision. Like it or not, I, my conscious ego, had to play the role of leader, had to put it all together, make the decisions, figure out how to implement them, and take responsibility for the outcome.

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

Nevertheless as they filed out of the room I thanked each one and hugged them. Each had become a known part of myself, whose needs and feelings I could now recognize and wanted to honor to the extent it was possible. I had listened to each one of them because they did throw light on the situation. I also sensed that each of them had energy and talents that would make the whole of me more complete and effective.

### **... and After**

So I made decisions regarding my job, my wife and my place of residence – three areas of change that reportedly create the greatest stress in life.

My wife and I agreed on a separation and then went on to divorce.

I moved to Costa Rica and radically simplified my life, selling the large house cum furnishings at a big loss. In my daily routines, I tried to eat healthily, to do regular exercise and practice good stress management. I started each day with a quiet time of meditation and inner listening.

I participated in the group of partners who took control of Bain & Co after negotiating a buyout from the founders on favorable terms. While continuing to play a role in the firm's new governance structure, I persuaded the firm to let me move to Costa Rica, to set up a small new "experimental" office and adapt the firm's "tool kit" to the needs of the region. Our mission was to help business leaders in the region make their family businesses globally competitive and play a leadership role in the larger society. My plans included a private equity fund, a philanthropic foundation, and significant time on non profit activities like teaching. In this way I entered my "public service decade," a period of my life I had imagined many years earlier.

And these three stressful changes proved to be exactly what I needed. The fifteen years since then, my "Costa Rica years", have been among the happiest and productive of my life.

The Costa Rica office was successful beyond anyone's expectation and our client list grew to include the leading family business groups of the region. My teaching at INCAE, a course of live cases on "Leadership and Competitiveness," received the highest ratings. The private equity investments were profitable. And the Strachan and Mesoamerica Foundations, fed by the profits of the consulting and investments, grew in size and scope.

Several years after moving to Costa Rica, I met a soul mate, Sandy, a successful professional involved in development work all over the world. She was willing to join me in Costa Rica and take responsibility for the Foundation. We have built a deeply satisfying marriage, and I have discovered an unexpected capacity for sustained intimacy in which fidelity has been no burden.

In Central America I also found the community I sought, a wonderful group of close friends. We work together, we play golf and poker, we discuss books and ideas, we share investing tips, initiate philanthropic projects and try to figure out how to achieve sustainable development in our part of the world. With some of these closest friends I formed a Father-Son Group that has given my son and nephew five “uncles” and me eleven new “nephews”.

My children made it through college, started their own successful careers, found great mates and made me a grandfather. Though living in the States, they regularly visit Central America and have become enthusiastically involved in the Strachan Foundation.

Not all has been perfect – I’ve had a few more medical setbacks – but the white stallion’s promise has been fulfilled. I’ve had the energy and health for more than full load and may even exceed Bill Wood’s most optimistic scenario.

### **A Transition Paradigm**

What happened during the transition that accounts for the success and happiness of this last period of my life? What were the key decisions or strategies that worked so well? Did I change in some important way? What role, if any, did the illnesses and my therapy play? These have been my questions as I reviewed this period.

Early in the process I read William Bridges’ Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes. His template for thinking of the journey proved helpful, and I have since recommended it to people going through a transition. In my journal I had summarized some of the ideas that caught my attention:

Transitions have three phases: 1) An ending, 2) A neutral zone, a period of confusion and distress, leading to 3) A new beginning. Before you can get to the new beginnings you have to have the endings.

“The Odyssey is a particularly powerful story about the midlife transition. The homeward journey of life's second half demands three things of us: First that we unlearn the whole style of mastering the world that we used to take us through the first half of life. Second, that we resist the longings to

## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

abandon the developmental journey and refuse the invitations to stay forever at some attractive stopping place. And third, that we recognize that it will take real effort to regain the inner "home."

Most endings require:

- Disengagement, pulling out of the situation
- Dis-identification, giving up the old labels and status
- Disenchantment a corrected view of your reality
- Disorientation , an unpleasant time of confusion and emptiness when ordinary things have an unreal quality about them.

The neutral zone is that period of fallow time where most of the useful activity is going on at an unconscious level. "The first of the neutral zone functions is surrender - the person must give in to the emptiness and stop struggling to escape it ... The symbolic return to chaos is indispensable to any new Creation." Chaos is not a mess, but rather it is the primal state of pure energy to which the person returns for every true new beginning."

My expectation from Bridges' book was that the journey ahead of me would require leaving a fertile hill range, perhaps passing through the valley of the shadow of death, painful swamps, past traps of quicksand, to end in a new beginning where I'd come out on more fertile country.

My actual experience was less a journey with clear milestones than a process which kept revealing new things that had to end, times of confusion and chaos in all the periods, and inklings of the new beginnings at the start, in the middle and obviously at the end. I had to cycle through the issues over and over again, go down deeper and deeper on each trip until things were finally resolved.

### **Three Views of What Happened**

As I reread the eight notebooks, three voices, distinct personalities, began a debate in my mind over what had really happened in the transition, what had really created the positive outcomes of the subsequent period. Giving them names I let them talk for themselves.

Michael (think of one of my no-nonsense, logical, data-driven, efficient partners), as he read the voluminous journals, concluded that the situation called for bold changes, changes that were both logical and obvious. "For Harry it was clearly time to move on to the next phase of his life and career. He had achieved the learning and financial objectives he'd come to the firm seeking. His plan had always been to enter "public service" after ten years in business. Among his

options, given his family and personal network, Central America was clearly where he could make his biggest contribution. The journals show that Harry knew very early that he wanted to return to Costa Rica, get re-involved in development, teach and set up a consulting / venture capital firm.

“It was also time for Harry and his wife to get divorced. Their kids were in college, so the timing was good. For twenty years they had tried to fix the marriage without success; everyone could see they’d be better starting separate lives. His wife was as unhappy as he. She had a fulfilling life in Boston, was near her family and did not want to return to Central America. With the financial settlement from the divorce and her well paying job, she was financially secure. She was attractive and could find someone who met her needs better than Harry.”

However, Michael was dismayed reading the many repetitive journal entries, “Same song, 40<sup>th</sup> verse! Reading Harry’s journals is like being in a car spinning its rear wheels in mud. How many times does he describe the same angry feelings, articulate clearly the same problems, only to reach the same conclusions? He stews in his juices. His propensity to over-complicate things with multiple options is obvious. I do not understand why he wastes time writing down dreams that make no sense and then chewing on them. His therapy sessions are a waste of money, the therapists fail to help him be decisive.

“When he finally pulls the trigger, he makes the right decisions -- Thank God! -- but in my opinion they are decisions he could easily have made after six months. Once he saw the target clearly, if he’d just pulled the trigger, he could have saved himself three years of struggling.!”

Michael would also argue that the Harry who arrives in Central America at the beginning of 1993 was only minimally affected by all the therapy and soul searching. “Hey, we’ve all known for years that Harry is a type-A personality, who has always worked 60 hours a week, has always been full of ideas. He’s a “promoting promoter” in the psychological lingo, enthusiastic and assertive. That’s who he was as a business school professor, that’s who he was in our firm in Boston and, no surprise, that’s who he’s been for the last fifteen years in Central America. He has been lucky that the region was ripe for many of his ideas. Though he remained disorganized, he was also smart enough to remember what he had learned and surround himself with colleagues that improved upon and helped implement his ideas.”

Linda (let’s imagine a process oriented consultant who has also known Harry throughout his adult life) has a different view. “The right decisions, at least regarding work and marriage are not as obvious as Michael makes them out to be. Harry’s journal suggests that he had a number of attractive options for work.



## ANATOMY OF A TRANSITION

Many studies of divorce suggest it is rarely a good solution, especially for a couple that treat each other well. But for purposes of discussion, I'm going to accept Michael's statement that the right decisions were obvious and that Harry knew them.

My argument is that even if he had the answers early, Harry had to go through the long painful process, a process which resulted in far better solutions than would have emerged from Michael's linear logical approach.

"If Harry had rushed to divorce unilaterally it is likely that the divorce would have been acrimonious, the property settlement contested, the kids and family forced to take sides. By doing therapy together, by agreeing to make the decision when each was ready, by asking extended family to continue treating the other as family, even by agreeing what they would say about each other, they laid the groundwork for an amicable divorce that has permitted them to attend graduations and weddings of their kids together. In 2008 Deirdre even loaned Harry her apartment in Boston when he had to spend four months doing radiation – how many divorced wives would do that?"

"A similar process was needed regarding work. It took the deep two year recession before the founders were willing to turn over the firm to the active partners and remove the major debt load. Given the governance structure of the firm, Harry's only option at the start of the period would have been to resign and sever ties. By staying involved through the difficult negotiations with the founders, by trying to play a constructive role in the crisis, he made his small contribution to the turnaround. This permitted him to find a creative way in which he could go down to live and work in C.R. while at the same time serving on several world-wide committees. His firm's support in Central America made him far more effective in his mission than he ever could have been on his own.

"Also don't forget that during these years Harry made a number of visits to Central America, even taught for a month in one of the business school's programs. On these trips he discussed his vision for consulting and venture capital with close friends, renewed his network, came to know the challenges of the region. All this ensured that when he finally returned, his reception in the region was warm, the growth of his business rapid and that he was surrounded by a group of friends eager to make his new move successful. Without authentic back and forth discussions, all of which were messy and took time, this might not have happened.

Linda concludes, "I can't evaluate the contribution of the dreams and therapy but I do believe that the drawn-out process was critical. Decisions are rarely black or white, right or wrong. What makes them right is how they are fleshed out,

negotiated and then implemented. Rarely is that process quick and sharp. Getting things right takes time, requires creative solutions to obstacles that arise.”

Donna (envision a Jungian therapist who enters the debate), “I agree with Linda, the decisions were made more effective by how they were developed and implemented. However I would like to go further and advance the hypothesis that the Harry who arrived in C.R. at the end of the transition was a different Harry from the one at the beginning of the period. Michael is wrong when he suggests no change resulted from the therapy and dream analysis. If Harry has enjoyed success and happiness over the last fifteen years it is due to some very important inner changes which occurred in those transition years.

“All of the things he did, talking to many people, reading many books, stewing in his journal, doing traditional marriage therapy, probably contributed. If they took longer than necessary it may well have been because saying good-bye to the past also means letting go of attachments and it may have been harder for Harry to let go of his attachment to social image and the financial rewards in his firm.

But of the many things he did, the most important part and the part which helped pull the rest together were the visualizations and his dream analysis. I say this because it was primarily as a result of these that Harry came to know many of the people inside of himself, the parts of him buried in his subconscious, their hurts, their fears, their needs. In this process he was able to embrace all the parts of himself and achieve a degree of personal integration that has been critical in the last fifteen years.

“It is this more integrated Harry that has been capable for the first time in his life of sustaining an intimate loving relation with a spouse, one in which he has learned to love her well without feeling that he has to take responsibility for her happiness. As a result of being more accepting of all the parts of himself, Harry is less angry and hostile, more tolerant, and therefore in better health. He is still full of ideas, a promoter, perhaps aggressive. But since he no longer feels obligated to push rocks up a hill, he is willing to accept the leadership of the market and others. He has become more effective than at any other time of his life. It appears that his clients trust him, that his colleagues admire him, and that many of the young people who get to know him seek him out as a mentor. My argument is that to the extent they are attracted to Harry, it is because they sense in him this integration, the mass and wisdom that accompany it.”