

“... birds singing from the branches of a tree...”

(Where I seem to be, and how I might've gotten here)

(Selected Autobiographical Pieces--with Links)

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The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative

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Sections

(bookmarked for quick access)

Early Life

Untitled Section

Inspiring Educational Experiences(24 page section)

The Most Important Influence in My Life: the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Employed in Many Different Settings

The Interfaith Peacebuilding and Community Revitalization (IPCR) Initiative

Additional Comments about The IPCR Initiative

Age 56, and Onset of More Serious Health/Physical Problems

I “Cobble Together” a Plan to Move Away from the “Big City”

Recognition and Appreciation for Kind and Helpful Assistance I Received At This Difficult Time

More Documents for Building The CPCS Initiative

My Second Application for Social Security Disability is Approved (February, 2016)

About The Year That Has Passed Since February, 2016

Some Thoughts About This Autobiographical Sketch

... And Some Concluding Thoughts About The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative

Early Life

My father's parents immigrated to the United States from Romania in 1920, and my father was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1922. My father earned a Bachelor's Degree from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois in 1948, and earned a Master's Degree in mathematics education from Northwestern University in 1953. He began working with IBM (International Business Machines) in 1957 as an Applied Sciences Representative, and from 1968 to 1985 was a National Accounts Marketing Representative, based in Bethesda, Maryland. My father also contributed career service in the United States Air Force; first in World War II, in China, as an Air Force Communications Officer, and then in the Air Force Reserve, where he became a Lt. Colonel involved with Air Force Intelligence Service (AFIS). My mother's grandparents on her father's side immigrated to the United States from Norway, and lived on a farm in South Dakota. She was born in Paw Paw, Michigan. She graduated from Western Michigan University (then Western Michigan College of Education), and met my father when they were both doing graduate coursework at Northwestern University. They were married on December 20, 1952. I was born on September 18, 1955, in Chicago, Illinois, the second of four children.

Regarding what our family life was like up into the mid 1960's, I have included here four written records, which will show that--speaking only for myself--there were many reasons why I have good memories of my early years as part of the Pasti Family...

1) [Early Stories](#) (around 1962)

Five very short stories, which I wrote when I was in 2nd grade (at Ben Franklin Elementary School, in Glen Ellyn, IL). When teachers give assignments, one of the results is that they learn something about the student's interests and ability--and the student learns something about their interests and ability. My favorite story in this collection is "How the Sad House Became a Happy House". There is also evidence, in these stories, that good natured humor was valued and appreciated in our family life.

2) ["The Funny Mixed Up Story"](#) (story by Faith McNulty; pictures by Dagmar Wilson) (18 pages; 1959) ([Word list which came with the book](#))--This is a story which I heard read to me when I was young, and which I very much enjoyed (I'm not sure if this book was as well remembered by my sisters, and brother). It's about a little boy named Albert, who goes into the woods to listen to the conversation of the bears. There are many blanks in the story--places where a word has been left out--and the book included a page of words which could be cut out and picked from. When I read this story as an adult, to children, I would make up my own words... and often when the children's parents heard the story, they would contribute more words.... It's like "Mad Libs"--but this is a longer story, which works every time

for some great laughs. Great fun.

3) The complete text of the Christmas letter my parents sent to family and friends (dated December, 1965)....

“We have become a traveling family since Nick’s transfer to Poughkeepsie (NY) last May. During the summer we packed the picnic basket at every opportunity and chose a new spot on the map to visit. The most memorable places we recall are the World’s Fair, the boat ride around Manhattan, the Boston Symphony at Lenox, Massachusetts, and our five day campout on Cape Cod.

“Our home is located south of the city and the children ride the bus to school--another new experience for them. It’s a special treat for David who has now started kindergarten. He’s a little fellow with a hearty laugh, and he likes to help Hilda with the housework and shopping whenever he and his buddies aren’t chasing bad guys. Little Carolyn, almost 3 years old, is the real family helper. We keep rescuing the kitten from the desk drawer where she has been put for safe keeping by our “little Miss Muff-it”. Stefan is a very active, sportsminded fifth grader. He enjoys baseball, bowling, and listening to his short wave radio which he and Nick assembled this fall. Sara is now in her first year of Junior High. Her interests are horseback riding and piano which she enjoys as a change of pace from her schoolwork. We have some homework ourselves for our weekly Senior High Sunday School class at the Methodist Church, and we find this quite challenging.

“We hope this Christmas finds you in good health, and we extend our yuletide greetings with the very best wishes for a Happy New Year.”

Sincerely,
Hilda and Nick]

[end of Christmas letter my parents sent to family and friends (dated December, 1965)]

4) Excerpts from a seven page reminisce about “The Cottage” (which I wrote)[Note: I now only have the following fragments of that seven page reminisce (which I’ve edited for clarity, and added to--mostly regarding the location of the cottage]

I do not know when my parents first started taking us kids on vacations to the cottage that my grandfather built on Lake Michigan (it might have been when I was five years old, or it might have been even earlier than that....) And I’m not even sure how many times we went there as a family for summer vacation (from maybe 1960-1971)(while we were living near Chicago, IL; while we were living in

Poughkeepsie, NY; and while we were living in Rockville, MD)... because I have such good memories, it may have been fewer times than I think it was....

The cottage was built on property which was near the end of a dirt and gravel road. And my best guess on the location of that dirt and gravel road is south of Saugatuck; west, and just a little south, of Fennville; south of the West Side County Park; and just north of where 120th Avenue ends at Lakeshore Drive/Adams Road... and thus--what is now Brookhill Drive changing into Plummersville Lane... (based on the google "earth view", which shows that the shape of the road is about what I remember it to be, and which shows an indication of the cemetery on the right side of the road, when entering Brookhill Drive from Lakeshore Drive).

The cottage was built on a hill which looked out onto Lake Michigan. I can still remember sitting in a chair outside the cottage, and looking out over the lake to watch for shooting stars (August, when we usually were at the cottage, is when the Leonid meteor shower is visible--when the "Earth moves through the meteoroid stream of particles left from the passages of a comet"). There was a big picture window which faced the lake. There was a large framed ("blown up") photograph of the Grand Teton Mountains (in Wyoming) over the fireplace. There was a carport with a shed, and a place to stack wood. There was a path from the cottage which went back and forth downhill before it led on to the beach.

The cottage was eventually sold to people outside the circle of our family and relatives, and we learned that sometime after that it burned down, and another house was built there.

Here are two excerpts from a seven page "reminisce" I wrote about the cottage...

a) "And so off we would go, with the station wagon packed quite full inside, and quite full in the baggage carrier on the roof. We had baseball mitts, balls, bats, and a football under the seat; rubber rafts, beach balls, a shade umbrella, and lawn chairs; boxes full of little cars, dolls, games and cards; blankets, towels, and sandals; sandwiches, and sticky Kool-Aid in a thermos; and Car-Bingo for the six hour ride (that being how long a ride it was when we lived near Chicago, IL). And when we were 'Car-Bingoed out', we played the alphabet game...."

b) "... We always floated with our rafts in the waves; always skipped flat brown stones when the water was calm; always hosed the sand off our feet and sandals--when we came up from the beach--with a short hose that only had cold water, near the front porch; always hung our towels and swimsuits on a clothesline between two trees when we were through swimming, and after we changed; always had steak barbeques on Sunday, and listened to the Detroit Tigers and Charlie Maxwell play baseball (we had relatives in Paw Paw, Michigan who lived across the lake from Charlie Maxwell); always played croquet; always played "hot box" on the beach; always played miniature golf while we used a

laundromat in Fennville to wash our clothes; always climbed Mt. Baldy, a large sand dune just west of Saugatuck; always went to the West Side County Park Grocery Store for milk, chips, cookies, bread—and to play the ‘baseball’ pinball machine; always had fires at night in the fireplace, and cooked marshmallows; always put the 1000 piece Big Ben clock puzzle together (especially when it was raining); always ate hamburgers and hot dogs and drank Hi-C; and (at least as I remember it) always got poison ivy and had to use calamine lotion.”

Additional Notes...

I said above that I believe the cottage was located on what is now Brookhill Drive changing into Plummersville Lane (based on the google “earth view”, which shows that the shape of the road is about what I remember it to be, and which shows an indication of the cemetery on the right side of the road, when entering Brookhill Drive from Lakeshore Drive).

I confirmed Plummersville Lane as the correct location through the following research...

Since I remember my parents talking about relatives buried in the cemetery we drove past on the road to the cottage, I recently searched through the interments in Plummersville Cemetery (I learned from a list of cemeteries in Allegan County which cemetery it was). [Note: It is becoming more common to find that volunteers have made grave information for nearby cemeteries (and photos of the gravestones) accessible on the Internet (see “Find-a-Grave” website).] And when my search (of the interments in Plummersville Cemetery) revealed many Crawford, I paused. That name “rang a bell”, so I looked through the information provided for each Crawford until I found the information provided for Arba Nelson Crawford (1807-1899).

In the information provided for Arba Nelson Crawford, I found the following:

Cornelia R. Crawford (daughter of Arba Nelson Crawford and Eunice Mack Crawford) married Sylvanus Stewart in 1856. One of their two children was Edwin R. Stewart, and...

“Edwin R. Stewart (1862-1937) married Catherine ‘Katie’ Imhoff Stewart (1865-1956). Their daughter Gertrude (1898-1973) married Charles S. Hagen (1896-1961). All are buried in Paw Paw. Gertrude'sson, Robert S. Hagen lives and works in Paw Paw, and enjoys the family's summer cottage in Plummersville.”

Through correspondence with the person who had provided that information about Arba Nelson Crawford, I confirmed that my grandmother's (Gertrude Clarice Stewart Hagen) father was Edwin R. Stewart; Edwin R. Stewart was the son of Sylvanus Stewart and Cornelia R. (Crawford) Stewart; and Cornelia R. Crawford, was the daughter of Arba Nelson Crawford and Eunice Mack Crawford [who were

the first European immigrants to settle on the lakeshore near Ganges, Michigan (1843)]. [I will also note here (from Find-a-Grave information) that Catherine ‘Katie’ Imhoff Stewart’s father (Jacob Imhoff, spouse Mary Anglemyre) was the son of Swiss immigrant Peter Imhoff and Elizabeth Pletcher (whose great-grandfather “Samuel Pletcher, his wife Marie, and their two sons Samuel and Henry, set sail for the new world from the Dutch port of Rotterdam around the year 1756”).]

Untitled Section

From the time I was twelve years old (1967), tragedy was a real and persistent shadow in our family’s world, as my mother was found to be suffering from incurable Multiple Sclerosis. There were unpredictable and sometimes severe relapses associated with this disease, and the disease slowly but inevitably changed my mother’s personality, her ability to think clearly, and her general physical capacities.

The difficulties my mother experienced, and the difficulties the rest of us in the family experienced, were not often eased or softened by outside support; and--speaking just for myself--there were psychological/emotional issues which persisted well into my adult years. I was assisted (at various times) by therapists, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, meetings of the Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families (ACA), and the spiritual Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba--and I am very grateful for all the assistance I received.

Inspiring Educational Experiences(24 page section)

Although my parents were determined to assist their four children so that they could have college level education, I never did complete coursework sufficient to earn a degree. I did attend Northwestern University from 1973-1976, where I did in depth coursework in economics and psychology, and I thought that many of my professors there were excellent [Ex: “People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character” (by David Morris Potter) was assigned reading in a class I had on “American Culture” (taught by Dr. Robert H. Wiebe); and I had an “Introduction to Economics” course taught by Dr. Robert Eisner, who served as an adviser to George McGovern (during his 1972 campaign for the United States Presidency), and as an advisor on economic policy to U.S. President Bill Clinton]. I left Northwestern University in the middle of my junior year, due to psychological/emotional issues (which I mentioned in the previous paragraph). In addition to my experiences at Northwestern University, there were eleven (11) other very inspiring educational experiences (roughly from 1976--1991; however what I include about books and music widens the range) which I will mention in this section of my “Autobiographical Sketch”...

Inspiring Educational Experiences #1

During my first attempt to restart progress towards a college degree, I did coursework at the University of Maryland (1976-1977)(I only finished one semester). While I was at the University of Maryland, I had a part-time job driving Shuttle buses around campus (and into surrounding shopping/residential areas)--partly because a friend of mine from Northwestern University had been hired to manage "Shuttle-UM" (as it expanded into buses instead of just vans). Finding that my sense of humor was encouraged by some of my fellow drivers, I contributed some humorous pieces to a newsletter titled the "Ratchet Jaw"--which was published solely for "Shuttle-UM" staff and employees.

I still have one of those pieces--scanned onto a pdf file--titled "[The Shuttle Test](#)", and it begins: "Realizing that most of us are in the midst of frantic end-of-the-semester cramming for course exams, the 'Ratchet Jaw', with its keen sense of timing, has chosen this time to examine (Shuttle-UM) employees, and find out whether they do in fact grasp the grave importance of the Shuttle-UM project". The "Shuttle Test" had three sections: Multiple Guess, Identify the Routes, and Bogus Essay. Although this may seem like a somewhat "inauspicious" inspiring experience [for a writer with a website titled "The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative], the pieces I contributed to the "Ratchet Jaw" were the beginning of my sense that I really enjoyed writing, and the beginning of my thinking about "being a writer". I will say I had reasons to hesitate about including this piece here; for although it is an example of humorous writing--and I did, and do now, enjoy humorous writing--it is also an example of the kind of "unrefined" thinking which can happen at a young age.

Since then, as my "reservoir" filled with more and more real-life experiences, and I felt I had more to contribute through my writing, the subject-matter which interested me most was (I thought) too serious to be "flippant" or "sarcastic" about. [However, considered from another angle, my writing might have been more readable, and more enjoyable, if I had included more anecdotal, personal experience "stuff"... (...which wasn't easy to do because there were few instances of communities going in the direction I hoped to go in; because for many--some would say most--of the years now gone by I wasn't skilled enough; and because I had been--and still am--living a mostly solitary life). I do think about writing some fiction, with some humor in it... and since now, in 2017, I may have said all I can say in subject areas with serious issues, it may still happen.... (I would write more, but it is still a difficult prospect--just sitting in a chair....)(Additional Note: looking back, it is fortunate for me, that I was able to maintain a sense of humor over the years--as it helped me to maintain a "love for life" (and helped me to not take myself too seriously), during times when my life circumstances took a tragic turn, and/or when the subject matter I was working with in my writings seemed to require my writing to be respectful and courteous.]

Additional Note: Bushwacking in the White Mountains....

The bus driving job (above) was also a good work environment [like the bookstore in 2) below], and there were many good memories. One in particular is worth mentioned here: a backpacking adventure four of us went on that had some harrowing moments, but which was, and remains, a good memory. We were two couples, and had planned, in August when there was a break in the summer bus driving, to go backpacking in Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Unfortunately, when the time came to check the weather, indications were for bad weather the whole time we would be there. So we changed our plans, and decided on going to the White Mountains instead.

In a case of what may have been a “higher power” hinting at events which would soon take place, I remember arriving at the parking lot where the trailhead we were looking for was (in the White Mountains), and we laughed as we took pictures of ourselves next to the sign that said: “Conditions can change quickly; if you are not well prepared, reconsider your plans” (or something like that). After all, it was August, and it was 70° in the parking lot. We had read the trail guides. And we were prepared for cold or wet, if that’s what we got. It was a good thing we were prepared.

The problems started because of excessive rain, which had happened even before we got there. It also rained a little while we were there, but the streams had already become very much larger than they usually were, and the trail we were following [a four day hike through the Presidential Range--the highest peaks in the White Mountains (specifically from near Mt. Adams, to Mt. Jefferson, and then on to the summit of Mt. Washington)], required many stream crossings. It was in the early afternoon of the third day, when we finally came to a place where the trail crossed a stream, but that crossing looked too dangerous to attempt. Unfortunately, the alternative, of following the stream further up to find another crossing, was blocked by steep terrain and thick bushes. We consulted. And by looking upwards, and at the topographical map, and at the trail guide (*and at our compasses*), it seemed like it would be easier just to hike straight up the hill, and meet up with the trail on a ridge further up. It may go without saying, but what we soon learned was that trails are often where they are because of difficulties with putting them somewhere else. As we continued to go uphill, we discovered a variety of such difficulties, but not until we were far enough along to make it seem impractical to turn back. Unfortunately, we were losing valuable daylight by having to practically “crawl” through the kind of thick, gnarly, bushes which seemed to be almost everywhere in that location [near Mt. Washington--which has the second highest recorded windspeed (not related to tornadoes) in the world--231 mph]. In addition, we were stopping, at times, to try to confirm our location, because we wanted to be as sure as we could about where, exactly, we were. Finally, in the late afternoon, we decided we better think about what we were going to do without our tents [because there was no place, on the side of that mountain (whichever one

it was), to put the tents]. Eventually, we found a rock overhang, which had enough of a sleeping area underneath for the four of us, and we improvised a wind break using rain flies (from the tents), space blankets (emergency, light weight blankets, made of materials first developed for NASA), and thin corded rope (which we had used earlier to hang our food in a stuff sack, from a tree limb, to lessen the likelihood of attracting “critters”).

Fortunately for us, it didn’t rain that night. It got somewhat cold, but we had sleeping bags. The wind did blow, and I’ll never forget the length of time between the noise of the wind coming, and when it rattled our “wind break”. The wind seemed to be coming from halfway across the state of New Hampshire. But we were able to get up the next morning only a little sore from the cramped positions we had to be in to lie down. And, as we found out soon enough, we were only 200 yards from finding the trail we were trying to find by such “bushwacking”. Our directional calculations had been on target; however, as we experienced first-hand, in places like the White Mountains, where (again) the second highest wind speed on Earth (not related to tornadoes) has been recorded (231 mph), a little change in circumstances *can* lead to disastrous consequences. All I can think of now is that if any of us had carried a hatchet, or a mini bow saw, we could’ve stayed near the stream, and cut up some down wood to make the stream crossing possible. When we eventually reached the summit at Mt. Washington (later that morning), the temperature there was 10°. It was a fine line between minor discomfort during an overnight bivouac on the side of the mountain, and *other things which could have happened*. We were fortunate enough to be able to call that backpacking trip a “learning experience”.

Inspiring Educational Experiences #2

Having discovered that I enjoyed writing--and taking into account that my older sister Sara was living in San Francisco--I decided, in 1978, to move to California, and look for a bookstore job in the Bay Area. My thinking was that with so many bookstores in the Bay Area, I was bound to find work in one of them. And, after an initial job (in San Francisco) working as a dishwasher (a job I often took when first arriving in a new place, as there was less competition for such jobs...), I did find a bookstore job--in what was then the largest used bookstore west of the Mississippi River: Holmes Book Company, in Oakland. And I really liked working at Holmes Book Company. It was a special bookstore in many ways: it had mostly used books, but some new books also; there was a California Room, which kept all the books on California, including some very rare books; and we (the owner, the managers, and the employees) did things together, like employee picnics, and employee bike rides. One especially good memory I have is of the softball games, with almost everyone along, plus family (as some of my co-workers were married with children). We would have beer and wine, and play was very informal. With especially small folk, the pitcher kept on pitching until bat and ball somehow collided, and little players always got a “hit” (that is, they were allowed to be “safe” at first--and at every other base, if they kept running).

Although I myself currently buy most of the books I now own from Amazon (because I can check out reviews, and often find a used copy for a much lower price), the sense that bookstores provide a kind of community space (for people who love to read), and the sense that working in a bookstore is often not really work (for people who like to provide assistance to people who love to read) makes me think that we often go along with changes in our communities without realizing what is getting lost, and only thinking about what is more “convenient”.

It may go without saying, but while I was “working” at Holmes Book Company, I was also becoming familiar with many, many writers, and topics, that I had not known about before. It is also worth mentioning that since I was living in Berkeley, I was near the University of California, Berkeley--and I discovered that a large collection of Mark Twain Papers are housed at the Bancroft Library on the university campus. I went to visit that collection of Mark Twain papers many times, mostly to look at Mark Twain’s Journals--which was a project the editors there were about halfway through, at the time. I got to know one of the editors there, and he would tell me stories about some of the discoveries he made while editing the journals. I learned early on that if I wanted to remember things I had heard or seen, I needed to keep a small notebook with me at all times [a lesson Mark Twain learned when he was apprenticing as a river boat pilot (see “Life on the Mississippi” Section II. “A Cub Pilot’s Experience; or, Learning the River)]. My system has evolved over the years into carrying around an index card, and making notes on that, and then reviewing those notes every three weeks or so, and saving the notes worth keeping by writing them onto regular notebook paper, and putting those notes in a binder notebook. By having such a system, I don’t have to worry about where to look if I need to find a note I made. It’s in the “Notes” section of a notebook I have.

Inspiring Educational Experiences #3

From some part of 1979-1980, I was working as a mail clerk at the National Fire Protection Association, in downtown Boston (and living in a shared apartment on one floor of a three flat house, in Allston (which was just southwest, and across the Charles River, from Cambridge, MA). There was one very special book I was given, by a friend, which led me into a most special appreciation for “the slow lane” (as opposed to “the fast lane”). That book was “The Secret Garden” by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and it led me into the world of “watching gardens grow”. My first garden was in the backyard of that rental in Allston, MA, and we (myself and one of my housemates) used a screen nailed on to four pieces of wood to get all the rocks out of the space we wanted to use in the backyard (for the garden). The soil was poor quality, but it was a starting point. Since then, it seemed like I must have had 20 or more gardens, but I just did an actual count (not including the farms I worked on), and the total is “about 8”. From my experiences in North Carolina (see #8 in this section), I used compost or manure (rototilled in, if

possible), created double-dug beds, and used seeds from Johnny's Selected Seeds (in Maine). The pleasure I got from seeing the progress being made by little seedlings, and harvesting homegrown vegetables (or flowers), made gardening one of my favorite recreational hobbies (along with walking, day hiking, and backpacking). Here is a quote from the book "The Secret Garden" which I sympathize with to the highest degree:

"Oh! the things which happened in that garden! If you have never had a garden, you cannot understand, and if you have had a garden you will know that it would take a whole book to describe all that came to pass there. At first, it seemed that green things would never cease pushing their way through the earth, in the grass, in the beds, even in the crevices of the walls. Then the green things began to show buds, and the buds began to unfurl and show color--every shade of blue, every shade of purple, every tint and hue of crimson. In its (the gardens) happy days flowers had been tucked away into every inch and hole and corner. Ben Weatherstaff had seen it done, and had himself scraped out mortar from between the bricks of the wall, and made pockets of earth for lovely clinging things to grow on. Iris and while lilies rose out of the grass in sheaves, and the green alcoves filled themselves with amazing armies of the blue and while flower lances of tall delphiniums or columbines or campanulas."

Inspiring Educational Experiences #4

My next attempt to restart progress towards a college course degree was at the University of New Hampshire (1980-1981). By this time I was taking courses in English Literature, with the idea of learning something about writing; and I had very good instruction in every course I took there. However, I especially remember the professor (Dr. Gary Lindberg) I had for an experimental course offered by the English Department called "Making Up The Facts". One of the assignments Dr. Lindberg gave us was to go to his office in Nesmith Hall, while he wasn't there, and record details (wall hangings, books, etc) which might be important "clues" to what kind of a person he was (provide insight into his character). After we had all done this, we had a class period when we could ask Dr. Lindberg about what items we picked, and he explained their significance. In this way, he showed us how to pick significant details which could reveal something about "made-up" characters. For my final paper, I picked the topic "Fiction Is More Important Than Fact". Included below is a passage from that paper [Note: the passage below is the only excerpt I now have from that paper [the quote is from p. 19 of the collection of excerpts "Developing a Tao Compass" (80 pages; Winter 1986-1987)(see #3 of my "Collected Writings" webpage <https://www.cpcsi.org/collected-writings.html>)]....

"... this suggests the following formulation concerning the uses of fact and fiction: while the use of fact grounds us in the 'sensed' world around us, and while it is only from such a base that clarity of vision inevitably rises--we cannot develop concepts of feeling and meaning around the facts without the use of

fiction, without the process of organizing what might be tedious facts into experiences of dramatic force.”

Inspiring Educational Experiences #5

My coursework at the University of New Hampshire ended in the middle of the second semester, when my mother died very suddenly (February 26, 1981) from choking on a piece of food (people with nervous system disorders can have difficulty swallowing....) And rather than pass by the personal tragedy I experienced in association with her death, I will say (as in some way it may be helpful for other people who have had similar experiences), that I had been struggling with my relationships with both of my parents at this time. So much so, in fact, that I had written them a letter, addressed to both of them, saying that I did not want to have any further communication with them, as the unresolved issues I had with them, and the unlikelihood of resolving those issues, was making me miserable. Two days after my parents received that letter my mother died from choking on a piece of food. As any reader might imagine, that was a very difficult experience to process... made even more difficult by the contrast between the unresolved issues in the present, and better days in the distant past, when I cared very much for my mother [who was a good person, with a good sense of humor (as one of the few records I have which is specifically about her will illustrate—see [“My Mother’s Report Cards”](#))]--and my father. Whether it was in the letter I sent, or just in a journal entry I made at the time, I remember feeling that God would forgive me for the things I could not do, as there were other things I could do. Even so, however much one might be philosophical about such experiences (or manage to find support through faith in one’s beliefs), one must also go on, because to dwell too much on what one might have done differently is to suppose that we are the sole “arrangers” of our fate, and we can arrange things so that there are never any tragedies in the world. So, after some soul-searching in therapy, I went on. [Note: although the experiences recorded above may seem exactly the opposite of “inspiring” (as in this is a section about “inspiring educational experiences”), this challenge to expand my “world view”--so that it included how to cope with a tragic event of even this magnitude--had, and continued to have (for a long time), a significant influence on what kind of person I wanted to be, what resources (and beliefs) I needed to be that kind of person, what was an appropriate place for me in the world, and what kind of work I perceived as “uniquely mine” to carry out.]

Additional Note: There is one specific experience I had, within two or three years of my mother’s death, which did much to change my “inner framework” in a positive way... and it’s probably a testimony to how my physical struggles are affecting my memory that I haven’t thought of it in connection with this “Autobiographical Sketch” until now.

I can’t remember where I was living when I had this dream... but I think it’s an example of how dreams

can be a very positive and long-lasting effects. The dream I had went like this: I was on a train station platform, and my mother was there with me. I was going to board the train, and she was there to say goodbye. What I remember most is not anything she said, because she didn't say anything. *It was what she seemed to be saying by the way she was looking at me.* When I saw how she was looking at me, I got a very clear impression that her message to me, at that particular moment, was: "I know you have to go. It is the part of me in you that gives you the strength to do it. If only you know I love you, that will get me through." It was as if she was delivering a kind of "benediction" regarding the tragic circumstances of a few years before, and a "blessing" on the path I was now on--and releasing me from any sense that the tangled emotions I had would in any way hold her back on her "spiritual journey". I still had "inner work" to do, and it wasn't until 1991-1992 (when I went to Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families meetings) that I did the most "clearing away" of my own dysfunctional thinking. However, this one single dream significantly lightened the "heaviness" in my spirit about my mother's death.

Inspiring Educational Experiences #6

In an effort to "come-back" after the tragedy related above, I returned to the University of New Hampshire during the fall semester of 1981--but not for coursework. I applied [both to the university, and to the trust fund associated with my mother's estate (she had some ownership in the previously mentioned cottage, and in her brother's tractor sales business)], and was given approval, to do an "independent study" (an internship) with Taylor Morris--an English professor then on leave from Franklin Pierce College in Rindge, New Hampshire. Professor Morris had been circulating a proposal titled "Soldiers for Peace", which called for an exchange of 100,000 students between the former Soviet Union and the United States, as a deterrent to nuclear war. It seems surprising to think about it now, but tensions were high at this time between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and there seemed to be some real concern about the possibility of nuclear war. As an intern, I read all the responses to the proposal that Mr. Morris had received, and I was deeply influenced with a new appreciation for the responsibilities and possible outcomes associated with being a writer. I also participated in the June 12, 1982 march in New York City, which coincided with the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament--and created a one issue newsletter "[Disarmament News](#)" (20 pages) to publicize the march. Although the newsletter was a roughly made cut-and-paste creation, it included newspaper articles and excerpts from books, etc which (I believe) provided much helpful insight and context--and it was an early example of what was to be my "compilation of excerpts" style of synthesizing much complex information into a coherent whole.

Inspiring Educational Experiences #7

In 1982, I worked as a door-to-door canvasser in southern New Hampshire for the New Hampshire People's Alliance (NHPA). At that time, NHPA canvassers were gathering signatures and donations, and were working to raise community awareness and mobilize community action, in response to electric rate hikes (rate hikes which were initiated to pay for nuclear power plant construction). The door-to-door canvassing I did then was an excellent experience in grassroots democracy, as the process constantly raised the following questions:

- a) did the local community decision-making process involve a majority of the local community residents?
- b) did a majority of local community residents care whether they were involved or not?
- c) what sources of information are most respected?
- d) how often are people's day-to-day decisions based on a thorough understanding of the consequences of their actions?

[Special Note: Although this section of my "Autobiographical Sketch" is for inspiring educational experiences, I am going to include links here to some [poems](#) and [songs](#)(and a file "[Poems and Songs](#)" which includes a few pieces not in the previous files) which I wrote (mostly in the 1980s)—as they do fit in with the chronological order. I will also include here the "[catalogue](#)" ([list of my writings \(from 1976-2011\)](#))(in which I provided information and/or commentary related to writings from 1976-1991). Readers may find that the commentary I provided for the poems and songs, in the "catalogue" (list) of my writings provides a unique view into my thinking--before I learned about the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba (in 1992). [It is also worth noting that the last song included in the "Song" file eventually became a part of the short story "The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop" (below).]

Inspiring Educational Experiences #8

In 1984, I wrote the first version of a short story titled "[The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop](#)". I have thought about this ten page short story many times over the years.... In its original version (which I no longer have a copy of), I thought it was a unique and relevant commentary on our complex and challenging times. In its revised version (which came about more than twenty years after the original version), I see it as a healing story, and *I have read it many times with that outcome in mind*. One of the original inspirations for the story was a prayer by Black Elk, a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux tribe, which includes the following: "It may be that some little root of the sacred tree still lives. Nourish it then, that it may leaf and bloom, and fill with singing birds!"

Here is a brief introduction to the “Sacred Hoop” story: “Many years ago there was a tribe of people who were experiencing challenges that were threatening their very existence. During this ‘time of fear’, a young woman experiences a vision--of a bird which says to her: ‘You must all leave where you are, and travel to a place far away... You must look for the tree at the center of the sacred hoop. You will know when you have found this tree when you hear birds singing on the branches of a tree, and you understand their song.’ The tribe of people eventually begin this ‘great journey’. Do they find the tree at the center of the sacred hoop? ‘The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop’ is a ten page short story which recognizes intuition and spiritual wisdom as important elements of community and cultural sustainability.”

I am (still) convinced this story contains oneline--*one sentence*--(an example of positive “accidents” which can happen in the process of writing...) that encapsulates the advantages of having many different paths by which we, ashumans, can access the wisdom associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions (the wisdom associated with love, virtue, sacrifice, forgiveness, peace, etc)(the sentence is on p. 8--“Bird sighters were sent...”) The ten page short story is accessible by way of the above link, and at the webpage for my Collected Writings (see#6) at <https://www.cpcsi.org/collected-writings.html> .

[Note--I also wrote two different kinds of postscripts for the story: ([“Something about a short story titled ‘The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop’”](#)), and ([“16 Facets of the story ‘The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop’”](#))...]

however, neither of those two postscripts include the poems which framed the original version of the story (and which were left out in the final version). They had to be left out in the final version so that the feeling of *sympathetic resonance* between the tribe, the Earth, and the “Spirit of the Sacred Hoop” would be the most prominent concluding note. And yet not bringing those two poems forward will leave out one impression of the phrase (“sacred hoop”) which I did hesitate to leave out.... So, here are the two poems which framed the original version of the short story “The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop”:

(at the beginning) And then I dreamed while I was wide awake
and saw where earth once used to be
a rock spirit captive in a concrete spell
blinking out its message from an ice age cell.

(at the end) And then I dreamed while I was wide awake
and saw where concrete used to be
tribal ceremonies grown from melted tears
singing once again about the marriage of the spheres.

At the time I wrote the first version of the story, I was inspired to begin exploring ways to become

involved with, and advocate for, ecologically sustainable communities--and I moved to the mountains of North Carolina, which was a very special place for me in many ways....

a) My starting point when I arrived in North Carolina with my car, and my worldly possessions, was a stay with a couple living on the South Toe River, near Burnsville, North Carolina. The woman's mother was a friend of my older sister Sara, who was then living in Nyack, New York. The woman's mother had some property somewhere nearby, and there was a neighbor living near her property who needed some housesitting. While I was doing the housesitting, I ventured into Asheville, where (in the French Broad Food Coop) I found a flyer about a Rainbow Gathering, for the Summer Solstice, to be held at Sam's Knob (just off the Blue Ridge Parkway, and not far from Burnsville). The description on the flyer sounded like the planners were going to make a temporary "village" during the week of the gathering. I did go to that Rainbow Gathering, and that week was like living in a primitive village. There were many tents and teepees on a flat space at the base of Sam's Knob, and there was a stream close by. There was a division of labor which was remarkable--with kitchen duties, and dead wood sawing and chopping, at the top of the list; there was a sweat lodge; and there were impossible-to-replicate music jams around the fire at night. Because a high percentage of the people there were responsible people, child care was often done by many people, in a most informal manner. Hikes were taken to the top of Sam's Knob, which was treeless at the top, and thus provided a view, in all directions, of nothing but mountains and trees. This "village" experience was (eventually) part of what inspired my short novel "The Last Map of Root Man Charlie" [more below in g)].

b) One of the first places I visited after leaving the Burnsville area was to a farm in Zionville, which I had learned about from the Katuah Bioregional Journal I found at the Beautiful Day Food-Coop [this legendary food-coop was on Berwyn Road, near Smile Herb Shop, in College Park, Maryland (near the University of Maryland, College Park)... it reincarnated as Berwyn Café in 2001, but finally closed in 2011]. The classified ad I saw in the Katuah Journal (from one of the 1984 issues?) said the farm was looking for apprentices for spinach and cut flower production. While I did not become an apprentice at the farm, I did visit there, and learned for the first time about "French Intensive" gardening [which requires time intensive preparation of "double-dug" beds--beds which can "produce up to four times the produce per acre while using only half the water consumption than traditional farming techniques" (from Wikipedia webpage for "French intensive gardening")]. On the first day of my visit, I watched Bob Gow, the farmer who put the ad in the Katuah Journal (and who now is the owner of "Forget-Me-Nots Landscaping in Boone, NC), as he prepared a maybe 6' x 40' bed using a Guatemalan hoe. The beds were supplemented with a very "rich" homemade compost which was "seasoned" over the winter (under a black tarp), and once these beds were finished, you could push a twelve inch dowel rod all the way into them with one finger. I saw--and harvested--spinach plants which grew in these beds (some to a height of two feet), and sometimes we snacked on spinach leaves while we were working, and had no need for anything else to eat. I became friends with everyone I met at that farm, and that was the

beginning of the largest network of friends I've had anywhere.

c) The first place I stayed at for any length was a Geodesic Dome, which probably was on Stone Mountain Road, in Vilas [as, a year or so later, I wrote a short story called [“The Water from Stone Mountain Creek”](#) (a story which, while highly imaginative in some ways, provides a visualization of “one piece” of what I thought I was looking for--in the way of community life--at that time... and in some ways, what I am still looking for....)] During the time I was living at that Geodesic Dome--before I found a job and started working--I helped get the garden going, and helped neighbors (Bill and Sarah) with a fence for their garden. I also learned how to make candles from Sarah.

When I first met Bill and Sarah, they had two children--a four year old girl, and a nine month old boy. It was even in the first months I knew them that a tragedy occurred: their little boy (who was already having difficulties because of a cleft palate) got a high fever, and was unable to survive it. Discussion ensued in our little community of neighbors about where the little one could be buried (on the property of the Geodesic Dome), and it was decided that burial (which, if done within the first twenty-four hours after death, can be as the family chooses) would be without a coffin, and in an area just above the main garden. Further, a tree sapling was bought, and the little boy was buried deep enough so the tree sapling could be planted over where he lay. Thus, as it seemed to me, I witnessed for the first time an almost immediate transformation from death to rebirth. It was a very inspiring experience.

d) I'm not sure, but I think one of the first more than just temporary jobs I got in North Carolina was as carpet cleaner. I learned about the job from a woman I had met among the people who visited the Geodesic Dome community. She knew a guy who had a carpet cleaning business, and he was looking for part time help. [She was living in the farmhouse of a former homestead in Sugar Grove, NC, and she also told me about an apartment in the barn of the homestead—see e) and f) below.]

I was glad to get the carpet cleaning job, which provided work for me for a few months at least. But what was most interesting was that the owner of the carpet cleaning business also needed side work—and he had just got a job as a manager at the Hospitality House [which was transitional housing for homeless people (people who had been burned out of their house, who had to leave because of domestic trouble, etc)]. When I heard about his work there, I thought about volunteering (maybe with the idea that I might also find work there, not sure...)--and it turned out to be a good place for me to visit, in many ways. First, I met Alma, who did a little of everything there (cooking, cleaning, etc). She was in her fifties--and she had common sense, was wise on many matters, and had a great sense of humor. I can remember following her around the house while she vacuumed, so I could talk with her. I also ate many meals at the Hospitality House, and socialized with the people there, as a way of trying to ease their worries during their time of transition. Thus it was that I knew almost everyone in the Hospitality House when it came time for the Square Dance Fundraiser.

It's interesting (now) to try and imagine what my thinking was then, when I volunteered to make a flyer for the Square Dance. What was going to be a flyer eventually became a two page ["invite" to the Hospitality House Square Dance](#)--and the "invite" actually appeared in the Watauga Democrat newspaper, because Alma knew someone there, and got them to print it as a public service announcement. I don't know how I had the time to accumulate all the quotes I included in that piece, but I will venture to guess that once I got started, and saw where the piece could go (by what people said about the Hospitality House, and square dancing), I just kept going until I "got there". I did meet a lot of people doing that piece. Although readers can see the quotes for themselves, I will include two here, as an example of "how much happiness comes to those who extend help, as well as to those who receive it". [Randall B. Nelson: "It was either that or an Indian sweat, and Alma said she'd kill me if I didn't go"; Alma Bryant: "Don't you dare mention my dress in there; if you do it'll probably self-destruct, and I won't be able to go."] As readers may see (by looking at all the quotes), this "invite" piece suggests that I already knew Ray Hicks (the storyteller), although I talk about meeting him below in f). This is just to say that in this "Autobiographical Sketch"--and particularly in this section on when I was in North Carolina--there will be times when how I write about what I remember won't be in chronological order.

e) The first place I rented to stay in was a small apartment built into a barn, on an old homestead which was being remodeled to be a rental property [which, as I say in d) above, I learned about from the same woman who told me about the carpet cleaning job]. The farm was off of Rominger Road, in Sugar Grove, and it was on a hill which overlooked the Watauga River. In the distant past, there had been a large garden behind the spring house (the old timey version of a refrigerator--a very small shack built over a spring, or small creek); but the garden space was now overgrown with briars. I asked the owner (a very kind woman in her seventies) if I could clear the briars, and bring the garden back to life (shades of "The Secret Garden"), and she was very pleased with the idea. It was a large space, about 30' x 50', but on a hill with much sunshine, and an outside tap was nearby, so water (via a long hose) could reach everywhere in the garden.

When I had the briars cleared, Bill [see c) above] came with his rototiller, and rototilled the whole space. Now the garden was ready for manure (after which Bill rototilled the manure "in"), and the closest farm did have horses. So I worked out a trade: enough truckloads of horse manure to cover the garden in trade for one day of putting up hay. That was the first time I put up hay, and ever since I would say (as many other people probably would) that putting up hay is one of the hardest jobs on a farm (a close second is harvesting potatoes for market, which I did once in Montana, during one of the ten times I drove cross-country). However, the garden was brought back to life, and stayed in production even after I left. [Note: one little practical joke I like to remember about that garden was the scarecrow I made for the garden, as there were "critters", and there was no fence. I got the idea of trying to make

the scarecrow look like the neighbor I got the horse manure from, who was a short guy with a big “pot belly”. With a plaid work shirt and jeans on, the scarecrow turned out to have so close a resemblance that when the owner of the homestead (the woman who I was renting from) saw it, she said I better take that down, because “if Mr. Nelson sees that, he’ll have a fit”.]

f) Another job I had, which I also learned about from the woman who was renting the farmhouse (while I was in the apartment in the barn), was being a cook at a special residential place for students associated with Appalachian State University. The place was called Camp Broadstone, and it is currently described as a place for “meetings/workshops; trainings; team building programs; campfire gatherings; cookouts/picnics; kick-off or end-of-the-year events; celebrations; and overnight retreats”. There was a lodge with a dining hall, and a kitchen, and four cabins. When I was a cook there, the four cabins were offered to students, when classes were in session. I mention this job not because I have fond memories of being a cook--though once I did make Romanian Cheese Strudel, something which (after some trial and error period around 1980) came out similar to what my grandmother (from the “old country”) used to make. Why I include this section is because a few of the students came into the kitchen one night while I was cleaning up, and said they had a cassette recording of a talk by a Native American about Indian life, from one of their classes, and they thought I might like to hear it. The presentation turned out to be from their “Comparative Religion” class, and it was my first introduction to N. Scott Momaday (retired English Professor, and a Native American of Kiowa/Cherokee heritage). When I went to the room of the two guys who had the tape, they said--“once the tape starts, listen but don’t talk; we can talk when it’s over”--and we listened by candlelight to Momaday’s talk. I no longer have the cassette recording (which is unfortunate, because N. Scott Momaday’s voice comes from a very special place). However, I do have a document file of a transcript I made of the recording (which I call [“Exegesis of a Prayer from the ‘Night Chant’, etc”](#)). Below is part of the introduction I include with that transcript--

“This lecture (approximately 60 minutes long on cassette tape), given as a presentation at a conference, is commentary on 1) a “comprehension of the world that is peculiarly native” 2) a prayer from the Navajo Night Chant Ceremony 3) the theme of religion and the humanization (or dehumanization) of man 4) on the magic of words and names (“KOSAN,” I said) 5) on storytelling as part of preserving the racial memory (“Who is the storyteller? Of whom is the story told?”) 6) on ceremonies as part of preserving a connection with the ancient beginnings (“As it used to be long ago, may I walk”; “After a long preparation, preparation of my mind and spirit, my grandmother, my father and I were ushered into Tia-me’s presence”) 7) how adopting particular stories (Example: interpreting catastrophic events) is an example of the power language and imagination can exert on whole cultures.”

f) While I was staying at the apartment in a barn, the owner had a local guy remodeling the rest of the barn to make it into a house. His name was Johnny, and he lived in some remote spot in the mountains. It was my impression that not only would he not mind being referred to as a “hillbilly”--he probably

referred to himself as a hillbilly. I once told him that I was having some trouble in my garden from a groundhog, and he said "That's nothin' that a twenty-two (a semiautomatic rifle) and a fryin' pan can't fix". Also, once when he was explaining how his father made elderberry wine (a process which involved a washtub with some plastic placed over the top), and I asked "how did you know when it was done?"— and he said "when the plastic puffed up so tight that you could 'peck' a tune on it, it was done". It was Johnny who first brought up the idea that I should go visit Ray Hicks, the storyteller. He knew other writers had gone to listen to Ray, and he thought I might be interested. The "getting to" Ray Hicks' place (on Old Beech Mountain) was tricky the first time, as there are no street signs or even rural route indicators, so you just have to keep stopping and asking along the way until you found it. But once I found Ray Hicks, I began going to his place every once in a while, for some time.

Ray, his wife Rose, and their son Ted couldn't have been friendlier. Though they had no telephone, once I arrived, they stopped what they were doing to set some food on the table for me (a taste of old time Southern Hospitality). Then Ray would take me into their living room, and start telling stories. All he ever asked for in trade was a tin of Prince Albert tobacco, so he have something to "roll his own" with. I wrote down one of his stories from memory when I got home, which was a "re-working" of some the legends which grew up around the subject of the Brown Mountain Lights (see Wikipedia entry). It was a story about a blacksmith who was so mean that the devil, and two sons, who came up to take him to a "lower hereafter" were fought off by such strength and tricks that they gave up. Later, when that blacksmith died, he went below, and asked for entrance at the gates down there, and the devil took a pair of "grippers", picked up some hot coals, and handed that to the blacksmith through the gate saying "we won't have you coming in here; so here's some hot coals, you go somewhere else, and start a 'lower hereafter' of your own." One time, Ray was just at the beginning of a story about how he got some buckshot in his eye (from a ricochet of a shot by his brother), and had to travel some length to see an eye specialist, and I asked him "how much did that operation cost?" He replied, "I'm a' gettin' to that". The cost of the operation was the whole "nub" (the crux, or central matter) of the story, and he still had some details to "throw in" before he got there. When he finally got there, the doctor replied to his question (about the cost for the doctor successfully getting the buckshot out of his eye) by saying "Ray, this operation cost many an eye" (meaning that the doctor had failed a number of times, on similar operations, before he learned how to do it).

Ray gave me chains for my car, when winter approached (they had about ten sets in their barn). They prepared for winter (since the roads to get to their place would be closed for about three months) by "putting up" at least a thousand jars of vegetables and etc in their root cellar--which I saw first hand. They gave me food from their garden (for example, rhubarb... "what should I do with this rhubarb?"-- "make a pie!"). And they even invited me to one of Ray's birthday parties, where I played the "handshake" game for the first and only time. The way that game went was a person would be sat down in a chair (it was outside on this occasion because of the good weather), and blindfolded, and then

asked to guess who's hand they were shaking, as different people came up. When it was my turn, I guessed Rose's mother (who was very old, with a very small hand), and Ted's (Ray and Rose's son), who was six feet five, weighed about 250 pounds, and had a very big hand. Once I arrived at their place and Ray was on the front porch, with his false teeth out, playing "Old Joe Clark" on his harmonica. I really liked visiting there.

g) Also during my first stay in North Carolina (I moved to North Carolina three times), I worked as a dishwasher in the St. Sinner's Café (which is now Melanie's Food Fantasy), in Boone. (Again--working as a dishwasher was a strategy I used often when I moved somewhere new, as there was often little competition for dishwasher jobs....) As it happened [as it was meant to happen (a phrase which came up often in "Cat's Cradle" by Kurt Vonnegut)], I got an idea for a short novel while I was working as a dishwasher, and spent days writing while I was working from 4:00 pm to close at night. The story was "The Last Map of Root Man Charlie" (see #2 on the [webpage for my "Collected Writings"](#) for links to the seven scanned files of that short novel). "The Last Map of Root Man Charlie" was a story about a legendary tribe of little people with wings who lived inside Sam's Knob [see a) above], and who had a community center where the little people with wings did their trading. The manager of the community center (a job I would've liked) was named Clear Water, and after an accident which resulted in his mother's death, he became disillusioned with the tribe's way of life, and sought out the "crystal ball" quest from the tribe's spirit healer. Clear Water eventually solves the question he is given to solve ("Where are you going?"--answer "I don't know where I'm going, but I know *the way*"), but by this time he has been blown some distance from the tribe, and has an injured left wing. In his effort to find assistance, from big people, who can only see the little people when the "Great Comet" is within the Earth's orbit (inspired by the musical "Brigadoon"), he is blown (during a blizzard) into the fireplace mantel holiday scenes (with symbolism I worked very hard to produce) of a "big person get together" on New Year's Eve, in Boone, North Carolina. The "big people" discover Clearwater, unconscious, on the fireplace mantel, and "grandpa" is reminded of a story he was once heard about the "little people". The story involves the map made by a prospector named Charlie. According to grandpa, the map has been lost for some 150 years... but it turns out it's a map which a couple at the party happen to have, as a family heirloom—and it's a map showing where the village of the little people with wings is. Although my own skills at scene set-up, and character development, were insufficient to make this short novel a serious contender to be edited for publication, I believe it has an interesting plot, and maybe someday someone who is interested can develop the story into a publishable piece (and any such person has my permission to do so, without me needing any compensation).

h) It is worth saying that there are good and kind people everywhere; however, my particular "feeling" on this subject (developed especially from living in the mountains of North Carolina) is that where there are many people who have grown up on farms, there will be many kind, understanding people who have common sense, and are very much service-oriented... and this has been confirmed during the three

years (so far) that I have been living in Fulton, Missouri (see p. 62-63).

Concluding Comment: I have included many experiences in this subsection--which I began by saying something about the short story [“The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop”](#)--because of the many positive effects the short story “The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop” had *on me* (i.e. the person who wrote the story).

Inspiring Educational Experiences #9

Since the organizational structure of this “Autobiographical Sketch” is mostly a function of what I have thought would be helpful to include in it (form as an extension of content has--very often--been the way I decided what the format would be for a writing piece), it will not be “out of place” if say something here about the inspiration I have found from popular, and “off the beaten path”, culture (as in television, movies, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, music, etc--and since the 1990’s, the Internet). Regarding television, I never bought one, and I never subscribed to cable TV services (though I watched a lot of TV when I was younger). I did become familiar with many movies (and still do watch movies now, as they are helpful to pass the time when I can’t do much of anything else). But I will not mention the thirty or so movies I have liked the most--as movies have a “most significant capacity to influence”, and often highlight too many negative aspects of popular culture. I listened to the radio most often when I was working as a driver [what I listened to: classical music; The Diane Rehm Show; C-Span; and “traffic and weather together on the 8’s” (WTOP, Washington D.C.)]. In the past (but hardly at all now), I read newspapers, but more to “keep up to date”, to “have something to talk about” with co-workers, or to pass the time while I was eating, than anything else--and I have never subscribed to any magazines. About the Internet--even now--I will say that although I’ve read much from Twitter links (a platform I have used often for research in many subject areas), and I’ve read much at websites I’ve explored, it has really been Wikipedia which I relied on most consistently for in-depth, well-sourced information. (And though I have almost always had very little in the way of finances, I recently acknowledged my appreciation for Wikipedia’s good work by sending them a small donation).

The real inspiration for me—however--(from popular and not-so-popular culture) comes from books and music.

Regarding music, ever since I can remember, little pieces of rhythm and melody have “stuck in my mind”, and even served to “rally the troops” (me, myself, and I) when my energy or spirits were low. One such “riff” was something I learned from a housemate in Portsmouth, NH--who repeated it so often on his harmonica that I suggested we send him to Russia, as after hearing him they would surely be willing to negotiate an end to nuclear proliferation. And yet that little “riff” has stayed with me since,

and not in a negative way... it comes in during tedious tasks--it has even recently--and keeps me moving. Such can be the mysterious and powerful effect of music ["Music expresses that which cannot be said, and on which it is impossible to remain silent" (Victor Hugo)]. Here, rather than list any favorites of mine, I will mention three collections I have made:

- a) the collection of 174 sing-along songs which I compiled ["Songs We Love To Sing" (174 Popular Showtunes, Ballads, Folksongs, Hymns, and All-Time Favorites)--see #6.5 on the [webpage for my "Collected Writings"](#), for links to the many sections of that scanned document], and which I used as a resource to lead sing-alongs when I was assisting elders with special needs (see also p. 31-36). Once I started researching songs that were part of their generation, I found many songs that I liked.... [Note: I made songbooks, to help people sing-along, and so people could make requests--and I had back-up cassette tapes, as a way of "not relying" solely on my voice to carry the tune....].
- b) the collection "[Music and Lyrics I Love](#)" (150 titles; selections of lyrics included), which I made around 2010-2011
- c) [the collection I have made at YouTube](#) (currently 105 different songs/performances in 34 playlists)

On the subject of books, I will offer a list of favorites (ones most worth mentioning here)--all of which are (in some way) a part of who I am. I really have found much inspiration from reading; and it has been rough in recent years, when my difficulties with sitting have made reading much harder to enjoy. While there may be other books I will add (when I am reminded of them), here is a list, in eleven categories, of books (and some related print material) which have had the most positive influence on me ("Such as are your habitual thoughts, such also will be the character of your mind...."):

Children's Stories (and Children's Quotes)

The Secret Garden (Frances Hodgson Burnett); Heidi (Joanna Spyri); Little House on the Prairie Series (Laura Ingalls Wilder); Five Little Peppers and How They Grew (Margaret Sydney); Pollyanna (Eleanor Porter); The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School (George Dennison); The Mad Scientists Club (Bertrand Brinley); Sinbad and Me (Kin Platt); Rascal (Sterling North); "[A Collection of Children's Quotes](#)" [5 pages; from when I visited a day care center (ages 2-5) for one month (probably in 1986)]

Humor (fiction and non-fiction)

[The Funny Mixed Up Story](#) (childrens story) (Francis McNulty); The Clicking of Cuthbert (short story) (P.G. Wodehouse); Grin and Bear It (George Lichty, Fred Wagner), Far Side (Gary Larson), Family Circus (Bil Keane) (Single Panel in Comics Section of Newspapers/Book Collections); A Damsel in Distress (novel) (P.G.Wodehouse); Three Men in a Boat (novel) (Jerome K. Jerome); Cheaper by the Dozen (biography) (Frank Gilbreth, Jr.); Many tall tales about Paul Bunyan

Religious, Spiritual, and Moral Traditions; Philosophy

“Sathya Sai Speaks” (Vol. 1-15)(Discourses by Sri Sathya Sai Baba from the years 1953-1982); my collections of quotes from “Sathya Sai Speaks” (Vol. 1-15): [“An Arrangement of Quotations from ‘Sathya Sai Speaks’ \(Vol. 1015\)”](#), and [“Divine Intervention”](#); The I Ching Workbook (interpretation by R.L. Wing), (interpretation by Richard Wilhelm); Tao Te Ching (translation by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English), (translation by Ch’u Ta-Kao), (translation by Stephen Mitchell); The Meaning of Happiness (Alan Watts); Essay in Zen Buddhism (D.T. Suzuki); Ramacharitamansa; [The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama](#) (epic saga by Valmiki; further interpretation by Tulasidas; edited by R.C. Prasad); Why the Village Movement? (J.C. Kumarappa)(1960 edition); Bhagavad-Gita; Living with the Himalayan Masters (Swami Rama); The Oxford Dictionary of Saints (Editor: David Farmer; Fifth Edition Revised); Gift from the Sea (Anne Morrow Lindbergh)

General Non-Fiction, Reference

Communities Directory (Fellowship for Intentional Communities; 1st Edition, 1991);Gaia: An Atlas of Planet Management (Editor: Dr. Norman Myers; 1984); Many quotation and proverb collections [see “Developing a Tao Compass” (#3 on the [webpage for my “Collected Writings”](#)) for a selection of proverbs]; In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America (especially the Conclusion Section--Chapter 25 “Civil Religion and Recent American Religious Ferment” by Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony) (Editors: Thomas Robbins, Dick Anthony)

Novels

Growth of the Soil (Knut Hamsun); Dr. Zhivago (Boris Pasternak); Robinson Crusoe (Daniel Defoe); Cry, the Beloved Country (Alan Paton); Watership Down (Richard Adams); The Water Gypsies (A.P. Herbert); A Christmas Carol (Charles Dickens); The Adventures of Robin Hood (Howard Pyle); Hanta Yo: An American Saga (Ruth Beebe Hill and Chunksa Yuha); Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Harriet Beecher Stowe)

Amish Fiction

Almost all of the novels by Beverly Lewis; many of the novels by Cindy Woodsmall

Short Stories

Old Times on the Mississippi (Mark Twain); The Tree (Grey Owl); Many of Anton Chekhov's short stories; The Golden Honeymoon (Ring Lardner, Jr.)

Plays

Our Town (Thornton Wilder); Hamlet (William Shakespeare); Life with Father (Howard Lindsay, Russel Crouse, Clarence Day); The Riverside Shakespeare (Editor: G. Blakemore Evans; 1973) (collected works of Shakespeare, which I read through twice)

Biography and Autobiography

Up from Slavery (Booker T. Washington); The Singing Creek Where the Willows Grow (journal) (Opal Stanley Whiteley); The Watershed: A Biography of Johannes Kepler (Arthur Koestler)

History, Exploration, Cultural Anthropology

The Silk Road (Irene Franck, David M. Brownstone); Myths to Live By (Joseph Campbell); The Little Community (Robert Redfield); Indian Oratory (Edited by W.C. Vanderworth); Critical Path (Buckminster Fuller); The History of Great American Fortunes (Gustave Myers); People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character (David Morris Potter); The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctica Expedition (Caroline Alexander)

Mysteries (novels and short stories)

All of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories about Sherlock Holmes; Almost all of Dame Agatha Christie's mystery novels; Almost all of Donna Leon's mysteries featuring detective Guido Brunetti

Miscellaneous

[Special Moments of Inspiration and Insight: A Reader from Books and Documents in the English Language](#) (includes references to more than 150 excerpts from Young Readers' Classics, History, Exploration, Fiction Short Story, Fiction Novel, Fiction Plays, Fiction Humor, etc--and 19 actual excerpts of various length)(it's something I put together); ["Exegesis of a prayer from the Navajo Night Chant Ceremony \(and more\)"](#)--a transcription of a presentation by N. Scott Momaday (see also p. 18-19)[11 pages; given at some conference (?) or program, though I don't know where or when... could have been during a January, 1973 week long program at Rockford College (Illinois) (John A. Howard, Ph.D., presiding president) devoted to American Indian Culture]; "Accident Insurance" (speech) (Mark Twain); "New

England Weather" (speech) (Mark Twain)

[Special Note: As an extension of the "Miscellaneous" category (above), I am going to include here a link to a game I invented in November-December of 1989 called "[Land Ho!](#)" (a game played with homemade cards). I had worked on a farm in Oregon for a year and a half, during 1988-1989. In 1989 I moved from Oregon to New Hampshire (where I got a job working with the cows in the dairy barn of the University of New Hampshire, and then (having preference because I was already a university employee) as a dishwasher in one of the dining halls at the university. While I was working at the cow barn, and staying with a friend in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, I somehow managed to create this card game called "Land Ho!"--which is a cross between "Milles Bornes", "Canasta", and "Rummy 500". I feel that this "card game" has more potential than it was ever given credit for... it did not find a warm welcome when I introduced it to back then, and it was eventually put away in a storage box. And yes, there are now very sophisticated games involving computer simulations, and I'm sure they can provide educational experiences which go far beyond what this game can offer. Even so, I am going to share some basic information about the "Land Ho!" game here, as it also (like the commentary I made on my poems and songs) provides unique insight into my thinking--before I learned about the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Inspiring Educational Experiences #10

I believe most readers will understand if I speak about my love for nature--and my explorations into the ancient Chinese philosophy associated with the "Tao"--together, in the same subsection. Ever since I can remember (even when I was six or seven years old, my parents would take us kids for walks in Morton Arboretum, which was very near Glen Ellyn, IL--where we lived at the time), I have enjoyed taking long walks...especially day hiking in natural areas, and backpacking into more remote wilderness. Some examples: along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, near the Potomac River (Maryland side); in Shenandoah National Park [especially White Oak Canyon Trail, which goes near five waterfalls (included here is a [photograph of one section of the White Oak Canyon Trail](#) which I've kept with me over the years)](Virginia); in the Grand Tetons (Wyoming); in the White Mountains (New Hampshire); in College Woods (University of New Hampshire, Durham); and in the woods behind a cottage I rented in the offseason (Cape Neddick, Maine). And since 1978, I had become familiar with ancient Chinese Philosophy, first through an Alan Watts book titled "The Meaning of Happiness" and Lao Tzu's "Tao Te Ching"--and then through "The I Ching Workbook" by R.L. Wing. I believe I have referenced (Ex: "[Notes on the I Ching](#)")--and attempted to apply the wisdom of the "Tao Te Ching" and the "I Ching"--on so many occasions that an understanding of the "Tao" is a part of my everyday philosophy. The "Tao" has been defined as "the only reasonable and harmonious path for the individual through the cosmos, given his (or her) nature and the nature of the cosmic forces at a given moment in time" (R.L.Wing, from the

introduction to “The I Ching Workbook”). “The Tao is close at hand, yet people seek it afar” (Mencius, Chinese, 372-289 BCE).

Since the time that I began to see that my life path was going to be more of an “organic process” than an exercise in “career development” [a view which was probably consolidated when I made the compilation of excerpts titled [“Developing a Tao Compass”](#) (see #3 on the [webpage for my “Collected Writings”](#)) in Winter 1986-1987]--and that I would again and again find myself making unusual choices for employment (choices which possibly only someone else in a similar set of shoes could easily understand)--knowing something of the “Tao” was helpful. I did what I thought was the next step I could take; then, when I saw where I had arrived at, I had a better idea about what I could do after that. Walking in natural settings--and especially in backcountry wilderness--always reminded me of this “organic process”; you have to explore, in order to discover the best places to explore next. And always there were reminders--from thousands and thousands of other kinds of living beings--that they too lived by an “organic process”...and they always had a calming influence on me... (See?...look what can be done...continue to wonder what is possible...much more that is wonderful will happen in the future....) Consider the following quote from the “Notes on the I Ching” document, which I will share here [and though the link has now vanished (it was from an essay titled “Taoism” at yakrider.com), it is possible to say that “yakrider” may have been paraphrasing Alan Watts, from “Nature, Man and Woman” (first published in 1958, [link to quote in Vintage edition 1991](#))(click on the “little blue p. 73” to see p. 72-76)]-

“... the Chinese (use) the word ‘Li’ to describe nature as organic pattern, translated as the markings in jade, the grain in wood, and the fiber in muscle. All of it is just infinitely beautiful, flowing in all sorts of complicated patterns. There is an order to it, but you cannot put your finger on it. It simply cannot be measured or put into words or symbols.... Look at a tree, a mountain, or the foam on water when it hits the shoreline; even the stars; all amazingly beautiful, in all kinds of wild and crazy patterns. All of it has an order to it that we simply cannot measure or describe. This is ‘Li’--organic pattern.”

A person who does a lot of walking in nature is simply more likely to notice “Li--organic pattern”.

With reference to the “organic process” mentioned above... there were more than a few times when I was in much difficulty figuring out what was the next step for me to take. Often--during these times--what I knew about the “Tao”, from “The I Ching Workbook” (mentioned above)(and from other sources) would calm my concerns...

“There is an estrangement present between elements that naturally belong together. Do not try to reunify the situation with force. Allow things to return to a state of accord naturally, as they will.” (from Hexagram #38 “Contradiction”; interpretation by R.L. Wing)

“You are now faced with a situation that can be influenced only by gradual efforts in a consistent direction... you must maintain clearly defined goals over a long period of time.” (from Hexagram #57 “Penetrating Influence”; interpretation by R.L. Wing)

“Were I to have the least bit of knowledge, in walking on a Great Road, it’s only going astray that I would fear. The Great Way is very level; but people greatly delight in tortuous paths.” (Lao Tzu, from Chapter 53 in the “Te-Tao Ching”; translation Robert G. Hendricks)

“For the soundness of ideas must be tested finally by their practical application. When they fail in this--that is, when they cannot be carried out in everyday life producing lasting harmony and satisfaction and giving real benefit to all concerned--to oneself as well as to others--no ideas can be said to be sound and practical.” (D.T. Suzuki, from “Essays in Zen Buddhism”)

“Adapting is knowing when to act, and when to rest; when to speak, and when to be silent.... By Adapting (my note: to forces which are not conducive to forward progress), life is protected as it rests and restores itself for new activity”. (from Hexagram #17 “Adapting” in “The I Ching Workbook”; interpretation by R. L. Wing)

“This part of the journey is again as natural as the development of chrysalis into butterfly, and any attempt to force this growth egotistically is like trying to open the chrysalis with tweezers.” (Alan Watts, from “The Meaning of Happiness”)

“All day in grey rain, hollyhocks follow the sun’s invisible road.” (Basho, from “Haiku Harvest”; translations by Peter Beilenson and Harry Behn)

“Who can wait quietly while the mud settles? Who can remain still until the moment of action? Observers of the Tao do not seek fulfillment. Not seeking fulfillment, they are not swayed by desire for change.” (Lao Tzu, from the end of Chapter 15 “Tao Te Ching”; translation by Gia-fu Feng and Jane English)

During one of these times of “adapting” (in 1991... see p. 31), I was in “not the main library, but another one” on the University of Maryland campus; and in one the oversize books of Chinese Art I found a photograph of a small statue of Kuan Yin--subtitled “The Goddess of Mercy”. Further research (further explorations) brought me to “Myths and Legends of China” by Edward T.C. Werner (1922); Chapter 10, titled “The Goddess of Mercy: The Guardian Angel of Buddhism” (accessible at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/mlc/mlc12.htm>).

Here are two passages from a compilation of quotes I made titled [“An Introduction to Kuan Yin: Goddess of Compassion and Mercy”](#):

a) “A seventh century Tibetan painting presents the idea of infinite mercy as Avalokitesvara-Kuan Yin with a thousand arms with which to scatter blessings. Usually, two arms are sufficient, Kuan Yin's beneficence being suggested by the various objects she holds in her hands: in one, a vase of amrita, the dew of immortality; in the other, a spray of willow branches with which to sprinkle her inexhaustible compassion upon her devotees.”

b) “She achieved enlightenment long ago but refused to go on to total bliss until all suffering humanity could go with her.”

For many years, my personal spiritual sadhana[an activity (inspired by long association with the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba--see especially p. 39-42, and p. 73-77) which I repeat to deepen my spiritual understanding, and reinforce the spiritual structure of my personality] included the following prayer: “Merciful Divine Mother: in accordance with what Your Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Mercy decree; please bless and sanctify All the Name-Forms in All the Worlds--with Perfect Faith in Divine Omnipresence, with a Most Natural and Heartfelt Willingness to Love All and Serve All (as the Multi-Faceted and Perpetual Flowering of Divine Effulgence), and with no taint of desire for the fruits or consequences of Any Thought, Word, or Deed *Therefrom*.”

Inspiring Educational Experiences #11

In 1991, I put together an outreach package which included a three page description of “How Modern Agriculture-Based Villages Can Contribute to the Continuity of Peaceful Human Settlements”, a flyer describing a concept called “Durham Village”, and long letter to the editor titled “A ‘Branching’ of American Culture” (which had been printed as commentary in a local newspaper). I sent this outreach package to many people and organizations working in related fields of activity (including environmental organizations, environmental magazines, peace organizations, sustainable agriculture organizations, individual organic farmers, etc). I enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope to encourage responses. I was hoping to find like-minded people and kindred spirits working along similar lines; a project similar enough in its goals and intentions to my own ideas, which I could contribute to; and a “tipping point” project which could be a catalyst for community wide change. I received many responses to this outreach, which I compiled into a document, and mailed to those who responded. [See #4 on the [webpage for my “Collected Writings”](#) for the newsletter “When a Village is Tended, a Toxic Waste Dump

Cannot Grow"--a culminating piece which included various pieces I did outreach with at that time

website; and see #5 on the [webpage for my "Collected Writings"](#)--"Some Responses to Outreach Done with the 'Durham Village' Concept "--for 16 of the responses I received.]

Unfortunately, I did not find enough of what I was looking for in any existing projects (a common difficulty for me... my interests and work seemed to be too far "outside the boxes" to consider "teaming up with others") That was one of three important insights I gained from this learning experience. Another insight was that I felt I still did not have sufficient personal growth and skill sets to be a valuable asset to existing projects--or to start a project myself. The third insight was the result of a response to my outreach package from Martha Shaw, an artist living in Massachusetts [Martha Shaw had done some art work for a "local currency" being developed at that time ([Berkshares](#))]. I no longer have the long and very thoughtful handwritten note that Martha Shaw sent me... however, at the end of her letter she added, as a postscript: "P.S. You might be interested in (a) most penetrating and insightful book: "Why the Village Movement?" by J.C. Kumarappa—an economist who worked with Gandhi. Available from Greenleaf Books; Canton, MA". I did get a copy of "Why the Village Movement?", and some of the writing in that book changed my thinking in a fundamental way... about how important it is for us to understand the consequences of how we use our time, energy, and money--and how this is the most effective way for people to live what they believe. So much attention in contemporary culture is given to "voting", and so little to the fact that everyone is participating--all the time--by the way they channel their time, energy, and money. I had already been thinking along these lines before I read "Why the Village Movement?" [Ex: see the bottom of p. 5 of the roughly made newsletter "[Disarmament Times](#)", I compiled in 1982)], but "Why the Village Movement?" was the first book I read which provided a deep, spiritual foundation to such thinking. One of the "Eight IPCR Concepts" (more in section about The IPCR Initiative below)--"Spiritually Responsible Investing"--was inspired by J.C. Kumarappa's writing. Here is one representative excerpt, from p. 79 of "Why the Village Movement?"

"If we feel it is beyond us to guarantee the concomitant results of all our transactions, it necessarily follows that we must limit our transactions to a circle well within our control. This is the bed rock of swadeshi. The smaller the circumference, the more accurately can we gauge the results of our actions, and (the) more conscientiously shall we be able to fulfill our obligations as trustees."

I hope, by my work, to convey a message similar to the message of that book (and of Mr. Kumarappa's life); that is, to encourage the integration of spiritual wisdom into the everyday circumstances of community life.

Here, in association with the previous paragraph, I will include the following quote, from the interpretation of #11 Hexagram (I Ching) (Prospering) by R. L. Wing in "The I Ching Workbook":

“It is possible for leaders to be so magnanimous and progressive--and circumstances to be so constructive and inspiring--that even the most evil elements change for the better.”

Are there actions people can take in the everyday circumstances of community life which will encourage the emergence of many such leaders? *This is a question which I am most interested in....*

As an ending note to this section on “Inspiring Educational Experiences”, I will say this: however much I have benefitted from formal education, I believe that the most valuable education I have received came from self-motivated learning of the “experimenting”, hands on, on-the-job, and personal research varieties. Many, many times, when I was interested in something, I explored on my own for answers—and when I had questions, I found someone to ask... or went inward for answers. Thus, I have come to believe that “informal learning” is at least as valuable as “formal education”--if not more. (And thus I believe there are many alternatives to the rising cost of “formal education”).

The Most Important Influence in My Life: the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba

At different times in my life, I have become aware of old patterns of thinking which originated from dysfunctional family experiences in my early life. When these times coincided with an awareness of resources which might be especially helpful in that regard, I gave special attention to reforming what remained of those old patterns of thinking. In the years 1991-92, I went to many Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families (ACA) meetings, and it was through someone I met at one of those meetings (in December, 1992) that I learned (through one of the biographical videos made by Richard Bock) about Sri Sathya Sai Baba (1926-2011).

From that point in time, I have tried to make a sincere effort to be more service-oriented. For most of the years between 1993-2001, I was an activity specialist for elders with special needs (specifically elders with Alzheimer’s Disease or Dementia)(mostly in assisted living groups homes in Maryland and Virginia). As my work in the elder care field provided me with some of the most rewarding experiences I ever had in a work environment, I gave little time to writing during this time—and instead spent much of my free time creating activities which I thought would promote pleasant experiences for the people I was helping.

Here are descriptions of some of the different activities I created, or modified, to provide pleasant and enjoyable experiences for people with Alzheimer’s Disease or Dementia:

1) Notecard Making

Notecard making was the most consistently valuable of all the activities I ever used as an activity

specialist in the elder care field. One of the important goals of the activity was to “handmake” a card for a family member to receive, and then actually mail it to them. Just that part of it was much appreciated on all sides, but there was many more dimensions to this activity. The cards were made by taking a blank sheet of “print quality” paper (thick enough to hold up when something was glued to it), folding it in half, gluing a photograph from a magazine to the front, and handwriting a message on the inside. As for the photographs from magazines, there was (at least for me), an inexhaustible supply of old National Geographic magazines in the “books, etc for sale” section of one of the Montgomery County (Maryland) public libraries. And before I even started this activity, I had made about 50 example notecards at home. So when the residents and I got assembled around a table to begin, there was (usually) something for everyone to do. The higher functioning folks could cut out pictures from the National Geographic magazines I brought, trim those photographs to fit the folded in half blank paper, and use a glue stick to glue the photos to the folded in half blank paper. Some people were involved in simply finding good pictures to cut out. Other lower functioning folks could look through the already made up examples of notecards (the “notecard collection”), and pick out one or two to keep. (At times, I had visions of buying a “spin around” rack to keep some notecards on hand at the assisted living group homes I was visiting, but there were enough reasons against that idea, so it never happened.) This notecard making activity was such a good “help us all get to know each other” activity that I often used it when I first visited an assisted living group home, as a way of having a pleasant start (for all of us).

2) Take-A-Penny Game

The first time I saw this game in action was at an Adult Day Care in Kensington, Maryland. I had begun my work there (in 1993) as a part-time bus driver (picking up participants in the morning, and driving them home in the afternoon). Soon I was volunteering (during the middle of my split shift) to help with activities. At a kind of “open house” to which family members were invited, the director divided us all into two teams, asked a question to one team at a time, and tallied up points for those raising their hands as a positive response to the questions.

The questions (which were from a game called [“Penny Ante”](#), that is still offered by companies which sell activity supplies online) were as follows: “How many people are wearing something blue?”, “How many people are wearing a watch?”—and so on (the questions being something even low functioning people can understand, and probably respond in the affirmative). Most often, though, the game is played around a table, with a pile of pennies in the middle as a kind of “pot”. And the activity director picks the cards, and reads out a variety of “Take-a-Penny” if “scenarios”... Take a penny if you ever lived on a farm; Take a penny if you’ve been to the beach; Take a penny if you ever made spaghetti sauce; Take a penny if you’ve ever been to Europe; etc. The general idea is to have cards which will get positive responses, even for low functioning folks--and to have cards which are “conversation starters” (which may lead to people talking about personal experiences on various subjects).

I did create my own set of cards, over the years, and this game was usually very lively. There were, however, potential difficulties with this game which one had to be prepared for. One difficulty was that some of the folks might just say “yes” every time, as if just going along with the question, or even to get more pennies--which is acceptable, just by itself. However, on one occasion, a higher functioning person noticed that another player was saying “yes” every time, and eventually commented on it: “She says ‘yes’ every time, and she’s lying--she’s never been to Europe”. I asked this higher functioning person to come away from the game for a moment, and I offered him this advice: “Whenever she does that (pretends that she has done something when she hasn’t), just say ‘fine’. You and I, we will know that she might be making it up, but this way it won’t disrupt the game”. He agreed, and a few weeks later he told me that he had been using that advice on many other occasions as well, and it was very helpful. I myself can think of more than a few times when I should’ve used it, and didn’t....

3) Sing-Alongs (with songbooks I made)

When I first started doing activities (which was at an assisted living group home), I looked through activity supplies they already had, and found a 90 minute cassette “34 All-Time Great Sing-Along Selections” by Mitch Miller (and the Gang). And when I played this cassette to see how many of these songs were familiar to the folks (at that house), I discovered that almost everyone knew every single song. [Here is the playlist from the “34 All-Time Great...” album: That Old Gang Of Mine; Tip-Toe Through The Tulips With Me; Side By Side; Medley--Shine On Harvest Moon/For Me And My Gal; Medley--In The Shade Of The Old Apple Tree/In The Good Old Summertime; Cecilia; Bye Bye Blackbird; Irish Medley--When Irish Eyes Are Smiling/My Wild Irish Rose; Medley--I've Got Sixpence/I've Been Working On The Railroad/That's Where My Money Goes; Medley--I Love My Baby-My Baby Loves Me/If You Knew Susie; By The Light Of The Silvery Moon; Good Night Sweetheart; Medley--Singin' In The Rain/All I Do Is Dream Of You/Toot, Toot, Tootsie!; You Are My Sunshine; Carolina In The Morning; Medley --While Strolling Through The Park One Day/Ida; Medley--Sweet Adeline/Let Me Call You Sweetheart; I'm Looking Over A Four-Leaf Clover; The Whiffenpoof Song (Baa! Baa! Baa!)/My Melancholy Baby; When The Red, Red Robin Comes Bob, Bob Bobbin'Along; Medley--When You Are Sweet Sixteen/Silver Threads Among The Gold; Now Is The Hour.]

This discovery led to my making songbooks (small ones at first), and making my own program cassette tapes of Mitch Miller sing-along songs, from albums I found at second hand bookstores (which also had used records). [Note: I learned later it is common knowledge among activity directors that memories relating to creative activity (especially music, singing, etc) are among the least affected by memory loss.] Over the years I worked as an activity specialist, I researched song compilations (at libraries, etc), and continued to expand my record and tape collection of songs in the 1900-1955 range. I even found a

record collector (he advertised in "Good Old Days" magazine--"Sounds of the Century") who had almost every record album recorded from 1900-1940 (many of them were 78s)--and he offered to make custom cassette tapes for me, at \$20 per tape. I may have spent 7 or 8 Sundays at his residence in Amisville, VA, and he would sometimes play three different recordings before we settled on one to put on the cassette. My goal was to have a) ten top hits from each year 1910-1940, and b) signature songs from the most recognizable performers. (Note: that 20 cassette collection is also something I no longer have....) While I most certainly did not have much of a singing voice, I had a variety of backup cassette tapes made, and songbooks which had all the songs in those backup tapes, so--in a sense--we were all singing along with the cassette tape (which could be stopped at any time for sidetrack conversation....) Since the sing-alongs were very popular with the folks, I always had songbooks, cassettes, and my cassette player with me (in my large athletic tote bag) when I visited any assisted living group home (even if I didn't use them). One of the most popular songs of all was ["I'm Looking Over A Four-Leaf Clover"](#) (very pleasant melody and words, and even poetic images). The last, and largest, songbook I made was titled "Songs We Love To Sing" (174 Popular Showtunes, Ballads, Folksongs, Hymns, and All-Time Favorites), and the many files containing the Table of Contents, and the song lyrics, can be accessed on the [webpage of my "Collected Writings"](#) (see #6.5).

4) "Wheel of Fortune" (variation) (using popular songs I had cassette recordings of)

There were many activities (both from catalogues, and activities I created myself) which did not work (sometimes there didn't seem to be any way to know what would work, and what wouldn't, until it was tried). One idea I had didn't work because it was too complicated. That one was a game I tried to invent which would be like "Scrabble", with many letters, and with people adding words to words already made in the center of a big table. After I realized it wasn't going to work, I tried to find something else to do with the all the letters--which I had painstakingly made by tracing the capital letters on to poster board, cutting a rectangle around the letters, tracing them with red magic marker, and coloring them in with green magic marker. What I decided to do with these letters was play a "Wheel of Fortune" variation--with a bulletin board, the letters, and a kind of "name that song" thing. The name of an old song (which the folks would know) was pinned on to the bulletin board, with the blank side out. Each resident took turns guessing a letter, and if they guessed a letter (or letters), the letter(s) would be turned letter side out. When someone guessed the name of the song, I played a version of the song on my cassette player. The tricky part of this game was the interval between the "name that song", when I had to take the old letters off the bulletin board, and put new ones on (a process which took some time).

5) Balloon Volleyball

Even after I got sand-filled bases with barbell weights on top of them that I could put the poles in (to tie

the volleyball net to), I still had to have some kind of “anchor”, so I could pull the net tight. Doing this indoors meant such a “freestanding” anchor also had to be heavy. While it took a few trips to get the necessary equipment inside and assembled, once it was up, this game was real fun--and even the staff would get into it (although they had many other things to do). If you get the right kind of balloon (thick and big, but not too big, so it is light enough), the volleys can go on for some time. One drawback: a few residents got so involved in the game that they sometimes left their chairs in a dramatic way to help keep the volley going... and this was a safety hazard to avoid at all costs. However, those moments were the exception--mostly it was good fun for all.

6) Name Something That Begins with _____

This kind of “brainstorming” activity helps with vocabulary and word finding. And it often leads to sidetrack conversations about the things named.

7) Trivia

There were many resources (including many articles in activity newsletters) for trivia questions which were interesting and pleasant for people with different levels of functioning. Whether it was name that movie, or name that song, or who did this or that, or who can name the nine planets in our solar system (I no longer have my activity supplies, otherwise I would have the deck of cards I developed over the years, with a variety of questions), the idea was to provide a pleasant, and mostly easy to manage, challenge which can lead into further conversation, and reminiscing.

8) Reminiscing

There were magazines like “Good Old Days” and “Reminisce” which had articles which could be read, and which would lead into conversation about specific topics, like the old schoolhouse, the farm, putting up jars of vegetables, which many people who were 70-80 years old in 1993-2000 could relate to. And as I mention also on p. 38, I had my “Timetable of Events in Popular Culture--from 1900-1991” (which included news, books, music, sports, inventions, etc from each of those years). At various times during my years as an activity specialist, I would bring out this “Timetable”, and we would talk about specific years--with the years of the Depression (much of the 1930’s) and the years of World War II, being the years we looked into most often. (At other times, it might be the year a person graduated from high school, as many people remembered the songs which were popular at that time). For the many files associated with that “Timetable” (as I had to scan the original documents), see #4.5 at the [webpage for my “Collected Writings”](#).

9) Sachet Making

I visited craft stores often, and from the potpourri sections I got the idea of handmaking sachets. The handmaking process required a little more dexterity than notecard making: cutting calico cloth into squares (I sometimes did this ahead of time); putting in some neutral potpourri; sprinkling some lavender oil on to the potpourri; and then tying the cloth together with a colored ribbon. However, these little sachets were a popular item, so as long as we had soothing music in the background, we usually managed to make a good number of sachets.

10) Flower Arranging

The craft stores usually had a large variety of artificial flowers, and a large variety of vases (which could also be found at thrift stores). I had already cut the artificial flowers to arranging length, and we would spend a pleasant 45 minutes to an hour creating arrangements, changing a flower here and there, or re-arranging the whole thing, and then picking one or two of the arrangements for centerpieces in the dining room.

11) Gardens

Although I tried gardens in three different settings (one with portable planters on a patio), the summers in the Washington D.C., Maryland, Virginia area (where the assisted living group homes were) were so hot and humid that by the time any kind of vegetable or flowers were growing, no one wanted to be outside to do anything with them. If I was more knowledgeable about “grow lights” I might’ve tried something indoors, but indoors usually had to be clear of “things which can be made into a mess” (as sometimes medication changes brought about “instability”--and part of my job was to create interesting and enjoyable activities, and to provide structure and stability.

12) Wind Up Balsa Wood Gliders

There were many experiments I tried (as mentioned above, I often didn’t know what would work, and what wouldn’t work, until I tried it), and another worth mentioning is the time I brought wind up (rubber band) balsa wood gliders to one of the homes. I brought two because I was sure both of them would eventually fly out of the fenced in backyard, and that would be that. I had a particular idea in mind with these gliders: one of the residents (who had serious dementia) had been a neurosurgeon, and, because of his particular temperament and condition, I had few successes getting him involved. He would be at the table, or in the room, but often he was too heavily medicated. On one of his better days, he was part of the group who came out into the backyard with me and my balsa wood gliders. I told everyone I was going to wind up one of the gliders, and we would see if it would fly. Then I asked Dr. _____ if he would like to help me. He was willing, so I got behind him, still holding the wound-up

propeller, and put the glider in his hands. I will say he had glasses on, so I wasn't worried about the propeller. Then I just said: "throw it, and see what happens". He did, and that first flight flew in an almost perfect circle around the inside perimeter of the fence, and then came back and landed almost at his feet. I looked at him, and he looked at me--and smiled. That experience is something I like to reminisce about.

13) The Driving Range (Golf)

When I first started in elder care I was, like I said above, a bus driver. And one of the passengers who sat near the front of the bus and talked with me (while I was driving) was a high functioning fellow, with increasing memory loss (he would say "the whatd'ya call" when he couldn't remember a word). He was a very pleasant fellow, and we could have conversations even though he switched subjects. I would just do the same, and we would cover much ground in our conversations. I knew he used to play golf, and once when I was talking with his wife, I asked if I could come on my own time, and take this fellow to a driving range. She thought it would be okay, so we tried it (that was before I knew about passenger liability insurance....) Once at the driving range, we found a booth, I set up a ball on the tee, and after a few practice swings, he cranked up and swung--and the club slipped from his hands, bounced off the roof of the booth, and fell to the ground with a clatter. It was a setback, and maybe we should've stopped there, but I decided to see what would happen with another try. On the second try, this fellow caught the ball square in the heart of the club with a good swing, and that ball went 75 yards in the air, straight out into the driving range area. And he turned to me and said, "I haven't done that in almost 20 years." It's now been about 10 years since I last played golf, and so I am now getting first-hand experience with the question: "Will this year be the last year I can _____?" A good activity specialist can keep people involved in activities they like to do for years beyond when they might've stopped otherwise.

The activities I have mentioned here are mostly ones which led to pleasant and enjoyable times for residents in assisted living group homes. I did have individual clients also, but individual companion care can be very person specific. If I was writing only for readers in the elder care field, I might provide more information about individual companion care. But here, in the context of this "Autobiographical Sketch", I think what I have shared will be enough for readers to gain some knowledge about caregiving under special circumstances, and for readers to understand that I had many special and valuable experiences providing care to people from a generation who I respected and cared for, very much.

I will add here that I think of my experiences of service to elders with special needs (one of the most rewarding and enjoyable jobs I had) as one of the genuine miracles of my life, as I was able to create positive experiences and provide meaningful care and support for people in need in a way that I was not

capable of when my mother's health was deteriorating due to Multiple Sclerosis.

One other experience which I regard as a genuine miracle in my life: something my father said to me, one evening during the time I was helping him because he couldn't drive (1991-94)--and he was helping me, because I had become unemployed (in 1991), and needed a place to stay. It was during the time I was doing much inner work (with the help of the Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families meetings mentioned earlier). I came home one evening with an interest in discussing something that had come up during the meeting I went to, and my father, who was not very good at talking about his feelings, somehow was willing to share with me--"I was not well equipped to handle those situations (the emotional issues part of our family difficulties)". There were emotional complexities which occurred when my mother was ill with Multiple Sclerosis. Some people are "well equipped" to handle such complexities; some people are not, and get help. And some people don't know enough about such complexities to know if they need help--or know how to get it. Speaking just for myself, it was long after the fact that I became aware of how much help I needed (but did not get) "processing the changes", when I was still young, and my mother was becoming incapacitated.

When my father spoke the above truth, it changed the dynamic between us forever--and I became much more sympathetic towards him, and understanding of what his own difficulties were. Hearing this truth from him, happening at about the same time as I was gaining spiritual understanding through the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and doing some healing inner work, made it possible for me to forgive him for what I had thought were failures on his part which had disastrous consequences.... It also made it possible for me to be on good terms with him (though we were very different in our views on many things)... and I felt better being on good terms with him.... [Although he had his shortcomings, he had many positives, which I am glad I could more fully appreciate before he died [see ["A Tribute to my Father"](#), from Funeral Services (January 4, 1996) at the National Presbyterian Church (D.C.); and ["A List \(with commentary--from me\) of Phraseology Commonly Used by My Father"](#) (which I compiled in 1996)]

Now--at least most of the time--I think of difficulties, and tragic happenings, as one part among many of God's story that is beyond our comprehension... and being that there are, and will continue to be, the unexplainable and the inscrutable (no matter how far we advance in human morality), it will be well (I believe) to aspire to "close communication" and "being on good terms" with "higher spiritual entities that are beyond our comprehension" (and that may help us... often in ways we may not, at first, understand).

Also during the time I was helping my father (and he was helping me), I revised the family photo album, so that it included many photographs which had, up until then, remained slides (from my father's old camera) which were stored in boxes. And I created a "Timetable of Events in Popular Culture--from

1900-1991”(which included news, books, music, sports, inventions, etc from each of those years).I used 14” X 22” poster board as a base, and pasted typed sections (on aged-looking archival paper) for each year onto a penciled in grid. Each poster board could accommodate three years. One of my original intentions, when making the “Timetable”, was to make it easier for me to better remember the years when I had some difficult experiences (so I could “work through” those difficult experiences). The other original intention was to create a way for me to re-examine my view of American Culture, to see where I may have been right, or wrong, about where I might do some good. Eventually, I also made use of this “Timetable”, when I was working with elders with Alzheimer’s Disease or Dementia, as many of these elders could still remember well things that had happened in their distant past. [Note: I still have document files for this “Timetable”, but they are made from scanned copies of 11” X 14” paper, which were then “spliced together”, so one large file (over 3MB) only covers 9 years... thus, the many files on [webpage for my “Collected Writings”](#) (see #4.5).]

During the years 1993-1996, I was (for most of the time) an activity specialist. I did make one more try at college coursework (this time at the University of Maryland, College Park (again)--but again, I only completed one semester). It is worth noting though, that one of the courses I took was on Food Security, and for one of the other courses (through the Family Studies Department), my final paper was “Community Visioning and Sustainability: Policy Recommendations for Families and Communities” (40 pages; 1994)(a scanned document--requiring two files--which is #5.5 on the [webpage for my “Collected Writings”](#)). [Note: the way I found out about Community Visioning--which is the most crucial component of the IPCR Initiative and CPCS Initiative “constellation of initiatives” approach to resolving the challenges of our times--was as follows.... During this semester, I had gone to some meetings associated with the Sustainable Communities Task Force Report of the President's Council on Sustainable Development--and those meetings led to me exploring the resource section of an organization in Washington D.C. working on community sustainability ([Concern, Inc.](#)—see notes at bottom of linked webpage about the Community Sustainability Resource Institute and Concern, Inc). Anyway, a friend of the director of Concern, Inc. (who was herself the director of Community Sustainability Resource Institute—and her husband worked with Housing and Urban Development doing some kind of community development work) was having a “get together”, and I went to it. She (the one having the “get-together”) had just seen the “Chattanooga...” video, and thought I might like to see it, so she let me watch it right then, in another room from the “get together”. And--as I say in more than a few IPCR Initiative and CPCS Initiative documents:

“This writer’s interest in Community Visioning Initiatives was inspired instantly when, in 1994, he watched a video documentary titled “[Chattanooga: A Community With A Vision](#)” (13 minutes)(*highly recommended*). The video includes many interviews and how-to details, and documents two very successful Community Visioning Initiatives organized by the non-profit organization Chattanooga Venture (Chattanooga, Tennessee USA)--one in 1984, and a follow-up in 1993. The 1984 Chattanooga

Community Visioning Project ('Vision 2000') attracted more than 1,700 participants, and produced 40 community goals--which resulted in the implementation of 223 projects and programs, the creation of 1,300 permanent jobs, and a total financial investment of 793 million dollars. What this writer saw in the documentary was a way of revitalizing the sense of working together with our neighbors for the greater good, so that there would be an electrifying feeling about what going to happen next--a collective revitalization of the belief that many good things would be happening in the community, and that many people who lived in the same community would have a part in it."

Also during the years 1993-1996, I read and re-read Vol. 1-11 (first U.S. Editions) of "Sathya Sai Speaks" (discourses from the years 1953-1982). When my father passed away in December, 1995 (from a heart attack, though he also had deteriorating health due to a disease known as ameliodosis), I inherited some money, and spent some time "not working". [I took a risk... instead of saving the money, or investing in job-related education, I chose to do see what I could do (with writing, or....) which might help me learn more about how I could "find my path" (i.e. find actual employment doing what I most believed in).

One of the most special experiences I had during this time of "not working" happened when I went to see Ammachi (Mata Amritanandamayi) at one of the locations which was part of her visit to the United States (in 1996). Amma (which is what most people call her) is sometimes known as the "hugging saint", as one of the ways she shares her special presence is by sitting (sometimes all day), and giving one person after another a hug. I had been going to a satsang at a house near Dickerson, Maryland, where Amma had once stayed; and I decided that, having the time and the finances, I would see if going to see her might lead to some new ideas, or connections. Once there [her two day visit was (I think) at a college campus in Connecticut], the most special experience happened when I decided to get into the "question line". Even while people were being "funneled in" to receive a hug from Amma, there was a separate "question line"--and when you got to the front of the line, you could ask Amma a question. What happened to me--and what probably happened to many people in the "question line"--is that I mulled over question after question, wondering what *could* I ask such an exalted being? I finally settled on: "I would like to be a good 'son', but sometimes I am not. Can you tell me what I can do, so that I can be a 'good son'?" When I got to the front of the question line, one of the sanyasins (who had taken a vow of renunciation, and who assisted Amma in various ways), listened to my question, and then relayed it to Amma (who was about three feet away, and ever busy hugging people). Soon, the sanyasin returned, and he said: "Amma says: 'continue with your efforts, they will eventually lead to fruition'"--and then, suddenly, Amma turned to me, in the midst of everything else that was going on, leaned nearer, gave me a little "chuck" under my chin with her right hand made into a fist (as if to say "keep your chin up"), smiled, and then went back into her "hugging" activity. What really seemed special to me was how she could make a gesture like that, with so much significance for me, without really knowing me. After that, I went over to a chair among some rows of chairs not much in use then, and thought about that....

There were two documents I created during this time of “not working”. One was a study guide--a compilation of quotations, in several different categories, for “Ramacharitamana: The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama” (epic saga by Valmiki; further interpretation by Tulasidas; edited by R.C. Prasad). The title for this study guide: [“Meditations on Devotion to Rama”](#). Unfortunately, the only file I have of this document is a scanned document of the whole 126 page booklet (121MB)(so I have tried uploading it to Dropbox, and then linking to it there, but I am not sure if that will work....) The other document I created during this time of “not working” was “An Arrangement of Quotations from ‘Sathya Sai Speaks’ (Vol. 1-11, First U.S. Editions)” (301 pages)(completed in early 1997). Special Note: The sources of all quotations in this collection were revised in 2004 so that they would reference the larger-print editions of “Sathya Sai Speaks”, which were published in 1997 to replace the First Editions I had been using as my key sources for quotations.... In other words, the published versions of “Sathya Sai Speaks” which would be made most accessible for purchase to people interested in Baba’s Teachings were changed during the very year I compiled my original collection of quotations). Here is a link to my revised [“An Arrangement of Quotations from ‘Sathya Sai Speaks’ \(Vol. 1-15, Revised Larger Print Editions\)”](#). The “Arrangement of Quotations...” document is also accessible as #6 on the [webpage for my “Collected Writings”](#).

In February, 1997, I went to India to stay at Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s main ashram in Puttaparthi, where He was at this time of year. (It is worth noting that--as people who advised me about travel arrangements said it would be--when I went to the Indian Embassy in Washington D.C., and said my reason for going to India was educational, to visit Sri Sathya Sai Baba, I got a Passport... no other reason was necessary). I had finances remaining from the inheritance mentioned above, and I felt the opportunity to see Baba first-hand was a most unprecedented opportunity. I also had the original manuscript of the above mentioned “arrangement of quotations” (my original compilation), and although I thought it would be very presumptuous for someone like me (with such shortcomings) to expect that Baba would acknowledge me, or the manuscript--I felt it was right to try. Not long after my arrival, I got a front and center seat (seating was done by a kind of “lottery”, so it was uncertain from day to day where one might sit) for Darshan (a time when Baba walks among the people who are quietly seated awaiting an opportunity to see Him, give Him a letter, be chosen for an interview, have some object be blessed by Him, etc.--and/or a time when He sits in a chair in front of the people assembled and leads devotional singing). On that occasion, I had the manuscript with me, but Baba walked by without noticing me in any way. Later, near the end of my time visiting His Residence in Puttaparthi, I wrote a letter, and took that with me to Darshan. On that occasion (March 31, 1997), He came to where I was (nowhere near front center), and accepted the letter from me (... He did that... for me....) Up until now (March, 2017), I had not thought of sharing anything about the contents of that letter; but I now believe it is appropriate for the contents to be known. Below are the four key paragraphs in the letter. What prompted the letter was my inner struggle regarding how I felt about Baba personally (which was separate from how I felt about His Teachings). The difficulty was that I just didn’t seem to have much liking for Him. A

difficult dilemma (I thought) when such a thing as “Darshan” is possible, and you have the opportunity to be there, and then.... So I wrote a letter which included the following paragraphs:

--“And so I pray--please, please, please allow me to proceed in my spiritual development, and thus become more inspired to serve others, and closer to Mergence with Your Grace, by guiding me to a Guru--

- a) who I can relate to on the physical plane as well as the spiritual plane (who I can talk with on a regular basis)
- b) who I will recognize immediately--by their Divine Effulgence--as a Guru qualified to guide me to God-realization and
- c) who I will love and be devoted to immediately

--“If you find my prayer, my appeal, for such a Guru-Disciple relationship to be insincere, or motivated by inappropriate desires (to gain the approval of others, to gain sensual pleasure, etc) then do not take this letter. Instead, please clarify what lessons I need to learn, and how I can learn them—and then please help me learn them.”

--“If you find this prayer--my appeal for such a Guru-Disciple relationship--to be sincere, and motivated by appropriate desires (to learn how to live in accordance with Your Will), then please take this letter at Darshan on March 31, 1997 or April 1, 1997—and then please clarify how I can meet my Guru and begin instruction.”

--“I know You are aware of my inner desires and my inner struggles. I trust You will grant what is best for my spiritual growth.”

With Faith in Your Love,

Stefan Pasti

(end of quotes from the letter)

[Commentary from 2014 (which I included at the end of the file document I made to save that letter onto a flash drive):

I have since come to believe that the “Guru” I was given was the increase inpotential to actualize love-filled human communities

that Baba’s Teachings

and collaborative problem solving and community education processes

--such as Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses, Community Visioning Initiatives [the potential I had already seen in a video I first watched ([“Chattanooga: A Community with a Vision”](#)) in 1994], Neighborhood Learning Centers, and Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education--

made easier to visualize....

“By the examples of your lives, you have to restore confidence among the people in the higher values of life.... Have the *picture of the happy, united, love filled human community* in your heart. That will give you enough encouragement in your mission.” (“Sathya Sai Speaks” Vol. 15, Chpt. 12, p.70)]

And clarification about the above commentary (from March, 2017): What I now believe is that my “Guru” was that potential (which I believed was made more possible to realize by Baba’s Teachings, and which was made easier for me to visualize (i.e. “the happy, united, love filled human community”--keep a *picture of the happy, united, love filled human community* in my heart)... and *whatever I learned in my efforts to realize that potential, was what I was taught by such a “Guru”.*

I still have a long ways to go to come near putting into practice the spiritual wisdom represented by the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. And yet however much I may fall short as a student of Baba’s Teachings, I do believe *there is something profoundly significant about Baba’s Presence at this particular time, and many things which are profoundly relevant about His Teachings.* [Note: In June, 2009, I made a shorter arrangement of quotations by Baba (42 pages) titled [“Divine Intervention: A Collection of Quotations from ‘Sathya Sai Speaks’ \(Vol. 1-15\)”](#). I recommend this short collection (over the longer collection referenced earlier in this document) as a more accessible pathway to understanding why I believe *there is something profoundly significant about Baba’s Presence at this particular time, and many things which are profoundly relevant about Baba’s Teachings.* The “Divine Intervention” document is also accessible as #11 on the [webpage for my “Collected Writings”](#).

Note: There are three other “things” worth mentioning which happened in India—and I will include them here.

1) While I was in Puttaparthi--which is where Baba’s main ashram is, and where I first visited--I learned about a special orphanage some distance from Puttaparthi. What I had heard (from two young men who had access to a taxi), was that the orphanage was favored with miracles, in the way of “amrita” (Divine Nectar) which emanated from an amulet with a picture of Shirdi Sai on it [Shirdi Sai Baba was the first appearance of what is to be a [“triple Avathara”](#)--Shirdi Sai (1835?-1918), Sathya Sai (1926-2011),

and Prema Sai (2030-2116)]. Apparently, so much “amrita” emanated from the pendant that it filled many, many bottles--and people would come from all around (and from other countries) to see the pendant, and acquire “amrita” to take back home. I had seen--both on videos, and in person--Baba produce “vibhuti” (sacred, and symbolic, healing ash) from His Hand... but although I had read about both “vibhuti” and “amrita” emanating out of photos and objects, I had never--personally--witnessed it happening first hand. So I commissioned a taxi trip to the orphanage. [I believe it is the same orphanage (Sri Ranga Patna orphanage) that is referred to in [this YouTube video footage](#).] What I saw was similar to what the video footage shows: the director has the amulet in the palm of his hand, and the amulet oozes “amrita”, and continues to ooze “amrita”, until it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that this “happening” is a “miracle”... some kind of “Divine Intervention”. When I came to that conclusion, I said “Jai Sai Ram” to the director--which can be translated to mean “Victory to the Lord who is Sai Baba, Lord Rama, and etc”.

2) While I was sitting in the columns of people awaiting which columns would be picked first (by a kind of “lottery”), for the choicest seats for Darshan--when Baba walks among those assembled, taking letters, producing “vibhuti”, picking out people for personal interviews, etc--there were two activities I engaged in most often. One was making up a prayer, which included, at the end, the four line prayer (see p. 28) which was a part of my spiritual practice for so long (my spiritual practice is currently not occurring due to the physical instability I have associated with unsuccessful physical therapy....) The other activity I engaged in was making up a kind of “spiritual currency” I eventually called “virtue notes” (accessible in two files as #6.25 on the [webpage for my “Collected Writings”](#). The fourteen virtues I featured, in the order they appear in the two files: kindness, courtesy, responsibility, courage, gratitude, faith, resolution, abstinence, serenity, purity, reverence, silence, wisdom, and love. I created handmade versions in India, and then revised those with Microsoft Publisher once I was back in the states. Although it would seem there would be no practical use for such esoteric currency, the point of it (as I saw it) was to help people imagine the kind of world where such currency *would be* in use. There was a sun with rays spreading out on one side of the currency note, and some commentary on the particular virtue on the other side.

3) There were four books which I will always remember as a part of my trip to India. In the collection of “sacred books” which I studied during the time when I was doing a “writing sadhana” [which included writing by hand a set text, and some chosen quotations—and then inner “namasmarana” (repeating the Name of the Lord to myself), followed by silent meditation], quotations from each of the books below were included in the “notes” which were a part of the “sacred book” collection.

a) “Living with the Himalayan Masters” by Swami Rama

I met some guys from Australia at the ashram of Sri Sathya Sai Baba in Puttaparthi (people from countries all over the world come to this main ashram), and roomed with them in a dormitory in

Whitefield (Baba's residence in Whitefield was near a college for boys supported by Baba). One of the guys had a copy of "Living with the Himalayan Masters", which he lent to me. While this book, and two of the other three mentioned here, are now accessible through the Internet, in 1997 the only way you would see these books in the United States would be at a spiritual event associated with the visit of an Indian spiritual master (or at a "New Age" bookstore). In contrast, there are so many spiritually advanced people in India's history, and in India's present time, that trying to make choices in a bookstore in India can be a challenge. In "Living with the Himalayan Masters", Swami Rama provides in-depth personal experience of his guru-disciple relationship, and in-depth personal experience related to his visits with a large number of sages and spiritual masters his guru directed him to visit. Here is one quote which I used in my writing sadhana (described above): "A good resolution or Sankalpa sets up a series of such thoughts, each contributing its quota to the process of purification and strengthening".

b) "Mantra and Meditation" by Pandit Usharbudh Arya (a disciple of Swami Rama)

When I was preparing to go to MacLeod-Ganj [near Dharamsala (where the Dalai Lama has a residence), in the corner of India near Pakistan and Kashmir] for a silent retreat I had heard about in Whitefield, I went to Bangalore (a big city nearby) to find some books (and also blank notebooks). The book I chose for the long train and bus trip (roughly 2 days) from Bangalore to near MacLeod-Ganj was "Mantra and Meditation". Here are a few quotes:

"The yogis believe that a person is capable of cultivating a certain type of personality by choice and design." (p. 25)

"The process by which the universal consciousness emits the sounds and the words is called 'sphota'. This word has been variously translated as sound-essence, or sound-explosion, depending on the way you look at this principle." (p. 86)

"The Sun of pure Consciousness will dawn on whomsoever has mastered the pathways for returning articulate diversified speech to its deeper origins in the Word-Principle." (p. 94)

"Here we come again to the Vedic affirmation: 'The person who shines in the Sun, that one I am'." (p. 37)

"Only those who have been initiated in the secretmost yoga tradition of solar science fully understand the meaning of the word *hamsah*, for it represents that Sun of life-force with which the yogi finally identifies himself, and the entire *prana* of the universe then comes to be at his disposal." (p. 57)

c) "The Yogi Sutras of Patanjali"

While in MacLeod-Ganj, I visited one of the bookstores--and since MacLeod-Ganj is a small town in the foothills of the Himalayas (the roads one must travel on to get to this place wind around, and wind around, as they climb into the heights...), the bookstores (and other shops) are small. On the other hand, because this town is practically a part of Dharamsala (the main residence of the Dalai Lama), the kind of books one finds here are mostly of the spiritual kind (and the shopowners, mostly Tibetan Buddhists, were very pleasant folks). One of the books I found in the bookstore was "The Yoga Sutras of

Patanjali” (compiled prior to 400CE, using materials about yoga from older traditions-Wikipedia). When my writing sadhana began (around 2001), the beginning line (of eight lines I chose to set the tone for my spiritual practice) was from this book: “A wise person notices that inner harmony is disturbed when the mind lets itself be lured into indiscriminately sampling the World of Phenomena”.

d) “Sadhana” by Swami Sivananda

When I left the MacLeod-Ganj area, I decided that---while I was already in northern India—I would go to Rishikesh (a place with many ashrams)... with the idea of possibly going further on to Gangotri (one of four historically sacred pilgrimage destinations in India). While I was in Rishikesh, I visited the ashram of Swami Sivananda (mainly to look at books in the bookstore). The simple title of this book may be deceiving to some readers, because the actual topics covered in the book are very serious and profound. Two examples:

“You must be systematic--you must chalk out a Dinacharya, a daily routine, and follow it strictly”.

“During introspection you can clearly observe the shiftings of the mind from one line of thought to another. Herein lies a change for you to mould the mind properly and direct the thoughts and the mental energy in the Divine Channel. You can rearrange the thoughts, make new association on a new Sattvic basis. You can throw out useless worldly thoughts just as you remove the weeds and throw them out. You can cultivate sublime, Divine thoughts in the Divine garden of your mind or Antahkarana. This is a very patient work. This is a stupendous task indeed. But for a Yogi of self-determination, who has the grace of the Lord and iron-will, it is nothing.”

I will say, here, that I did make an effort in Uttarkashi (a stopping point I chose on my way to visit Gangotri) to carry out some kind of spiritual sadhana (practice, discipline), and failed miserably, due to the instability of my physical structure [which has led to me being approved for disability (February, 2016)]. However, I did visit Gangotri--which involves a bus ride up a very precarious route (in many places, one can look down, from the road, and see the Ganges River way, way down below). And there in Gangotri, I was shown to one of the caves which are used by particular spiritual traditions as special places for deeper and longer periods of meditation. I was allowed to spend some 20 minutes in the cave, by myself...and it is my own experience--and probably many others as well--that when the word “Om” is pronounced, in such a cave, there is a kind of echo that makes it seem as if the cave is your mind, and the sound is taking place only inside your mind. Swami Rama (see above “Living with the Himalayan Masters”) once spent eleven months in such a cave (as part of being initiated into the tradition of his guru), and one of the comments he made about that is that either your mind becomes very one pointed, or you will become unstable. Such practices are not for the unprepared, or the simply curious. Realizing that my path was not going to be as a practitioner who achieves advanced states of wisdom through meditation, and not feeling I was being nudged into the bhakti/devotion kind of spiritual path, I turned again to what I had previously thought about myself--that being a service-oriented person was a central and essential part of my personality, and that such a path would be fine

for me--and decided to return to the United States to pursue that.

When I returned from India, I began assisting elders with special needs again, only this time I was more often self-employed--both in assisted living group homes, and with individual clients--rather than working as an employee of an elder care group with many assisted living group homes. Eventually, in the approximately seven years of assisting elders with special needs, I led group activities in 21 different assisted living facilities/residential group homes, and provided specialized activities, companionship, assistance, and transportation to 32 individual clients (in Maryland, Washington D.C., and Northern Virginia).

Often, during my time as an activity specialist, I was uncertain what would work from one day to the next... and so I would fill my large athletic tote bag (which had many pockets) with a variety of items [with special attention given to including the sing-along materials (cassettes, songbooks, and cassette player); and notecard making material]. Thus, if what I planned to do didn't seem like it would work that day, or didn't work, I would try something else. After a while of finding something that worked (most of the time), I even seemed to gain a kind of "serendipity" feeling, about finding something which would work, even if when I knocked on the door of the assisted living group homes I was visiting, I had no idea what was going to work there that day.

And yet... even though it seemed to me that I was a good person for this kind of work, I didn't connect with other activity specialists at workshops geared toward certification. I just wasn't a "bird of the same feather". And, eventually, I realized that there would come a time when I needed to move on to some other kind of work. During one of the times when it seemed like I might need to look around, I decided to see a life coach (someone who I thought might help me discover what might be the next step for me to take, regarding how to earn a living).

One of the "homework assignments" given to me by my life coach was, I imagine, an activity often assigned to "clients" by life coaches. I was asked to make a list of the most meaningful experiences of my life--up to that point--and then find some way of defining the common thread running through those experiences. This was an effort to get at the following question: what was it about the experiences I chose, that made me choose only those as the most meaningful experiences of my life? Since I probably did this activity around 1998-1999, many years of writing had already occurred... and I now had the "Arrangement of Quotations from 'Sathya Sai Speaks' (Vol. 1-15)" document. [Note: I did not have permission to publish it... yet... but in 2004 I sought out permission, and received permission (from the Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust) to publish the book on a donation basis--i.e. with the requirement that I donated copies to the Sathya Sai Bookstore in Puttaparthi.] Readers of this "Autobiographical Sketch" who do look at that "Arrangement of Quotations..." document, may well

imagine that it had a profound effect on me. So profound, that it seemed like the task of a lifetime to assimilate such truths--especially when it was a flawed person like me who was trying to assimilate them. [This reminds me that around this time I also went to my first and only Sathya Sai Baba retreat--for the Northeast region, I think. There, in a conversation with one of the regional coordinators, I said that I didn't believe I was worthy of being one of the people to be given knowledge of (and belief in) Baba's Presence. And the regional coordinator said: "Many people feel that way."] So... what did I come up with regarding my "homework assignment" for the life coach? I said what I saw as a common thread in the list of most meaningful experiences I had made was that I was most interested in contributing to the creation of "the highest synthesis of truth and community". It is worth mentioning that another activity assigned to me by the life coach was to create affirmations, which I could say to myself, to affirm the positives in my life, and the goals I was trying to work towards. One of the affirmations I came up with: "It is right and appropriate for me to fully experience God's infinite compassion and everlasting love".

Unfortunately, however valuable the work I did in the elder care field was to me personally, it became difficult for me to continue to earn a living doing it. This was especially true once I returned from India (Summer, 1997). As I mentioned above, I began to have more individual clients, and the insurance rates necessary to have a client as a passenger in my car were high. Piecing together two hours here, and three hours there, was also a difficulty--and by 2001 I owed a significant amount of back taxes, and had credit card payments I couldn't keep up with. [I once went to the prayer room of the Tibetan Buddhist Temple in Poolesville, Maryland (which has a 24/7 open to all prayer room) to "meditate" on why this bankruptcy was happening to me, and sat for three hours straight in front of the "Tara" altar.] When I declared bankruptcy in 2001, I was taxed (as if for income) for the amount I received relief from, and what I now owed in back taxes to the IRS amounted to \$16,000 (a large amount for someone whose highest yearly earnings up to this point were only a little more than \$30,000 (before taxes). So, in the years 2001-2013, I returned to work as a driver as my way of earning a living. During the years 2000-2006, I was a delivery driver, courier, and assistant bindery person at a print shop (in Chantilly, Virginia)--and during the years 2006-2013, I was a delivery driver and stock person for an auto parts store (in Leesburg, Virginia). [Note: the IRS was flexible about my efforts at paying my back taxes; I was fairly consistent in keeping up on my payments; and the \$16,000 (plus what was charged in interest) was eventually paid off in 2010.]

Employed in Many Different Settings

To make the contributions I believe are uniquely mine to make, I have, over the years, had to find other work as a way of earning a living; and I have been employed in many different settings, including retail

bookstore clerk, mail clerk, door-to-door canvasser for citizen action groups, dishwasher, cook, stone mason helper, field worker/truck driver on an organic farm, driver/warehouse, bus driver/program assistant, and activities director for elders with special needs. Earlier, in the “Inspiring Educational Experiences” section of this “Autobiographical Sketch”, I mentioned that “Since I began to see that my life path was going to be more of an ‘organic process’ than an exercise in ‘career development’ (and that I would again and again find myself making unusual choices for employment, choices that possibly only someone else in a similar set of shoes could easily understand), knowing something of the ‘Tao’ was helpful”. Here I will add that, while it may be a stretch for some people, I believe I have some personal experience with parts of the following quote [from the article “Open Source Social Solutions” by Charlie Brown—(note: I can no longer find a link to this article on the Internet)]: “... the most promising innovations are often lost to view and lacking the resources to take effect; these innovators are working away quietly at a small-scale, local level, unknown to the much broader community that could benefit from them. They are ‘needles’ lost in the societal haystack. This isolation, often a major stumbling block for social innovators, is no coincidence: *innovators often deliberately isolate themselves in order to realize a vision that may be at odds with existing norms or received wisdom*” (my italics). And I will also add a “why” to this kind of isolation: If I am going to be careful about protecting my capacity to move forward in adverse and unsupportive circumstances, I have to avoid getting entangled in activities which drain my energy to no constructive end. So I tend towards waiting quietly in environments where I am not required to sort out important issues (thus minimizing misunderstandings and conserving energy for what work I believe is constructive), and where it is acceptable for me to be inconspicuous, and in the background--and I do what “building work” I can in my spare time. (Each person has to decide for themselves what will work best when they are trying to *adapt* to adverse and unsupportive cultural influences.)]

[Additional Note: in one of the periods of time when I wasn’t working on a writing project (around 2010-2011), I scanned writings which were not in document form (to make pdf files of them), and made a [“catalogue” \(list\) of my writings \(from 1976-2011\)\(in which I provided information and/or commentary related to writings from 1976-1991\)](#). There are some writings in this “catalogue” for which I no longer have document files, or hard copies (and the website referred to--writingsofstefanpasti.net--no longer exists). However, I believe the commentary--as it is a kind of “reminiscing about old friends” view of the variety of writing I did during 1976-1991--will provide a different, and more personal, impression of who I am than this "Autobiographical Sketch".]

The Interfaith Peacebuilding and Community Revitalization (IPCR) Initiative

The events of 9/11/2001 (the terrorist attack in which planes flew into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, and into the Pentagon, in Washington D.C.) had a significant influence on me.

I felt there were some real and meaningful contributions I could make towards creating better understanding and higher aspirations among people from very different economic circumstances and cultural backgrounds. So, later in 2001, I began building an initiative called The Interfaith Peacebuilding and Community Revitalization (IPCR) Initiative (now archived at <https://www.cpcsi.org/about-the-ipcr-initiative.html>).

Even before 9/11 though, there were two “seed-like” ideas which--when catalyzed by 9/11--grew into The IPCR Initiative...

1) Learning about the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba was such a profound experience for me that I began to believe that much more was possible--now, in this particular time in history--than in any other time of history before. One way I expressed this unprecedented potential was in the lead paragraph of the first [IPCR Journal/Newsletter \(Spring, 2005\)](#): “As a result of the unprecedented opportunities created by the expansion of the Internet, we have now arrived at a very auspicious moment in time... for at no other time in the course of history has so many people had access to so much in the way of time-tested guidelines, inspiring role models, and service-oriented initiatives relevant to peace, prosperity, and happiness for all humanity”. As I also say on p. 58, on p. 77, and on p. 78-79: “I can see with my own understanding (from reading volumes of ‘Sathya Sai Speaks’--specifically Vol. 1-15) that the potential for an exponential increase in highly advanced forms of wisdom and compassion; the potential for an exponential increase in resolving even the most profound challenges; the potential for an exponential increase in forgiveness and reconciliation; and the potential for an exponential increase in peace, prosperity, and happiness now exists (as a direct result of the outpouring of Divine Grace which is the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba). I have therefore adjusted my perceptions, understandings, and beliefs about what is possible [Faith helps move from ‘it hardly seems possible’ to ‘it must be possible’ (since Faith believes Love will prevail)], and now prepare documents and resources believing *not only that such exponential increases are possible, but that they will happen*. An accumulation of such documents and resources have resulted in my efforts at building The IPCR Initiative.” [In addition to this thinking, I also now had a very deep belief that there is a more advanced and more benevolent spiritual entity than ourselves--and that such an entity *does actually count for something in overcoming the difficult challenges ahead*. And further: such an entity had made Himself known to many people during His time here on Earth, and provided assurances that “There is nothing that Divine Power cannot accomplish. It can transmute earth into sky and sky into earth. To doubt this is to prove that you are too weak to grasp the grandeur of the Universal” (from p. 14 of my collection of Baba quotations titled [“Divine Intervention”](#)).

2) Having adjusted my beliefs to “*such exponential increases are (not only) possible, but... will happen*”, I then decided to do research into what were the obstacles to realizing such potential, and what kind of collaborative problem solving, community peacebuilding, and community education processes would be

most helpful in overcoming those obstacles. My research into what the most difficult obstacles were became a list (with commentary) of the most difficult challenges of our times (the most current form of this list is [“Unprecedented Challenges Ahead—February 2017”](#)). My research into what kind of collaborative problem solving, community peacebuilding, and community education processes would be most helpful in overcoming those challenges culminated in Section IV Part B of the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper [“Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses: to resolve unprecedented challenges and discover our collective spiritual destiny”](#) (see p. 35-45)[an overview of Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses Surveys, Community Visioning Initiatives, Neighborhood Learning Centers, and Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education Projects (in local newspapers)].

Some of the first IPCR documents were advocacy for “Community Good News Networks”--the first of Eight IPCR Concepts in the IPCR document “Brief Descriptions of The Eight IPCR Concepts” (a document which was revised in 2014 into [“Ten Steps for Long Term Culture Change”](#))--and Community Visioning Initiatives [which remains a central focus of CPCS (see below) Initiative’s “constellations of initiatives” approach to overcoming the challenges of our times.] [Note: Seven of the “Eight IPCR Concepts” were highlighted in the earliest IPCR Journal/Newsletter I still have a copy of: [“IPCR Journal/Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 3 Spring, 2005”](#) (14 pages).]

The “Community Good News Networks” concept was inspired by a letter writing activity I created as a therapeutic activity (probably in 1993) when I was helping elders with special needs. What we did was a variation on the “notecard making” activity” (see p. 31-32). Instead of the residents making notecards, and sending those to family members, I provided copies of a letter to be sent to various local town councils (which we would put into envelopes, address the envelopes, and stamp--making them ready to mail... they were never mailed). Since I wanted the activity to be as realistic as possible, the letter we were sending urged the creation of “Community Good News Networks”... [“One way to begin creating ‘Community Good News Networks’ is as follows: ongoing intergenerational programs--programs that bring together elders of the community with young people (ages 5-18) of the community--are created at appropriate meeting places such as local places of worship. Such intergenerational programs would include the following activities: 1) collecting and sharing good news articles, stories, etc., and making contributions to “Good News Reference Resources,” specific to local communities and regions 2) sending notecards of gratitude and encouragement—and invitations to visit—to people who are making good news in the local community or region 3) inspirational sharing meetings featuring “good news makers” from the local community or region.”] When I began to build The Interfaith Peacebuilding and Community Revitalization (IPCR) Initiative, I brought forward the “Community Good News Network” idea as a way of visualizing what our communities *could be like*, if that’s what we wanted them to be like.

And--as mentioned earlier (on p. 39-40): my interest in Community Visioning Initiatives was inspired (instantly) in 1994, when I watched a documentary titled [“Chattanooga: A Community With A Vision”](#) (13 minutes). To repeat for emphasis: the video documents two very successful Community Visioning Initiatives organized by the non-profit organization Chattanooga Venture (Chattanooga, Tennessee USA)--one in 1984, and a follow-up in 1993. The 1984 Chattanooga Community Visioning Project (“Vision 2000”, organized by the non-profit organization Chattanooga Venture) attracted more than 1,700 participants, and produced 40 community goals--which resulted in the implementation of 223 projects and programs, the creation of 1,300 permanent jobs, and a total financial investment of 793 million dollars. What I saw in the documentary was a way of revitalizing the sense of working together with our neighbors for the greater good, so that there would be an electrifying feeling about what going to happen next--a collective revitalization of the belief that many good things would be happening in the community, and that many people who lived in the same community would have a part in it.” [Note: I used to have a copy of the video cassette “Chattanooga: A Community With A Vision” (which I received as educational outreach from Chattanooga Venture), and I used to have had 4 DVD copies made (for preservation purposes, and so that I can share this resource in a more commonly used format...) but I no longer have those copies.]

Here are thirteen IPCR Initiative documents which I believe will be sufficient to show I was actively developing this initiative while I was a delivery driver for C and R Printing (December, 2001--November, 2006) and while I was a delivery driver for CarQuest Auto Parts (full-time from December, 2007--April, 2013).

[First IPCR Brochure](#) (4 pages) (2002)—includes details for two key IPCR (and Tipping Point Action) ideas, and many core insights and observations which are still just as relevant (Scanned document)

[First IPCR Pocket Folder](#) (maybe 2003)--although the scanned file for this pocket folder provides information, and illustrates the design, it does leave out the text for the three sections included in the pocket folder.

[“The IPCR Journal/Newsletter Spring 2005” issue](#) (14 pages)--key document for the first IPCR Initiative outreach campaign. Also noteworthy because it contains detailed descriptions of seven of The Eight IPCR Concepts—and much of that content has remained as it was written then [see updated version “Ten Steps for Long Term Culture Change”].

[“Spiritual Peacebuilding: 47 Quotes and Proverbs”](#) (12 pages; August, 2007)

[“Peacebuilding in its Most Compassionate Form”](#) (41 pages) (Aug.-Nov., 2007)

["A 15 Step Outline for a Community Visioning Initiative"](#) (28 pages) (2008)

["1000Communities2"](#) ("1000Communities Squared") (164 pages; June, 2008) 1000 Community Visioning Initiatives X Community Centers with Ongoing Workshops + Sister Community Relationships = an exponential increase in our collective capacity to resolve the challenges of our times

["125 Related Fields of Activity"](#) (2 pages) (2009)

["15 Sample Preliminary Survey Questions"](#) (12 pages) (2009)

"Brief Descriptions of The Eight IPCR Concepts" (26 pages) (2005, 2009)

[Special Note: The [Spring, 2005 issue of The IPCR Journal/Newsletter](#) (see section below) has descriptions of seven of the eight IPCR concepts. The document referenced here ("Brief Descriptions...") was eventually modified and retitled "[Ten Steps for Long Term Culture Change](#)" (30 pages; March, 2014)]

["The Twilight of One Era, and the Dawning of Another"](#) (35 pages; Sept.--Oct., 2009)

["The IPCR Workshop Primer"](#) (425 pages) (Feb. 2010)

A Comprehensive Summary of the IPCR Initiative; including "36 Problems That May Arise (in preparing for, and implementing, Community Visioning Initiatives)" (Section 11), a section which was only included in this document.

["Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses"](#) (29 pages; April, 2011)

Another source for evidence supporting my assessments of the critical challenges of our times, and the need for unprecedented collaborative problem solving. The title would be used again in the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper ("Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses: to resolve unprecedented challenges and discover our collective spiritual destiny")

[Additional Note: Although my life path since I "dropped out" of college in 1976 has been an "organic process", which has no clear or familiar organizing structure (like career development), I feel that there has been a progression from dysfunctional family experiences and a personal "repair" focus; to exploring pathways for involvement in ecologically sustainable projects; then to exploring pathways for interfaith peacebuilding... eventually, accumulating both reasons for, and resources for, building cultural sustainability... that is, cultural sustainability with an emphasis on spiritual cohesion, and practical and effective responses to a wide range of critical challenges. The IPCR Initiative was--and the initiative it transformed into (The CPCS Initiative) now is--an effort to apply the accumulated wisdom now accessible to us towards the general goal of integrating spiritual wisdom into the everyday

circumstances of community life, and towards the specific goal of generating practical responses to the challenges of our times.]

One of the key documents I used for IPCR Initiative outreach (in 2011) ([“A Four Page Summary of The IPCR Initiative”](#)) is worth quoting at length [other IPCR Initiative outreach documents, and a few IPCR Journal/Newsletters, are accessible at the bottom of the [“About the IPCR Initiative” webpage](#) (at the CPCS Initiative website)]. Regarding the outreach I did with IPCR documents: besides sharing resources which I thought might be helpful to others, I continued to be hopeful that I would find like-minded people and kindred spirits working along similar lines; a project similar enough in its goals and intentions to my own ideas, which I could contribute to; and a “tipping point” project which could be a catalyst for community wide change.

Here is some of the text from the IPCR Initiative document “A Four Page Summary of The IPCR Initiative”:

We live in very complex and challenging times. These challenges include, but are not limited to:

- a) global warming and reducing carbon emissions
- b) peak oil and reducing dependence on petroleum based products
- c) global inequities and the tragic cycles of malnutrition, disease, and death
- d) an increasing world population requiring more resources when many resources are becoming more scarce (*with a special emphasis on the increasing number of people who are consuming resources and ecological services indiscriminately*)
- e) cultures of violence, greed, corruption, and overindulgence--which have become so common that many of us accept such as inevitable; which are a significant part of the current crises of confidence in financial markets; and which are in many ways slowing the restructuring of investment priorities needed to respond *to an increasing number of other critical challenges*
- f) a marginalization of the wisdom associated with religious, spiritual, and moral traditions

More and more people are coming to the realization that resolving these challenges will require problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before.

Much of work of The IPCR Initiative has been comprehensive research, seeking evidence for identifying the most critical challenges of our times (see reference to the “IPCR Critical Challenges Assessment 2011-2012” project below)--and thoughtful explorations into identifying and developing solution-oriented activity which is appropriate to resolving such challenges.

The following seven point list summarizes the IPCR “constellations of initiatives” approach to overcoming the challenges of our times. These are steps towards solution-oriented momentum which can be taken by communities in almost every variety of circumstances.

1) A central focus of The IPCR Initiative is its advocacy for a combination Community Visioning Initiatives, "Community Teaching and Learning Centers" with ongoing workshops, and "sister community" relationships as a way of generating an exponential increase in our collective capacity to overcome the challenges of our times.

2) Community Visioning Initiatives can be described as a series of community meetings designed to facilitate the process of brainstorming ideas, organizing the ideas into goals, prioritizing the goals, and identifying doable steps. One of the main goals of Community Visioning Initiatives is to maximize citizen participation in identifying challenges, and in solution-oriented activity.

3) The concept of “Community Teaching and Learning Centers” (created by the “Teachers Without Borders” organization) (modified and expanded by the IPCR Initiative) is about creating many local community points of entry which function as information and resource centers, locations for workshops, and locations for the training of “teacher-leaders”.

4) Results from well thought out preliminary surveys (circulated to at least 150 key leaders from a significant variety of fields of activity in the community) can help residents appreciate the need for a Community Visioning Initiative, and for “Community Teaching and Learning Centers” (CTLCs).

5) The job fairs which come at the end of the Community Visioning Initiative process provide opportunities for all key stakeholders in the community (businesses, organizations, institutions, government, etc) to demonstrate their upgraded awareness--and their interest in the welfare of the community--by offering and facilitating new employment opportunities... and thus assisting with a just transition to patterns of investment which in many ways represent solutions to prioritized challenges.

6) “Sister Community” relationships provide whole communities with ways of assisting other communities with such a “just transition”. In addition, such community-to-community relationships can create service work capable of uniting diverse communities of people, and a variety of opportunities for person-to-person peacebuilding (as can be seen by the work of organizations such as “Sister Cities International”.)

7) This “constellation of initiatives” approach to maximizing citizen participation in solution-oriented activity also provides many opportunities for local newspapers to contribute very valuable community services [for example: making preliminary survey results accessible; advocating for Community Visioning Initiatives; highlighting inspirational role models and initiatives associated in local and regional

areas (and elsewhere); describing workshop activity in the “Community Teaching and Learning Centers”; reporting on the planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow up stages associated with Community Visioning Initiatives; etc]

(end of excerpt from the IPCR Initiative document “A Four Page Summary of The IPCR Initiative”)

[Note: I will also include here, as an example of my efforts to gain appreciation for the potential which The IPCR Initiative was hoping to help realize, reference to Part E of Appendix 1--titled [“48 Different Ways of Describing The IPCR Initiative”](#) (compiled February, 2010)--which is on p. 286-313 of [“The IPCR Workshop Primer”](#) (425 pages; Feb. 2010).]

From July, 2011 to January, 2012, the focus of my IPCR Initiative work was open-ended research (I started researching “education” in general, and specifically high points in education history and curriculum development, and let the research lead where it would...) for what eventually become [“IPCR Critical Challenges Assessment 2011-2012”](#) (444 pages; January, 2012). I now refer to the “IPCR Critical Challenges...” document, and the CPCS Initiative document [“Invitation Package for Possible Board of Advisors”](#) (589 pages, 3.6MB; November, 2013), as two key sources for evidence supporting my current assessment of the most critical challenges of our times ([“Unprecedented Challenges Ahead—February 2017”](#)).

Here, at this point, it is worth pausing... to reflect on three definitions/observations, two of which I discovered through the above open-ended research into “education”, and one of my own which I first used in the April, 2011 IPCR Initiative document [“Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses”](#) (see page 4).

1) From “Introduction” to [“The American University in a Post Secular Age”](#) Edited by Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Jacobsen Oxford University Press USA February, 2008 (passage is from paragraph 1 of “Introduction” on p. ix) [Note: many sections of this book are accessible by way of the “Google Books” link provided above. It is also possible to find the context of this quote via a key phrase search.]

“For most of the 20th Century, and especially since the Second World War, higher education has been largely a secular enterprise. The goal of a college or university education has been to provide students with scholarly ways of understanding both themselves and the world around them that required little or no appeal to God, religion, or the sacred. The underlying assumption seemed to be that as research and rational reflection explained more and more of the world, religion would become an increasingly unnecessary part of human life. Higher education prepares students for the future, and religion was not particularly relevant for the future as it was envisioned at most universities.”

2) From the Catholic Encyclopedia entry on Education (section at the beginning subtitled “Education: In General”) (at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05295b.htm>) (see paragraph 1).

“The meaning of life, therefore, of its purposes and values as understood by the educator, primarily determines the nature of his work. Education aims at an ideal, and this in turn depends on the view that is taken of (human beings) and (their) destiny, of (their) relations to God, to (their) fellowmen, and to the physical world. The content of education is furnished by the previous acquisition of humankind in literature, art, and science, in moral, social, and religious principles. The inheritance, however, contains elements that differ greatly in value, both as mental possessions and as means of culture; hence a selection is necessary, and this must be guided largely by the educational ideal.”

3) This writer’s description/definition of world peace (as in the kind of world peace which this writer believes is possible, and which he is hoping to contribute to by his writing)--

From [“Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses”](#) by this writer (29 pages; April, 2011)(see p. 4)

“This writer offers the following definition of world peace: a universal feeling of sympathetic resonance between the examples of leaders (as seen in the wise and equitable administration of cultural and natural resources); the personal cultivation of virtue throughout society; the ecological stability and sustainability of natural resources; and the current of Divine Grace.”

As per our pause for reflection here... do any of the above three definitions/observations appeal to you (the reader) more than the others? And... which one of the above three definitions/observations would you (the reader) expect would place us in the most complex set of critically challenging circumstances, if followed by a majority of people to see where it leads?

My commentary here is this: people who have not seen, and personally experienced, sages and spiritual masters who have “realized/actualized” advanced stages of wisdom and compassion are more inclined to believe such attainments are idealistic (especially given what most of us see and experience through mass media such as television, movies, newspapers, radio, and Internet content). However, people who have seen, and personally experienced, sages and spiritual masters who have “realized/actualized” advanced stages of wisdom and compassion, are more inclined to believe such attainments are practical, rather than idealistic, and practical in the highest degree... that is, it seems much more practical and sensible to live a life of wisdom and compassion, as so much more good can come from such an approach.

And yet... as the “universal feeling of sympathetic resonance” in my definition hopes to encourage, it is possible (I believe) for people who do not want to have anything to do with God or religion to live lives

which sympathetically resonate with wisdom and compassion... just as it is also possible for people who claim to be following the codes of conduct laid out by the holy scriptures of their religion to actually be acting in ways which--if done by the majority of people--would take us all in the opposite direction from world peace. The key point here is not that everyone must have religion, but (again) it is not in our best interests (I believe) to marginalize religious, spiritual, and moral traditions, and the scriptural sources of inspiration which make up those traditions, when so many people have learned to be wise and compassionate from just such sources. The key point is to cultivate all likely sources so such sources yield the desired wisdom.

Additional Comments about The IPCR Initiative

There may be many people who do not understand why I believe that giving so much time and effort to building The IPCR Initiative is a sincere and genuine way of expressing compassion for fellow human beings. And there may be many people who do not understand what I mean by “staying at my post”. But I understand... and I know I understand.

[Note: Before reading the following, it will be worth having another look at how I believe my “Guru” was teaching me... (see p. 42-43)]

I believe that there are essential and critical pieces to a comprehensive community response to the challenges of our times which are missing from the approaches now at the forefront--and I believe I have some of the pieces. And I want to contribute those pieces. I can see the potential energy which would be actualized if those pieces were in place (*I can see that many other people with pieces to contribute would have many more opportunities to contribute their pieces*)—and thus *I believe my life is most meaningful when I am contributing what I can to the actualization of that energy*. And because of the nature of this particular potential energy, the very act of trying to actualize it *does actualize it*, (in me, at least)... it energizes me... it connects me with the storehouses of wisdom which have accumulated over the many centuries of human experience, and which have been confirmed again and again by the saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and sincere practitioners of all faiths and moral “world views”; it strengthens my belief that it is possible for representatives of the highest spiritual ideals (irrespective of the traditions they are derived from) to become better appreciated, more easily recognized--and more numerous--in the everyday circumstances of community life; and it gives me hope that whole communities in the future will understand that there are currents of good will just as real as currents of electricity.... And if this kind of work (actualizing such potential energy) does not, at this particular time, lead directly to financial security and social connectedness for me; such circumstances are not going to deter me from doing everything I possibly can—*in my lifetime*— so that such work *does lead that way* for more and more people in the future.

Further, many people may think it is naïve to imagine that people from so many diverse religious, spiritual, moral, and cultural traditions can decide to come together in such a way as to not only encourage, but participate in, a high percentage of constructive thinking and constructive action in response to the difficult challenges ahead (as in the high levels of participation encouraged by comprehensive Community Visioning Initiatives). From this writer's point of view, such skepticism and cynicism depend for their existence on doubts as to whether it is possible for people to achieve highly advanced forms of wisdom and compassion through genuine instruction and sincere effort. *Thus it is that there is a great responsibility on those people who are in any way representatives of religious, spiritual, and/or moral traditions--to demonstrate what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion, to provide genuine instruction when sincere efforts are being made, to contribute to the greater good of the whole, and to help restore confidence in the higher values of life.*

I believe that the most advanced societies are the ones which have been successful at integrating spiritual wisdom into the everyday circumstances of community life.

My work building The IPCR Initiative is an effort to contribute to the process of integrating spiritual wisdom into the everyday circumstances of community life.

I gladly and willingly contribute time, energy, and money to make the resources and documents of The IPCR Initiative accessible to those people who might benefit from them.

[in this context, it is worth noting The IPCR Copyright Policy (which, though an appropriate version of this is not currently stated on The CPCS Initiative website, also applies to all CPCS Initiative documents):

“In light of the urgent need to build bridges and increase collaboration between communities of people, all of the documents, information, resources, etc. created by The IPCR Initiative are viewed as resources which ought to be made as accessible as possible to people who can make good use of them. Therefore, all such documents and information (including this document) may be reproduced without permission, and distributed in any way the user believes will be consistent with the goals listed in The IPCR Mission Statement. [Please note: Quotes, statistics, and other copyrighted material used in IPCR documents have been appropriately attributed to their copyrighted sources. Readers may thus be assured that The IPCR Initiative encourages and supports the proper referencing of copyrighted material to their copyrighted sources.]

-----First Significant Update (March--April, 2017) to this Autobiographical Sketch since 2012 begins here [although many(what was 11 pages--before this current update--is now 83) of the previous pages include additions and modifications which were also made during March—April, 2017]-----

Age 56, and Onset of More Serious Health/Physical Problems

Beginning in 2011-2012, two health/physical problems began to decrease my capabilities:

1) In November, 2011, I was diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)--at the moderate to severe level. I had been sweating easily, and had shortness of breath. Since I did not have health insurance, I could not access appropriate medications, and had to experiment with out-of-pocket purchases of discounted medications from other countries.

2) I became unable to afford chiropractor care, which had been helpful to me over the years for (what I now believe is) a misaligned hip/pelvis (lumbar area), and related subluxations in my back and neck (thoracic and cervical areas). Ever since I had been doing delivery work (from 2001 on), I had sought out chiropractic care every six weeks. My only alternative, since I was unable to continue chiropractic care, was to experiment with stretching on my own... which I had to try, because I was not only doing driving and heavy lifting work (delivery driver for an auto parts store), I was also bicycle commuting (six miles round trip for three and half years), and spending a lot of my free time sitting in front of a computer, creating documents.

Unfortunately, the experiments I did--both with medications, and stretching--resulted, more often than not, in more difficulties. My lifting capacity, my memory, and my temperament were negatively affected, and issues at work became more noticeably.

By April, 2013, it became clear to me that I could not continue working at the auto parts store--and also that I was unlikely to find any other work. I decided to leave my job before I was "let go"--and after some difficulties (which I won't describe, as it is possible for there to be "adventures" one undertakes which it is best not to encourage other people to attempt), I lived at my brother's house (with his wife and their three boys)--and in a shared living situation paid for by my two sisters, and my brother (in Maryland)(the period of time referred to here is May, 2013-April, 2014).

During this time, Maryland Medicaid provided for access to Advair, a respiratory medication which

greatly improved my struggle with respiratory issues (which was mostly a struggle with medication issues). However, I still could not access chiropractic care, and I continued to be unstable as a result of my own stretching efforts--with memory and temperament being the worst problems. Although I made efforts to find employment through state employment agencies websites, and job search websites, I was well aware that I'd have to be "on" all the time to find unskilled labor (which was the only kind of labor I could hope to find)--at age 57.

So I did what I could with my writings... first consolidating four websites I had into The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative, and then beginning on another long research document [which became the ["Invitation Package for Possible Board of Advisors"](#) (589 pages, 3.6MB; November, 2013)]. This "Invitation Package..." includes biographical information of 272 people in 13 fields of activity related to community peacebuilding and cultural sustainability--all of whom I sent personal emails to, inviting them to be on the CPCS Initiative Board of Advisors; a 28 point list of warnings (with related text) about Global Warming (from 1988-2013)(see p. 273-301); and a 63 page advocacy for villages, towns, and small cities as the best habitats for our efforts at creating carbon neutral and ecologically sustainability economies (vs. the trend towards increasing urbanization and megacities (cities with a population of over 1 million). I continued to be hopeful that, through the process of outreach, I would find like-minded people and kindred spirits working along similar lines; a project similar enough in its goals and intentions to my own ideas, which I could contribute to; and a "tipping point" project which could be a catalyst for community wide change. Unfortunately, my outreach (with reference to the "Invitation..." document), both through emails and Twitter, did not discover any personal support, or organizations willing to take the CPCS Initiative "under its wing". [I did, however, continue to become more and more familiar (through identifying potential outreach recipients) with many, many organizations and projects doing good work, in many different fields.]

By February, 2014, the focus of my outreach had transferred to seeking support for the ["Tipping Point Action: Citizen Participation in Times of Unprecedented Challenges"](#) Proposal I had created at the MIT Climate CoLab. (Note: through contests and competitions, the MIT Climate CoLab has created a crowdsourcing platform with the goal of "harnessing the collective intelligence of thousands of people from all around the world to address global climate change.") During this time, I even did outreach to Native American Tribes, referring (in my outreach emails) to both the Tipping Point Action Campaign, and my short story ["The Spirit of the Sacred Hoop"](#).

I "Cobble Together" a Plan to Move Away from the "Big City"

Unfortunately, with no encouragement or support coming for my advocacy work--and an end coming to the good assistance I had from my two sisters and my brother--I had to "come up with" another step to

take. So in March, 2014, I “cobbled together” a plan to at least move away from the “big city”.

Fortunately--at this critical time--I discovered that I had \$1,600 coming to me from an employee shared ownership plan (ESOP) associated with the auto parts store I had worked at for seven years. [Note: \$600 of this was used for an extra month of rent (March, 2014)--during which time I applied for disability, continued outreach, and prepared to leave the “big city” .]

I will not provide details about the plan I “cobbled together” to move away from the “big city”, as (again) it is possible for there to be “adventures” one undertakes which it is best not to encourage other people to attempt.... Suffice it to say, “things” were very “marginal” for a time.... However, by July 1, 2014, I had signed a lease with Fulton Housing Authority (Fulton, Missouri), with the subsidized rent being \$35 (as I had very limited finances, no other income, and was not employed).

In the weeks and months ahead, I struggled on a day-to-day basis, sometimes stretching for five hours a day, so I could walk long distances--as I didn’t even have \$2.50 for bus fare. (There were times when I walked four to five miles roundtrip for groceries, which I bought with Food Stamps).

I still had no access to chiropractic care (though one kind practitioner, when I inquired about a free exam, decided to grant me ten almost free sessions... adjustments which, unfortunately, didn’t hold for long....) While I was, and remain, grateful to have been approved for Missouri Medicaid (when I eventually was approved), Missouri Medicaid did not provide for chiropractic care (or physical therapy). And I was becoming more and more concerned, because the chiropractor adjustments didn’t hold, and because my “experimenting” with stretching was having only marginal success. I began to feel that an old injury, to my left hip [which happened when I fell out of a hayloft in high school (1972)(42 years previous), and which I had thought was just a bruise], had caused me to sit and walk differently since then... that muscles, particularly in my left leg and back, had accommodated themselves in a dysfunctional way... and that chiropractic care would not be enough to re-train those chronically mis-aligned muscles. Eventually, I got physical therapy books from the public library, and made more efforts at “experimenting”. Unfortunately, most of my experiments were, at best, temporary fixes.

Recognition and Appreciation for Kind and Helpful Assistance I Received At This Difficult Time

Here, at this point, it would be right and appropriate to recognize and appreciate kind and helpful assistance I received at this difficult time:

- 1) There was a Christian couple who were like friends to me, and who were most helpful in a variety of ways: they invited me to restaurants for special meals and socializing; they offered me yard work, and

other work, so I could (informally, though I reported this income to the Fulton Housing Authority) earn money for rent and other expenses; and they sometimes paid my rent when I could not.

2) There was a person who had been, for the last 13 years (here in Missouri), receiving furniture, household goods, clothes, books, etc through donations, and redistributing them for free around Callaway County. When I was granted an apartment through Fulton Housing Authority, I had nothing but a backpack (with clothes and supplies), a tent, two boxes of clothes I acquired from the Clothes Cupboard (see below), a sleeping bag, and a camping mattress. This extraordinarily service-oriented person provided me with a table, chairs, and a mattress--and was a continual source of additional clothes, other items, and highly interesting and pleasant conversation [both before the "Free Store" opened (a store front for her "redistribution operation"), and after].

3) The generosity and understanding of people who I worked with when I did the volunteer community service work required by my lease with Fulton Housing Authority... specifically, the kind people at the Clothes Cupboard (a thrift shop sponsored by a local service organization, which had deliberately low prices on many basic items); and the people in the office of the First Christian Church (who allowed me to re-organize the church library by decades and alphabetically--an assignment which provided me with over six months of community service work).

4) The kind and helpful people who drove the SERVE buses, and who did the schedule arranging for daily bus service provided by SERVE [a local service organization which manages a food bank; a thrift shop; a bus service which is of the door-to-door kind (and which also goes outside Callaway County--most importantly, to Columbia, MO); and many other services]. I believe that it was the conversations I had with both bus drivers and other riders which, little by little, convinced me that--even though I was a "odd bird" to many of people here--I could consider this place "home".

5) There is a woman who also lived in the public housing managed by Fulton Housing Authority--and she and I had a similar liking for playing Scrabble, similar interests when talking about people, and similar preferences in music (she had a turntable record player and many ballad type easy listening records from the 1940s and 50s). During times when I was struggling, and not writing, my visits to her apartment (about once a week) are very enjoyable, and kept my spirits up.

6) The Fulton Housing Authority staff, who were helpful in every way they could be... and particularly the director, who, when it was appropriate for her to do so, guided me through the process of becoming exempt from the community service requirement, and exempt from even the \$35 rent charge.

7) The staff at the library (who knew me from all the books I requested, and checked out); and both the library staff and the many kind people at the Callaway County Senior Center--who knew me from the

many hours I spent using the computers which were accessible in these places (before I got disability back-pay, and bought a desktop computer for my apartment).

8) And the many other good and kind people who were friendly to me.... It is worth saying that there are good and kind people everywhere; however, my particular “feeling” about this (developed especially from living in the mountains of North Carolina) is that where there are many people who have grown up on farms, there will be many kind, understanding people who have common sense, and are very much service-oriented... and in Fulton, Missouri, there was much evidence in support of this “feeling”.

Thus, I managed to stay in my apartment, in public housing managed by the Fulton Housing Authority. I did continue to struggle--especially during the time of April, 2014-February, 2016--with difficulties sitting and walking, and with memory, anxiety, and temperament issues (which I believe were mostly the result of misguided “experimenting” efforts to fix my chronic hip/pelvis issues). It must also be said that I struggled with frustration and depression from the difficulties of my circumstances. The frustration and depression, combined with the anxiety and temperament issues associated with my misguided stretching experiments, caused me to seek out both psychological counseling, and the assistance of whatever medications might be helpful. Unfortunately, the psychological counseling was done by people who misunderstood me as much as anyone did [who could not sympathize with my interpretation of the source of my issues (I associated my anxiety and temperament issues with stretching experiments); who could not visit me at my apartment to see how I could come to such a cause-and-effect connection; and who could not be helpful in supporting my spiritual understandings, and the frustration I had with not being able to carry on with my spiritual practice]. And the medications had no positive benefits... they just made it very difficult for me to think clearly. Thus, while I can understand why my diagnosis continued to include anxiety, depression, and personality disorder, the most lasting impression I have of the approach of western medicine to my circumstances--and what the Missouri health care system, and its practitioners could offer me (despite what I knew was the best of intentions)--is that much of what good was accomplished (with assistance on issues they could provide treatment for), was *almost outweighed* by how many opportunities to help me were missed (if only someone had come to my apartment, they would've seen enough in thirty minutes to save them making twenty tests and examinations....) But no... exceptions for physical therapy (for people who were not trying to rehabilitate from critical injuries, or surgeries, were almost unheard of, so I muddled along.... [Note: I did get admitted to the University of Missouri's free physical therapy clinic (PhysZou) for 3 visits (October, 2015), and this was helpful... but the strain of needing to walk, needing to do yard work (or something), and trying to sit--and the continued “experiments” I tried to keep going, consistently negated any gains I made from following their prescribed regimen.] (Additional Note: I tried two other primary care doctors, but the same limitations--no access possible to physical therapy--were present in those circumstances... so eventually I “stuck with” a group of physicians in Fulton, MO where I lived.)

More Documents for Building The CPCS Initiative

Be that as it may, I still had the sense that I had something to contribute by continuing to share my ideas about the “whys” of my focus on community peacebuilding and cultural sustainability. So, when I could--and mostly through two and three hour stretches in the computer room of the Fulton Housing Authority Community Center, at the public library, or at the Callaway County Senior Center--I researched, compiled evidence, wrote, and created documents for The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative (at www.cpcsi.org)....

1) During November-December, 2014, I created key documents for The Recalibrating Our “Moral Compasses” Survey Project, which include a 74 page prospectus, a 13 page overview, and a 5 page [“Project Overview and Invitation to Collaborate”](#). Those key documents are accessible at the [ROMC Survey Project webpage](#).

2) During March-April, 2015, I created the Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education (NTNCE) Project--a proposal for a section in local newspapers to highlight and accumulate stories, personal experiences, and other forms of reader contributions which identify helpful people and valuable resources, and reinforce important community goals. The key documents associated with this project are accessible at the [Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education \(NTNCE\) Project webpage](#).

3) During May-June, 2015, I created the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper: [“Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses: to resolve unprecedented challenges and discover our collective spiritual destiny”](#) (85 pages; June, 2015; links updated July, 2016). [Note: this paper was such an effort (because my ability to synthesize and organize large amounts of complex information was declining, and because my ability to sit and walk was also becoming more problematic) that I had a feeling it would be the last long document I would create (with complex research in it)--hence the title “Summary Paper”.]

Upon completion of each of the above projects, I did extensive outreach (via email and Twitter)--to share the resources, and to seek out potential collaboration. (Again, as with earlier outreach, I continued to be hopeful that I would find like-minded people and kindred spirits working along similar lines; a project similar enough in its goals and intentions to my own ideas, which I could contribute to; and a “tipping point” project which could be a catalyst for community wide change.) For the Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses (ROMC) Survey Project, special attention was given to offices of religious and spiritual life at universities and colleges, and to regional offices of Campus Compact (an organization which works with universities and colleges to create student service work projects in local communities). For the Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education (NTNCE) Project, special attention

was given to newspapers associated with small towns in Missouri, and national and state newspaper associations. And for the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper, I tried all varieties of related organizations and individuals I had ever considered for outreach recipients.

However, and for whatever reasons, I could not find encouragement or support for my work from anyone, or anywhere. It's true, there was disappointment associated with not securing support for my work... and with not even securing the encouragement of colleagues, or people who at least understood what I was saying. However, because of the access I had to unprecedented resources, because of the unrealized potential which I thought could be realized if IPCR Initiative and CPCS Initiatives projects went forward—I felt like I had to try. I had to know what would happen if I tried, and so I had tried. Since the potential which could be realized from accumulating contributions (of which mine would be at least one such contribution) seemed so unprecedented (to me), I never found myself thinking that I had made sacrifices which led nowhere, and I never became bitter or resentful. I have always felt that it was God's story unfolding, and not mine, and that was the real thing to hope for--so (though I did, at times direct some of my frustration "upwards"), I was--for the most part--sufficiently "philosophical", and accepting, about the consequences of my efforts. I felt that I had been given the opportunity to contribute to something special--and the inspiration and hope I gained from such involvement seemed to be a "spring", which continued to flow with ideas for more ways to contribute (see also p. 57-58, p. 76-77, and p. 78-- "I can see the potential energy which would be actualized....")

My Second Application for Social Security Disability is Approved (February, 2016)

It was in March, 2014 that I initiated my first application for Social Security Disability, and I had received a letter notifying me of non-acceptance in September, 2014. By May, 2015, the people I had been working with at the Missouri Department of Vocational Rehabilitation had been trying to assist me for a year, and they notified me that they were designating me as someone who could not be helped by their services. This notification provided sufficient support for a second application for Social Security Disability, which was submitted in June, 2015. In February, 2016, I received notice that my application for Social Security Disability was approved.

My disability benefits were based on dating the beginning of my disability in September, 2014, after I left my last place of employment (at the Westminster Dining Hall, where I worked eight weeks as a dishwasher--I couldn't work fast enough, and I was sometimes limping back home, after work). So, there was Supplemental Security Income (which I would've been entitled to) dating back to six months after that, which amounted to \$9,600. And because I had, in the last 20 years of my work life, earned enough to have had a sizeable amount taken out of my paychecks for social security, I was assigned a monthly disability check of \$1,097.

Of the \$9,600, it only needs to be said that I began rehabilitation (with physical therapy and massage); that I paid off three debts, (including one to my brother for \$1,600); that I bought a desktop computer system for \$1,200; and that I paid forward my rent (and heat and air conditioning charges) by \$4,000... as it can be easily imagined that--having had very few possessions, there were furniture, (bookcases, chairs); books (especially for researching a fiction piece I had wanted to work on... if I could gain the ability to sit....); household plants, etc which accounted for much of the rest. Because keeping Medicaid (which I needed to do) meant that, after one month from receiving the \$9,600 I could not have more than \$900 in savings, the most important of the above actions was the \$4,000 in credit I had with the Fulton Housing Authority. It was the savings from not having to pay rent (which, after deductions for a Medicaid spend down came to \$165) and other charges, plus other careful management, which meant that I would have much opportunity to gain ground through physical therapy, even on a chronic physical condition like I have (Note: I currently refer to my condition as chronic posture issues, tilted pelvis, and difficulties sitting, walking, and lying down).

About The Year That Has Passed Since February, 2016

1) Even after four physical therapists; much supportive equipment and accessories; five new chairs; two new mattresses; and a three month membership at the Fulton YMCA--I am still struggling with issues associated with sitting, walking, and lying down. I just can't seem to establish a "baseline", a pattern of activity which stabilizes my condition enough to compare any new approach with, to see if the approach is helping. I'm still just muddling along...[Although even as I work on this update to my "Autobiographical Sketch", I have been able to sit longer because of advice from the third physical therapist I saw, who tried an experiment which seemed to indicate, to her, that I had a tilted pelvis. She also has a tilted pelvis, and she said what helped her a lot was to sit in "straight back" chairs. And as a result of learning about Services for Independent Living (in Columbia), I was able to receive transportation assistance (via vans and buses) in which it was okay for me to haul chairs. So I went chair hunting, and one of the three "straight back" chairs I bought seems to be helping....][Update—straight back chairs turned out to only provide temporary positive progress....]

2) The medical doctors I have seen are (still) unable to comprehend my struggles [*no one with any influence on my medical care--with the exception of a Community Worker from the Department of Health and Senior Services (learned about this from Services for Independent Living), who visited to assess my eligibility for help with laundry and cleaning (both of which negatively affect any progress I make)(and thus who was not there to observe what I was doing as stretching and physical therapy)--has ever visited me to see first-hand how the efforts at stretching I am making might affect my temperament (a phenomena I can reproduce, by lying in bed on my right side for ten minutes)*]. Thus, even though I

now have Medicare, my primary care doctor says physical therapy will probably not be covered for me (as the treatment must be “medically necessary”). So in one of my calling around to find ideas sessions, I spoke with someone at Physzou (a University of Missouri free clinic I was admitted to for 3 visits in October, 2015--mentioned earlier), and one idea was to see if I could get an MRI before trying physical therapy again... and an MRI could be recommended by an orthopedic doctor. I did get an appointment (just recently) with such an orthopedic doctor, and he had new Xrays made of my left hip area, and though I think he was only talking about a minor long term decrease in bone structure, he was willing to refer me on to a Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation doctor, who could recommend physical therapy. So, another pathway to try.... that appointment is April 28, and the date today (as I do final editing and proofreading) is April 20.

However, even with the difficulties I have--and I am aware that my difficulties are far from being as debilitating as many people I have known, and far from level of suffering that many people experience who already have health issues, and have also to try and survive multiple, additional challenges (in places around the world)--I have, when I am able (although it is never an easy process), and when I am sufficiently inspired, continued to write. [It is worth noting here that reading books is something I rarely do now, and then only standing up (I may try Kindle after all)... and walking for pleasure is only rarely an option....]

Writing I have done recently:

- 1) An [eight page introduction](#) (Oct. 2016; Jan. 2017) to the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper, which I did outreach for on Twitter
- 2) An update to my assessment of the most critical challenges of our times--[“Unprecedented Challenges Ahead—February 2017”](#) [which I unfortunately forgot to link to in the outreach letter referred to in 3) (below), leaving in place an outdated, and less refined assessment....]
- 3) In February, 2017 I sent a critical challenges alert to more than 200 people in the field of peacebuilding (both on the ground, and in graduate schools), and chaplains in offices of religious and spiritual life, at universities and colleges ([“Convergence of Critical Challenges Alert to Peacebuilders, Chaplains—from cpcsi.org”](#)).
- 4) A comments and questions statement for the Cambridge Climate Lecture Series, who were seeking questions from citizens around the world, and had provided a Twitter hashtag (#CCLS17) for people who wanted to make their questions known to them. My questions were specifically for the panelists who will be speaking on the topic of “COP21 to Zero Global Emissions” (Thursday 16 March 2017 Time: 18:30 – 20:00 GMT). I made tweets with a link to my questions and comments statement [[“Questions for CCLS17 Panel Discussion--Diminishing Returns re Megacities?”](#) (8 pages; March, 2017)] to @ClimateSeries (their twitter handle), and to #CCLS17 (and to other hashtags)--and @ClimateSeries tweeted back “@StefanPasti Hi Stefan, Thx for detailed questions. Will try to ensure that they are at

least partially addressed”... but they did not address any question I sent to them (“@StefanPasti Thanks for your engagement and sorry we didn’t manage to include your previous question re megacities”). Regarding my engagement, there was a way to enter “chat” messages while the panel discussion was in progress, and being amazed by some serious “blind spots” I noticed in their views, I sent (among others) the following “chat” message (limit 200 characters): “No sense that people can--like they did during WWII--make sacrifices for the greater good... assessment means little trust in higher aspirations, and yet this in not seen as a critical challenge to 1o5?” I have also posted the full eight page text of the “Questions...” statement at Worldpulse and Peace and Collaborative Development platforms... but these four listed documents seem like all I can do.... It seems too much, for me, to follow the bewildering variety of complex discussions in so many different fields--all of which are far from recognizing views which I believe should be at the foundation of approaches at this point... and yet what attempts I’ve made to contribute seem to be of no interest in anyway.... So it seems I’ve arrived at a “stopping point”, where I will focus more on physical therapy, diet, spiritual practice (if I can), and maybe even the fiction piece I mentioned earlier.... [Update: what has in fact happened is I watched many movies, and gained weight eating junk food, as a way of blocking out the discomfort I have no matter what I’m doing—standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. It’s really wearing me out....]

An encouraging note: the Department of Health and Senior Services approved me for Medicaid covered assistance with laundry and cleaning (about five hours a week). And real help came(first visit 3/23/17), as the companion care/personal care aide (as they call them), is very friendly, very understanding, easy to work with, can converse on many subjects--and is most willing to do whatever she can to help (laundry, cleaning, “cleaning” chickens to store individual servings of chicken in the freezer, etc... and whatever else of the awkward or heavy labor, leaning over work,getting on my hands and knees work, and etc which set me back when I do them).So grateful to receive real help on this most difficult issue....

Some Thoughts About This Autobiographical Sketch

I make this record of circumstances and activities in my life of now 61 years to provide a context for some of the decisions I made, and the views I have—and to share whatever it is possible for me to share which might be helpful, or useful, to someone... somewhere. I believe I have had access to unprecedented resources (specifically the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, but also as a result of the vast storehouse of resources which could be accessed through the Internet)--and it seemed to me that we were living in a time which will be looked back on as a critical point in the evolution of life on Planet Earth.The [first IPCR Journal/Newsletter](#) (of any length)(Spring, 2005)--the one I did much outreach with when I first had a website for The IPCR Initiative (and the one which I mentioned earlier--on p. 51, as being the first publication which offered descriptions of seven off The Eight IPCR Concepts)--began (on the front page) with a headline “... things people can do in the everyday circumstances of their lives...”,

and the following lead:

“As a result of the unprecedented opportunities created by the expansion of the Internet, we have now arrived at a very auspicious moment in time... for at no other time in the course of history has so many people had access to so much in the way of time-tested guidelines, inspiring role models, and service-oriented initiatives relevant to peace, prosperity, and happiness for all humanity.”

Of the difficulties decisions I had to make during the years up to this point (that is, not counting the physical issues I now have), I feel the most difficult were about how much time to give to spiritual practice [given both the teachings I had access to, and what I perceived as limitations to how far I personally could advance in that way (due to physical limitations--difficulties sitting, chronic posture issues)--and how much time to give to sharing insights and resources I was accumulating to assist with realizing the profound growth towards advanced wisdom and compassion—for which there was both unprecedented potential, and an unprecedented need for (there is now a profound and critical need for as many people as possible to be exercising as much love, understanding, and forgiveness as possible, in as many ways as possible) (even though I knew some of my presentation approaches were flawed, I had no one to help me as a “sounding board” for improving my presentation, and I was not getting any positive responses, gaining colleagues, finding similar projects I could contribute to....)What happened regarding these difficult decisions, over the years, is that I split time between both—knowing that in both cases there would be fundamental shortcomings... but knowing also that I had to try.

Here are six points which may help readers understand what I thought of as “my post”, and why I made such an effort to “stay at my post”.

1) Even though there were times when I was not as physically able; or lacked sufficient personal growth and skill sets to be a valuable asset to existing projects; or was not as advanced as I would've liked in applying the wisdom in the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba--there were contributions I felt needed to be made, and I felt I had *enough* insight, intuition, inspiration--or whatever--to make those contributions. So I did the best I could, and hoped that if what I did had its shortcomings, at least it might be some help to someone who could use it in their better, and more advanced, efforts. I did not think I needed to wait until I had attained the most advanced physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual state I could possibly attain before contributing... and, in fact, due to the difficulties which persisted with my physical issues, and my circumstances as a long time “outsider” with no traditional credentials, I doubted I could reach advanced stages in any area. Further, for the very reason that I didn't have the academic history, any blue collar vocational interests--or the constitution for either--to advance along a recognized career path, it seemed okay for me to risk being isolated, dismissed as

irrelevant, etc.... Thus, it became more and more clear to me that I was “well suited” for sharing thoughts and resources which other people might not have “put out there” for public access. I went by what I thought was needed, not by how it might affect my social or professional standing; and (again) the potential which I thought could be realized seemed far, far, far more important than items of personal stature (or even physical health, to some extent) which I either couldn’t aspire to, didn’t really need, or could manage to do without.

2) Here I will repeat for emphasis, some comments I made earlier in this “Autobiographical Sketch” (from p. 49)...

Here I will add that, while it may be a stretch for some people, I believe I have some personal experience with parts of the following quote [from the article “Open Source Social Solutions” by Charlie Brown-- (note: I can no longer find a link to this article on the Internet)]: “... the most promising innovations are often lost to view and lacking the resources to take effect; these innovators are working away quietly at a small-scale, local level, unknown to the much broader community that could benefit from them. They are ‘needles’ lost in the societal haystack. This isolation, often a major stumbling block for social innovators, is no coincidence: *innovators often deliberately isolate themselves in order to realize a vision that may be at odds with existing norms or received wisdom*” (my italics). And I will also add a “why” to this kind of isolation: If I am going to be careful about protecting my capacity to move forward in adverse and unsupportive circumstances, I have to avoid getting entangled in activities which drain my energy to no constructive end. So I tend towards waiting quietly in environments where I am not required to sort out important issues (thus minimizing misunderstandings and conserving energy for what work I believe is constructive), and where it is acceptable for me to be inconspicuous, and in the background—and I do what ‘building work’ I can in my spare time. (Each person has to decide for themselves what will work best when they are trying to *adapt* to adverse and unsupportive cultural influences.)

As I went on and on, not receiving support, or even acknowledgement, from people I sent outreach messages to (over many years), I had to decide whether I should continue to at least record the insights and observations which (I thought) were uniquely mine to make—even if I had to remain isolated as a result... or—to pitch in on established initiatives and projects, which I thought of as lacking essential elements necessary for getting at the real depth of the challenges ahead. When I thought about the latter choice, there were always at least two objections which surfaced: a) pitching in on established initiatives would, very likely, result in me having second thoughts, because I’d be wondering “what if I had kept trying...” about the work I most believed in b) I did have the concern (whether real or not, I may not be able to know), that I would not be able to refrain from at least trying to contribute the ideas and resources I had created for earlier projects, The IPCC Initiative, and The CPCS Initiative... (again,

because it seems to me that there is such a need in many fields of activity for approaches my work was carried out to fill, and without such work, many initiatives just might not get at the depth of cultural transformation needed....) Thus, I imagined that I would probably be “at odds” with the goals of such initiatives and projects, and not be interested in staying with them anyway--and thus, I decided to continue with what I most believed in, thinking that at least I would be making these resources accessible to a few people who might value them... and making a record, hopefully, for a time in the future, when they could be more useful.

3) I feel there are many fields of activity (one is what some Buddhists refer to as “socially engaged spirituality”; another what the IPCR Initiative and CPCS Initiative describes as “spiritually responsible investing”; and etc) where people who are inspired by the treasured wisdom of religious, spiritual, or moral traditions can contribute much. Besides the general categories mentioned above, consider the following specific areas: educating students about peacebuilding practices from a very young age; contributing to the understanding that “...every article in the bazaar has moral and spiritual values attached to it...” (J.C. Kumarappa, from “Why the Village Movement?” (also referred to on p. 28); reinforcing the awareness that everyone--by their investments of time, energy, and money (their “votes”) in the everyday circumstances of community life--is contributing to the nature and character of the larger economy; sharing experiences about--and providing educational instruction about--people who are making sacrifices for the greater good; reinforcing reconciliation in community visioning initiatives and neighborhood learning centers (to help the transition from polarized views to being on the same side, helping each other); interfaith peace vigils (which emphasize silent meditation); contributing to hope (through faith) even in circumstances where there is no longer any “reason” to hope for a positive outcome—and, most importantly, diminishing the cynicism and skepticism in the world about religious and spiritual traditions (cynicism and skepticism which has resulted in such traditions being marginalized in society) by being good examples of the wisdom and compassion which can be realized through dedication and discipline... *(Thus it is that there is a great responsibility on people who are in any way representatives of religious, spiritual, and/or moral traditions: to demonstrate what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion, to provide genuine instruction when sincere efforts are being made, to contribute to the greater good of the whole, and to help restore confidence in the higher values of life).* And yet, there is such a negative stigma associated with applying spiritual wisdom (though I well understand keeping a distance from what is not wisdom) that it is almost perceived as an affront to the secular trained professionals (i.e. that anyone would consider “God nonsense” as useful....)

I believe it will be most helpful to reverse the “marginalization” of the treasured wisdom of religious, spiritual, and moral traditions. What I included--

---in Section III (p. 21-30) in the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper[["Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses: to resolve unprecedented challenges and discover our collective spiritual destiny"](#) (85 pages; June, 2015, updated July, 2016)]—and also on p. 56-63 of that summary paper

---and the appeal I made regarding the need to make unprecedented progress on towards resolving timeless shortcomings of human nature—*even though such shortcomings are perceived as so much a part of who we are that most of us accept such as inevitable*[see p. 4-6 of ["Convergence of Critical Challenges Alert to Peacebuilders, Chaplains--from cpcsi.org"](#) (10 pages; Feb., 2017)]

--will (eventually, I believe) help some readers (at least) see that what I mean is there are realizations one can have about the meaning of life... through examining the wisdom which have accumulated over the many centuries of human experience, and which have been confirmed again and again as essential to individual well-being and social harmony by the saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and sincere practitioners of all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions--

and these realizations can have very down-to-earth practical value...

(again) *and these realizations can have very down-to-earth practical value.*

Remaining on the subject of "socially engaged spirituality"--and *these realizations can have very down-to-earth practical value*--I now ask you to think carefully about the following observation:

---if many people can learn to find contentment and quality of life while consuming much less material goods and ecological services, this limiting of desires at the "root" will save much trouble trying to respond to the symptoms (of unrestrained, or unexamined desires) as they materialize worldwide. This is one of the benefits of spiritual teachings which often gets overlooked.

The many very difficult challenges associated with global warming/climate change are a most dramatic example of "symptoms as they materialize worldwide." If those of us who have much more than we really need had been wiser about what really matters in life--and had, once we achieved a sense of stability and security regarding meeting their basic needs, turned to helping others who were experiencing severe levels of suffering from wars or deprivations--would we be experiencing a convergence of critical challenges, now, even though the most advanced communications technology ever created is accessible to people around the world? And on the subject of advanced: what is so advanced about exponentially increasing population growth when "half the world's people live in countries where water tables are falling as aquifers are being depleted" [(from overview of Chpt. 2 in "World on the Edge" (2011) (Lester Brown))].

Are we afraid that applying wisdom will cause more suffering than we are experiencing now?

How many people believe that we have deep misunderstandings about the value of exercising wisdom and compassion in our daily lives; about how possible it is for many people to achieve highly advanced levels of wisdom and compassion; and about how possible it is for people to become enough of a “master of themselves” to control population growth to whatever level matches the carrying capacity of our habitats, and the planet we live on? (Here, I at least, will raise my hand....)

I believe we have a profound need for collaborative problem solving processes which help citizens understand that the investments of time, energy, and money (the “votes”) each of us make in our everyday circumstances become the larger economy. And that wisely directed, such “votes” can result in countless ways of earning a living which *contribute to--rather than impair--*the peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecological sustainability efforts necessary to reach positive tipping points on many critical challenges at the same time. Citizens from every variety of circumstances can learn how to wisely cast such “votes”--through workshops and meetings at Neighborhood Learning Centers during a Community Visioning Initiative, and through other local learning experiences.

It should also be clear to most readers that the virtuous conduct (the discipline, restraint, wisdom, understanding, compassion, forgiveness, etc) necessary--to change the way we “invest” our time, energy, and money, and turn those “investments” into examples of the treasured wisdom of our human heritage being more fully appreciated, and applied in the everyday circumstances of community life-- would inspire “waves” of additional goodwill.

Are we afraid of that if we become a virtuous people, life will just be a dismal, dreary, and joyless dirge?

Thus it is that there is a great responsibility on people who are in any way representatives of religious, spiritual, and/or moral traditions: to demonstrate what is possible along the lines of wisdom and compassion, to provide genuine instruction when sincere efforts are being made, to contribute to the greater good of the whole, to help restore confidence in the higher values of life—and to make the path of wisdom and virtue full of so many meaningful and enjoyable experiences that very few people will want to miss a “single episode” of it! Not possible? Let five communities carry out Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses Surveys, Community Visioning Initiatives, Neighborhood Learning Centers, and Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education projects through local newspapers--along with “Interfaith Peace Vigils” (over a two year period)... and see which community makes the most progress towards positive tipping points on every challenge in the list of ten challenges described in [“Unprecedented Challenges Ahead—February 2017”](#)... and then ask the residents of *that community* what is possible....

You have to explore, in order to discover the best places to explore next (also on p. 27).

4) I have been very straightforward in offering documents (the following are from [my "Collected Writings" webpage](#))(numbers below indicate # in the list of documents on that webpage)--

----(6.)"[An Arrangement of Quotations from 'Sathya Sai Speaks' \(Vol. 1-15\)](#)" (301 pages; 1997; 2004)-- Arrangement of quotations from "Sathya Sai Speaks" (Vol. 1-15)-- discourses by Sri Sathya Sai Baba (1926-2011)]

----(11.) "[Divine Intervention](#)" (42 pages; 2009)--Shorter arrangement of quotations from "Sathya Sai Speaks" (Vol. 1-15)-- discourses by Sri Sathya Sai Baba (1926-2011)]

----(16.) "[Four Positive Effects from the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba](#)" (13 pages)(April, 2012)--which makes references to an earlier version of this "Autobiographical Sketch"

--which include "intimations" that Sri Sathya Sai Baba is an Incarnation of God, and that I concur with those "intimations". Even the word "intimations" is a word I have never seen used until I saw it in the discourses of Sri Sathya Sai Baba: "... in no previous Yuga did the people get so many clear intimations of the nature of Avathaar as now..." (this quote is in "Divine Intervention", at the bottom of p. 7)]

I realize that to be straightforward about something like this--in a world where people acting as if they had instructions from God and are doing crazy things is something mass media news sources *prefer* to share with readers (over sharing truly inspiring examples of genuine goodwill)--leaves me open to being completely dismissed as some kind of "fringe element". And yet...as I say in the brief preface to the 301 page arrangement of quotations (above):

"We are at a critical point in the evolution of spiritual understanding.

"There is now a profound and critical need for as many people as possible to be exercising as much love, understanding, and forgiveness as possible—in as many ways as possible.

"The compiler of this "arrangement of quotations" believes that Sri Sathya Sai Baba (age 81; main residence-- Prasanthi Nilayam, Southern India) has genuine insight into how to deliberately cultivate love, understanding, and forgiveness.

"This book has been created for the purpose of providing one way among many for sincere seekers to discover and experience the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba."

And further: I feel we are living in times when it is most important to be honest and sincere about what resources one has to offer (especially since I believe we are going to need to make best use of the

qualities and skills each one of us has); to offer such resources without being offended if other people don't want what is offered; and to, in every way, be respectful, courteous, and thoughtful about others, so as to reinforce the need for positive and constructive collaboration. And anyone who wants to look through the www.cpcsi.org website (where most of my work is made accessible) will find that in all the documents and resources I offer, those threads are consistently present--and other, more negative, personally critical, or inflammatory language is not present. [Note: such a consistency about "tone" is as much an expression of "someone who is" kind and courteous, as it is an acknowledgement of the need for peacebuilding practices, and trust building (i.e. because we have a profound need, at this critical time, to be on the same side, helping each other)]. Including many of my writings was one way of demonstrating that I was *both* consistent about at least *trying* to make sincere, carefully researched, relevant, respectful, thoughtful, and meaningful contributions--*and* I concurred with the notion that Sri Sathya Sai Baba was an Incarnation of God. Thus, *people who came to trust my judgment on other things might then be a little more hesitant before they completely dismissed my carefully researched compilations I made of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's Teachings.*

And thus it wasn't because I'm so self-absorbed, or think I'm so important, or anything like that, that I include so much information about myself on the CPCS Initiative website (have such an extensive "Collected Writings" section). Again, for emphasis, it had to do with me being right up front with my belief that Sri Sathya Sai Baba is an Incarnation of God--and feeling it would be helpful, since I am saying *that*, for me to provide some evidence that I am an honest, kindhearted person who--among other honest and kindhearted activities--does very careful research, which is backed up by evidence from authoritative sources--and I share my research in a kind, courteous, and respectful manner (for those who can benefit from it, not to be annoying to people who are not interested).

Still more... because there are so many ways I could be misunderstood on this subject....

Many other people might not get into details about what they believe Sri Sathya Sai Baba is; as Baba has said "Do not proclaim great truths aloud; show by your conduct that you attach value to them and that you are guided by them"--and, in many fields of activity, ways of earning a living, etc, there is no work being done during which the subject might come up. However, as a person working in the field of interfaith peacebuilding, I believe I need to be right up front and sincere about what I believe (instead of acting like I have something to hide.... (although there are hundreds of circumstances I can think of where it would be tactless, disrespectful, discourteous, and only succeed in sowing seeds of ill will and resentment to be straightforward about my beliefs)(One has to exercise wisdom about when to speak, and when to be silent....)And yet I will repeat, again, for emphasis: I believe Baba's Teachings have much practical wisdom--and inspiration about cultivating compassion for our fellow human beings--to offer, and thus could contribute much to not only reversing the "Marginalization of the Treasured Wisdom of Religious, Spiritual, and Moral Tradition, but to exponentially accelerating our progress towards resolving a convergence of critical challenges... at one of the most significant crossroads in the history of

life on Planet Earth. It's not about being evangelical; it's about having a "tool" of practical value in our "tool boxes", at a time when we have much "repair work" to do--and that kind of "tool" is something we will be needing at almost every "job site".

One example of that practical value: my own willingness to believe unprecedented progress in human morality is possible--[again, see p. 55-61 in the CPCS Initiative Summary Paper ["Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses: to resolve unprecedented challenges and discover our collective spiritual destiny"](#) (85 pages; June, 2015, updated July, 2016)--and p. 4-6 in ["Convergence of Critical Challenges Alert to Peacebuilders, Chaplains--from cpcsi.org"](#) (10 pages; Feb., 2017)]--is because the universal truths in Baba's Teachings, which have the potential to re-ignite faith for people in all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions, and which *make it seem possible to realize potential which, before, might have seemed unrealistic...*

Thus... [the following is from p. 2 of ["Four Positive Effects from the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba"](#) (13 pages; April, 2012)]

"I can see with my own understanding (from reading volumes of 'Sathya Sai Speaks'--specifically Vol. 1-15; from creating a 301 page "Arrangement of Quotations" from those discourses; and from using that "Arrangement of Quotations" as part of my spiritual practice for over 15 years--this parenthesis added for emphasis) that the potential for an exponential increase in highly advanced forms of wisdom and compassion; the potential for an exponential increase in resolving even the most profound challenges; the potential for an exponential increase in forgiveness and reconciliation; and the potential for an exponential increase in peace, prosperity, and happiness now exists (as a direct result of the outpouring of Divine Grace which is the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba). I have therefore adjusted my perceptions, understandings, and beliefs about what is possible [Faith helps move from 'it hardly seems possible' to 'it must be possible' (since Faith believes Love will prevail)], and now prepare documents and resources believing *not only that such exponential increases are possible, but that they will happen*. An accumulation of such documents and resources have resulted in my efforts at building The IPCR Initiative." (People who do not believe such potential is possible to realize will be much less likely to devote their lives to working towards realizing such potential....)

And yet:

[from p. 7 (with updates relating to the name "CPCS Initiative" and the website address) of ["Four Positive Effects from the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba"](#) (13 pages; April, 2012)]

"... no one needs to know anything about Sri Sathya Sai Baba, or the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, to contribute resources to The IPCR Initiative, participate in workshops or other activities sponsored by The

IPCR Initiative, or make use of any of the documents and resources accessible for free at the website of The IPCR Initiative (something which is also equally true regarding The CPCS Initiative at www.cpcsi.org). Therein lies the mystery. Therein lies a special kind of faith. An unusual tribute, to assert that nothing need to be said of the Teacher or His Teachings... and yet, (I believe) this (the work of The IPCR Initiative, and the work of The CPCS Initiative), and any other such work, which nurtures, supports, and sustains the essence of all religions--truth, virtue, love, and peace--need not say a word about the Teacher, or His Teachings]...and that silence about the Name (that it is not necessary to “gild the lily” as Shakespeare put it, or say that it is the Sun that is providing light, or to glorify God every time something happens, as if He will be disappointed if credit is not given to Him every time He is involved) is a valid interpretation of Baba’s Teachings....”

“... I have no geographical ‘far’ and ‘near’; My ‘far’ and ‘near’ are not calculated in miles or yards. Nearness to Me is not acquired by physical nearness. You may be by My side-- yet, far; you may be far, far away-- yet, very near and dear. However far you are, if you but stick to Sathya, Dharma, Santhi and Prema, you are close to Me and I am close to you.” (“Sathya Sai Speaks” Vol. 7, Chpt. 14, p 71-72)

I am aware I haven’t been the best role model for people who might wonder about the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba--and I haven’t been as personal or engaging in my storytelling to go along with research pieces, as I, or others, might have liked... but I have tried to bring forward ideas and resources which do, in at least some ways, help bring to light the most treasured wisdom of all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions--and encourage compassion for our fellow human beings... and at a time when there is a profound and critical need for as many people as possible to be exercising as much love, understanding, and forgiveness as possible--in as many ways as possible. And so, if there are readers who are inspired by my work, and wonder what my inspiration was... I can say I was clear on that point from start to finish (as I have said many times):

I hereby attribute the inspiration for the approach and substance of The IPCR Initiative (and The CPCS Initiative); my personal capacity to see good in the efforts of people from many different faith communities and cultural traditions; and my personal faith in a positive outcome regarding the challenges of our times to close contact; over many years, with the wisdom and compassion in the Teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

5) Repeated for emphasis (from p. 58 and p. 77)--

I believe that there are essential and critical pieces to a comprehensive community response to the challenges of our times that are missing from the approaches now at the forefront—and I believe

I have some of the pieces. And I want to contribute those pieces. I can see the potential energy which would be actualized if those pieces were in place (*I can see that many other people with pieces to contribute would have many more opportunities to contribute their pieces*)—and thus *I believe my life is most meaningful when I am contributing what I can to the actualization of that energy. And because of the nature of this particular potential energy, the very act of trying to actualize it does actualize it, (in me, at least)... it energizes me... it connects me with the storehouses of wisdom which have accumulated over the many centuries of human experience, and which have been confirmed again and again by the saints, sages, spiritual leaders, and sincere practitioners of all faiths and moral “world views”; it strengthens my belief that it is possible for representatives of the highest spiritual ideals (irrespective of the traditions they are derived from) to become better appreciated, more easily recognized--and more numerous--in the everyday circumstances of community life; and it gives me hope that whole communities in the future will understand that there are currents of good will just as real as currents of electricity.... And if this kind of work (actualizing such potential energy) does not, at this particular time, lead directly to financial security and social connectedness for me; such circumstances are not going to deter me from doing everything I possibly can—in my lifetime— so that such work does lead that way for more and more people in the future.*

I believe that the most advanced societies are the ones which have been successful at integrating spiritual wisdom into the everyday circumstances of community life.

My work building The IPCR Initiative (and The CPCS Initiative) is an effort to contribute to the process of integrating spiritual wisdom into the everyday circumstances of community life.

I gladly and willingly contribute time, energy, and money to make the resources and documents of The IPCR Initiative (and The CPCS Initiative) accessible to those people who might benefit from them.

6) People in the future might wonder...

People in the future might wonder... there must have been people who knew, that catastrophic consequences were possible, from issues associated with global warming/climate change, and from other unprecedented challenges...

Why wasn't more done, to warn people? Why didn't more people know....?

Were there many people who knew, but just didn't say enough?

Ultimately, while I struggled to contribute what I could, I still believed, and believe now, that all of what

has been, and what will be, has been in God's hands, and is now in God's hands... and the inscrutable Divine Story--of which pieces and parts are known through the revelations of saints and spiritual masters in all religious, spiritual, and moral traditions--has been happening, is happening now, and will continue to happen... with or without our conscious awareness of it.

"Were I to have the least bit of knowledge, in walking on a Great Road, it's only going astray that I would fear. The Great Way is very level; but people greatly delight in tortuous paths." (Lao Tzu, from "Te-Tao Ching"; translation Robert G. Hendricks)

If many people can learn to find contentment and quality of life while consuming much less material goods and ecological services, this limiting of desires at the "root" will save much trouble trying to respond to the symptoms (of unrestrained, or unexamined desires) as they materialize worldwide. This is one of the benefits of spiritual teachings which often gets overlooked.

"The Tao is close at hand; yet people seek it afar."

"Let the Will of the Lord prevail; one's duty is but to connect oneself to the Current of His Grace."

Faith helps belief move from "it hardly seems possible" to "it must be possible", because Faith believes Love will prevail.

... And Some Concluding Thoughts About The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative

The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative (www.cpcsi.org) provides research and analysis for critical challenge alerts, and research and support for collaborative problem solving and community education initiatives which seek to maximize citizen participation, and accelerate solution-oriented activity.

In Section IV of the CPCS Summary Paper (see p. 35-45), this writer describes four collaborative problem solving and community education approaches, which are offered as an example of the kind of "constellation of initiatives" approach necessary to accelerate solutions-oriented activity, and accomplish the unprecedented cultural transformation ahead (again, here is a [two page description of the ten most critical challenges of our time](#), as identified by this writer)--

1) "Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses" Surveys

- 2) Community Visioning Initiatives
- 3) Neighborhood Learning Centers and
- 4) Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education

1) “Recalibrating Our Moral Compasses” Surveys:

a) are a very careful and conscientious approach to identifying critical challenges and solution-oriented activity—and to comparing that input with working definitions for “right livelihood” and “moral compasses” (to increase consensus on such definitions)—which could do much to increase the reliability of our “moral compasses” at this critical time

b) can help citizens in every variety of circumstances to understand and appreciate the need for Community Visioning Initiatives and Neighborhood Learning Centers

c) can provide starting point input for the kind of workshops needed in Neighborhood Learning Centers, and the kind of sharing which can be done through a Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education (NTNCE) section in local newspapers.

2) Community Visioning Initiatives can be described as a series of community meetings designed to maximize citizen participation in identifying challenges, and in solution-oriented activity. The more comprehensive Community Visioning Initiatives can last 6 months or longer. This writer’s interest in Community Visioning Initiatives was inspired instantly when, in 1994, he watched a video documentary titled [“Chattanooga: A Community With A Vision”](#) (13 minutes).

In this time of unprecedented challenges—and especially in the context of collaborative problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before—there are going to be countless opportunities for reconciliation. There are going to be countless opportunities for arriving at a new appreciation of the personal qualities, skills, and beliefs of our neighbors and fellow citizens—personal qualities, skills, and beliefs which we once might have thought were only being directed towards outcomes with serious negative consequences for many people. And there are going to be countless opportunities for all of us—ourselves, our neighbors and our fellow citizens—to become part of a system of mutual support and encouragement in our local communities, as we respond to multiple, unprecedented challenges.

One of the keys to appreciating the value of Community Visioning Initiatives: such collaborative problem solving processes can help people “become stakeholders”, with the faith that as they do so, and become involved in the education at the level of Neighborhood Learning Centers (and “voting” on priority challenges and priority solutions), *people will discover for themselves* just how much we all need to be learning to so that we can be part of the solutions... and how much we really need to be on the same side, helping each other.

3) Creating many Neighborhood Learning Centers can provide places—in local neighborhoods—for

discussion, information sharing, mutual support and encouragement, and fellowship and friendship, so that the exchanging of information and resources can also make significant contributions to the process of building “close-knit” communities of people... (which are) communities with a healthy appreciation for each other’s strengths, communities with a well-developed capacity to resolve even the most difficult challenges--and communities which demonstrate a high level of compassion for their fellow human beings.

4) The Neighbor to Neighbor Community Education (NTNCE) Project advocates for a new section in local newspapers. The new section (NTNCE section) would be used to highlight and accumulate stories, personal experiences, and other forms of reader contributions which identify helpful people and valuable resources, and reinforce important community goals.

What we need now are collaborative problem solving and community education initiatives which carefully and continuously (through ongoing monitoring) seek to achieve a meaningful balance between the urgent need to “frontload” specific issue-related agendas, and an even more serious priority: for all of us to understand--

- a) how much we need to be learning to so that we can be part of the solutions
- b) how much we need to be making best use of the knowledge and skills each one of us has
- c) how much we need to be on the same side, helping each other
- d) that—wisely directed—the investments of time, energy, and money (the “votes”) each of us make in our everyday circumstances can result in countless ways of earning a living which *contribute to—rather than impair—*the peacebuilding, community revitalization, and ecological sustainability efforts necessary to reach positive tipping points on many critical challenges at the same time.

The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative is an effort to apply the accumulated wisdom now accessible to us towards the general goal of integrating spiritual wisdom into the everyday circumstances of community life--and towards the specific goal of generating practical responses to the challenges of our times.

The CPCS Initiative encourages and supports the belief that that if we are to overcome the challenges of our times we will need not only the resources which innovators can prove the existence of by scientific method; we will also need the resources which people of faith believe exist as a result of inner experience.

The CPCS Initiative supports the belief that there is a more advanced and more benevolent spiritual entity (“energy”), with a kind of existence which is beyond what we can know or understand--and that

such an entity (“energy”) does actually count for something in overcoming the difficult challenges ahead.

The CPCS Initiative supports the belief that “God can do anything”.

The CPCS Initiative believes that the most advanced societies are the ones which are successful at integrating spiritual wisdom into the everyday circumstances of community life.

The CPCS Initiative supports the following definition of world peace: a universal feeling of *sympathetic resonance* between the examples of leaders (as seen in the wise and equitable administration of cultural and natural resources); the personal cultivation of virtue throughout society; the ecological stability and sustainability of natural resources; and the current of Divine Grace.