Coming Home

A personal story about the camps of the 1980s

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This is a story of the founding of an energy-stream of deep learning experiences, generally known as 'The Camps', and of the prototype Glastonbury Camps and their successor OakDragon Camps in particular. While the general public is largely blissfully unaware of this phenomenon, these events have played a major role in the lives of thousands of people of many walks of life.

The views recounted here are my own. These camps were unique, the beginning of something that carries on to this day. For many people, the camps have been 'just like coming home, back to the real world'.

Glastonbury Gatherings

In late summer 1983, Jamie George, director of Gothic Image in Glastonbury, asked me to help him organise a special weekend gathering for people interested in Earth Mysteries – ancient landscapes, remains and metaphysics. We had a brainstorming session together about it.

Suddenly, an unpremeditated design of the gathering flooded out. Unbeknown to us, this was going to turn out to be a new model of education, gatherings and larger group-work, and the development of a

new kind of ‘mystery school’ or educational-initiatory process for the modern day.

The blueprint which arrived that evening has continued to this day, emulated with varying degrees of success by many people and organisations. It has not yet attained its full expression: it has immense potential for resolving communication, fulfilling co-creation and co-empowerment needs in large groups or crowds, as the world goes through its changes and develops the need for truly deep-democratic interactive processes and, literally, for collective miracle-working.

In retrospect, this ‘idea-arrival’ was a classic case of the downloading or implanting of a holographic idea into the world of humans, or of the translation of a potent thought-form from the superconscious into the conscious. It came through two unwittingly available mediators, Jamie and me. We didn’t just think it up ourselves – it was beyond our reach in terms of our experience at the time – yet it came all the same. Exciting! We took a plunge.

Jamie and I put out signals and organised the event. Around 100 people attended the November 1983 gathering in the Glastonbury Assembly Rooms (a birthplace of many initiatives), and it was an exceptional success. It involved a ‘silent circle’ at the beginning of every stage (the whole group holding hands and going within for a few minutes).

Then we used a form of circular group communication and sharing we came to call powwow, plus smaller groups examining different issues and subjects, and also some workshops taught by experts in their own fields. This pattern is well-known nowadays, but then it was new.

There was valuable informal cafe-intermingling during breaks – this always constitutes one of the richest areas of contact and exchange. The strength of this complete interactive model was that it drew on the accumulated knowledge and experience of everyone present, pooling it into a group energy which built up over the weekend.

The high point of the weekend came when we spent twenty minutes sending meditative support to forty or so Glastonbury women who, that weekend, were at Greenham Common USAF base near Newbury on a major protest action against cruise missiles. The meditation seemed

profound - we all were quite stirred by it. Later that day, Lydia, one of the women at Greenham, returned to report that the Glastonbury women had instigated a tearing down of the perimeter fence of the base. It turned out they had started doing this spontaneously at the very same time that we had sent our meditative support, earlier in the day.

No one had planned this symbolic offensive – it had just arisen. It was the first time it had happened - the security of the base had been overcome. This demonstration of synchronicity - between the event and our meditation at the gathering - was a confirmation of the potential of groups and of the realistic dynamism of collective psychic solidarity – a positive shock to us all. We realised we were in business, not just playing mind-games.

Having been successful, there just had to be more gatherings. However, Jamie withdrew, leaving it to me. This was difficult - I went through soul-searching over this, sensing it was significant. Also, frankly, I was scared. But I did it anyway: it had to be done, and if I didn't do it, it probably wouldn't have happened. We held another gathering in May 1984 to mark Beltane – again, very successful. I later organised a Community Gathering for the local Glastonbury alternative community, leading to the publication of a magazine, Glastonbury Communicator – though not much more came of this event after a few more of them.

Another gathering in late May 1984 for astrologers (since I am an astrologer) set off a new trajectory in astrological research and evolution, spawning a stream of astrological events which continue to this day. It particularly gave impetus to the development of the use of therapeutic techniques in astrology - a new thing at the time. The high-point of this Living Astrology Gathering came when, at the close, we climbed Glastonbury Tor, landing up in a massive group hug, humming and swaying with eyes closed for a seemingly interminable time – then, when we opened our eyes, a bright double rainbow stretched over us! We were being blessed.

However, it became clear that participants were but warming up by the end of such a weekend, when it was time to go home. The question arose: how could we gather people together for a longer period without having to charge them enormous fees?

Glastonbury Camps

As a former Venture Scout, mountaineer and conservationist, I thought of running a camp. However, I then instinctively shied away, knowing this would entail much organisation, innovation and risk. It would be a big challenge. I was aware that we would lose a few people, for whom camps and outdoor living might be too much. Yet being outdoors, in a temporary world without walls, is liberating in itself – it simplifies life-issues and introduces the fluctuations and wonders of nature into the transformative equation. The energy-field could grow unimpeded by ceilings, architecture, electromagnetic dissonance and the constraining habits of 'civilised behaviour'.

The idea would not go away. After one month I accepted that a camp was inevitable... but it would have to be next year! Too much organising! Two weeks later, I gained the sneaky, insistent feeling it had to be this year, 1984. I cringed! It would take miracles to make it work. Two weeks after that, while attending the Glastonbury CND festival in late June and observing the milling mayhem of energies and crowds there, I arose one morning just knowing my envisioned camp just had to happen – and that very day I planned it all out.

This kind of rush of inspired energy was not new to me – I had felt it when I was involved in the LSE 'disturbances' in 1969-71, and had similarly been pulled into co-organising a home-birth movement in Sweden in 1977, arising from the birth of my first child Maya. Here came that feeling again: I felt both fired up and nervous – 'treading on the tail of the tiger'.

One of my then house-mates, Diana, asked me what I was brooding over. I told her I needed somehow to find the right people to help me with this crazy scheme. Within hours, Diana was mobilising her friends

from the Dove Workshops outside Glastonbury to organise catering (not a simple matter!), and Sue, my other house-mate, committed herself to running welfare operations. That evening, I visited John, a wizard logistics man, and lo, I had a site manager – with a special gift of manifesting things cheap or free. We had lift-off!

My soul-sister Atharva came in with encouraging noises and an uncanny capacity to arrive at any hour bearing simple solutions to problems which had just arisen. All suddenly went forward hell-for-leather: by late August, 120 souls were camping under the ancient Gog and Magog oaks beneath Glastonbury Tor at the first Glastonbury Living Astrology Camp – and it was an enormous success. Everyone agreed there had to be more. I was in a state of awe!

This matter of 'living astrology' was new and important. We instituted new learning processes. One was to establish twelve flagpoles in a circle at the centre of the camp. Each flag represented a zodiac sign. Then, each day for an hour, we would meet there and separate out around the different flags, in the zodiac sign of our Mercury, Venus or Saturn. This meant that each of us was in a group with at least ten others who had the same planetary position, and the issues suddenly came clear. Such a group would spend time together, comparing notes. Then we'd have a big reporting-back at the end.

We instituted other techniques too, quite experimentally - including incorporating therapy-related techniques into experiential astrology (things like psychodrama and visualisation or 'imaging'). The atmosphere was exploratory and experiential. We developed or gave opportunity to a new range of approaches to astrology, which became better known elsewhere in subsequent years.

Into the fray

I had virtually fallen into all this. Not unwillingly, but not intentionally either. Offers of organising support for the coming season arrived, but that support evaporated over wintertime – everyone was busy with other things. By February 85, it rested on me to decide whether or not to go further. I felt an intense aloneness. I paced around, thrashing within. I cried my eyes out and came to no answer. So I resolved to climb Glastonbury Tor, to say my prayers, ask for guidance. I went up and meditated a while. Nothing came. Perhaps I was kidding myself. Perhaps over-idealistic – after all, in Margaret Thatcher's Britain, most people were busy covering their asses and filling their pockets. I decided to look for omens.

Asking for signs, I meditated further, then opened my eyes. I was immediately overflown by seven birds in formation, heading straight for the site of last year's Astrology Camp. Hmmm, interesting. Perking up, I heard a child's voice lower down the Tor, exclaiming "*Daddy, this is lovely! I'm so happy!*". Now smiling, I stood up, turned around, and found myself bathed in deep red sunlight shining through the portal of the old church tower. I laughed aloud. I had just received three signs. The deal was done. 'The Management' wanted these camps to happen. I went home to my then-partner, January, who implied in her response, "*Of course – how could it be otherwise?*"

The Glastonbury Earth Mysteries Camp, held at Butleigh at Beltane 1985, featured a visible lunar eclipse. It was momentous for everyone. People were deeply moved – something far greater than any or all of us was birthing itself. A stirring ceremony took place over the eclipse, including a women's dance performance about the four faces of the lunar goddess – which itself was a milestone for Kathy Jones' unfolding

series of unforgettable mystery plays, staged in Glastonbury in subsequent years.

A historic video of the camp was made by Mark Walters, capturing priceless cameos arising at the camp – children in the hot-tub, campers at early-morning *T'ai Ch'i* with Devakirti, now deceased, circle-dancing in a downpour-swilled marquee, people stacking a great fire with logs, and Sig Lonegren, an American archaeological dowser, recounting that this was exactly what he had come to Britain for.

Then there was a coincident NATO exercise, during which some 20 items of aerial war-technology buzzed us daily, pretending we were a guerrilla outpost – we decided to bless them and pray that their planes would never be used for their deadly purpose. (Remember, these were the days of the Cold War when the enemy, allegedly, was USSR.) Moments of enchantment and awakening, archetypal scenes of humanness, joy, difficulty, debate, concentration and peace.

Yet a shadow reared its head. After everyone had gone home, I was summoned to an extraordinary parish meeting in Butleigh (apparently the largest for a decade), seemingly on trial. I was accused by the local vicar of fomenting black magic! This was a shock, since my motivation and the outcome of the camp were clean and clear. It took three months to sort out this problem, drawing in the Bishop of Wells and implicating Canterbury. The vicar was gone in a year, and a new bishop was installed – Bishop Carey, later to become the Canterbury Archbishop - who, as it happens, was the first to ordain women priests in the Church. After this, I realised that such fierce opposition from vested interests reflects the degree to which one's positive efforts for change are effective and potent. But the calming response of Wells and Canterbury were also signs of healing. Later, there was more opposition to come, even within our midst.

Yet the extent of background support from 'Upstairs' and from supporters was broad and affirmative. Even the local authorities and police were happy, since we were making legitimate arrangements, had small numbers of participants (compared with festivals) and we played no loud music. Also, I approached them in a way that generally didn't invoke problems. There was no money in this game (it eventually cost

me and some others thousands), but the non-financial payoffs were overwhelming. I was happy that the camps were economically accessible to a wide range of people. "*It's not what you get for it, it's what you become by doing it*" – John Ruskin's saying helped me a lot.

That summer, Colin Harrison the circle-dancer and I, together with the team of forty or so people I'd built up who dedicatedly did the hard work, on site management, catering, children's facilities, welfare, gate, admin and teaching, teamed up to stage the Glastonbury Music and Dance Camp. It was triumphant, pioneering, innovative. Belly-dancing, Sufi chant, jam-sessions, enormous circle-dances, bagpipes, drumming, voice workshops, the big top crammed with shining, interweaving dancers winding around John Cartwright and his impromptu dance band: this camp spawned numerous other music and dance camps in years to come. Few who attend these popular Music and Dance camps know of how they started. They started in August 1985, in a field near Shepton Mallet overlooking Glastonbury Tor.

The second Living Astrology Camp, following this, was a hothouse of new developments in therapeutic astrodrama, inner journeys and interactive astrological processes. To beginners and veterans alike it was an awakening to a new astrological experiential realism, 'taking astrology off the shelves and into our hands'. For astrologers, accustomed to snooty ridicule, it was a great relief to talk astrologese without constraint in the workshops, group processes and the Pie in the Sky camp cafe – and under the nighttime stars. Everyone present spoke the astrological lingo.

Then came the most consequential camp of all, the following year. There had been difficulties organising the 1986 Beltane Earth Mysteries Camp: it wasn't working. There were meetings, but nothing actually moved - everyone was busy doing other things. We were heading for

crisis. One day, I awoke from sleep, troubled, knowing that this was the day to commit or to cancel. Cutting through the rather collectivist committeeism which had been stultifying things, I phoned my four key site helpers to check their commitment. They were on for it, relieved that someone was taking the initiative. I found a site for the camp that very day, in a beautiful spot on Pennard Hill, east of Glastonbury. The wagons started rolling. Bookings started coming in - not without a major networking effort on the phone and with mailshots.

One mystery remained: usually I had a clear inner sense of the underlying theme a camp would have – but for this camp I didn't have a feeling. I had a blank space with no inspiration or ideas – just a knowing that the camp had to happen. We went forth on faith and moved onto the site – like an army operation of trucks, trailers and people – and set up the camp, wondering what would happen.

The answer came on the campers' arrival day, a Friday: on their car radios, while driving to the camp, the news had broken that Chernobyl had blown up. This was a major shock. Was this the beginning of the end? Was this it, what we all quietly feared in the 1980s? No one knew – there were no precedents for this kind of disaster. Fear rumbled threateningly through the collective unconscious of the world. The people at the camp – all Earth-lovers – were riddled with shock, dread, fear and helpless frustration. No hope left. What a downer!

There was but one major option: to powwow the issue, to process it through amongst the 120-strong group. Powwow was the name I had given to the circle-working process instigated in 1983 by Jamie and me, which by 1985 had (on the recommendation of Sun Bear, a visiting native American medicine teacher) adopted the talking stick. Earlier on, the idea of powwow had come to me through observing films of Maoist China in the 1970s and through experiences I gained in gestalt therapy, even though I chose a handy native American name for it.

Using a talking stick, the rule is that only the stick's bearer may speak, while all others in the circle undertake to give complete attention without interference. The stick starts at the centre of the circle, to be picked up by the first person who is moved to contribute. Therefrom, it proceeds round the circle so that everyone may contribute and be heard.

It goes on until such time as everyone agrees the process is complete. Participants may speak, sing or be silent, spontaneously and without forethought, and without any obligation to follow on from earlier contributions.

What happens is remarkable. It's a phenomenon both ancient and futuristic. Once the stick has gone round awhile and once participants have aired their more personal stuff and opinions, the consensus can shift into something transpersonal, archetypal, gripping and immediate. Individuals find themselves expressing and articulating things on behalf of others or of everyone present, or the wider world. At times, a form of group channelling arises, oracular, healing and prophetic. A timeless and potent energy builds up, sometimes taking hours. The changes and resolution of issues which gradually emerge can be profound and far-reaching.

This is working within the world psyche, changing the inner patterns of history – as well as infecting those participating. When a powwow is well run, people make unparalleled leaps forward and the sheer humanity of the situation overwhelms all ego-inflation and defensiveness. Though powwow is not easy, its results are exceptional.

However, it is tricky to convey its value to people without their experiencing it personally. It is difficult to understand until you have participated - then it is simple and obvious. Many have attempted to run such processes without full regard to procedures or their implications, with a resulting weakening of its potential – and sometimes people have thereby been deeply hurt because things didn't go right, and things were said which should not have been said. The power and potential of this technique is immense, not to be underestimated. But it has to be done well.

Tears rolled and rage, resignation, insight, grace and strength were expressed. The nuclear threat was upon us – literally raining isotopes on

our camp. The sky even seemed strangely tinted. Some who hold silent, habitually allowing others do the talking, were coming out with gems of rumination, great gifts to the group. Pontificators and customary dominators were levelled down, obliged not only to listen, but also to fully hear.

A boy of nine, William, stood quietly with the stick for ten long minutes, holding everyone in stillness, like a samurai holding a great sword of destiny. Wow! He was embodying something deep for all of us. Powwow is a meditation in which everyone grows up into an elder. After some hours, some wanted to stop for a rest, but no one could break the circle of intensity: “Pee in your pants then!”. Another social taboo was overcome, and the pasture was duly fertilised! It didn’t become a habit though!

Later, a man approached me to say he was taking his family home, since he didn’t feel good about exposing them to the radiation. I understood, and wished him well. Yet that evening, at dinner, he and his family were there. What had happened? “We drove fifty miles and we realised that if we were going to die, we’d prefer to die with you all, not alone at home”. We hugged each other and cried. Ian later became a director of the OakDragon.

At one point, a sweat lodge and meditation was done by about forty people, focusing on supporting the emergency work at Chernobyl to gain control of the disaster. Later it was found, after the end of the camp, that the workers had regained control of the disaster at the same time as that meditation. Hmm... One evening, around a bonfire, we drummed, danced and catharted our doomy nuclear feelings to emerge with an immense joy and hope, a feeling of empowerment to go forward, come what may.

The world was perhaps beginning its times of tribulation, and we accepted there would be many more such threats before humanity’s prayers for a new world could be fulfilled. These are but some of the many moving snippets from the ‘Chernobyl camp’ – a corner-turning initiation for all present. From then on, I was committed to creating further energy-spaces where such things could happen, in the form of

camps – and growing numbers felt the same thing themselves, and have acted on it.

That summer of 1986 we did a Ceremony camp, an Astrology camp and a Music and Dance camp, all of which were remarkable. But by now everyone was getting weary. We had karmically collided together, giving our time, hearts, money and commitment spontaneously, and these camps were beginning to become a fixture. Many positive spin-offs had come: businesses, careers, music groups, other camps, relationships, even babies, and a centripetal spinning-out was growing.

The camps had been so moving that many were becoming joyfully burned-out. This couldn't go on – the energy was so momentous. Something had to shift. The pace was hot, and there was a risk we might break apart in tragic disarray. Such an ongoing intensity was not feasible to sustain – we humans have our security needs and our personal limitations. I had anticipated this – for I had my own needs and limits too, and I was feeling them acutely. It wasn't just a matter of running the actual camps, it was the year-round organisation, politics, money-managing and hassle-busting unpaid work which was difficult to do. The camps needed to work more sustainably.

Re-envisioning

In March 1986 I had gone to my wilderness hideaway, a mountain valley called Cwm Pennant in Snowdonia, North Wales, to say my prayers. I loved the place - it was my spiritual source-point. There I was, alone up a mountain by a waterfall, stripped naked to render myself vulnerable under the pouring rain, crying my eyes out over the wonder and the burden of it all... I needed some truth.

After all, all this had pretty much landed on me – though not without my own complicity. It hadn't been thought through as a long-term

fixture and it earned nobody a living. I was running low on funds and energy yet I felt I couldn't back out now – we had gone too far to turn back. Still, we couldn't carry on the way we had been going. The accent of the 1980s was on financial viability and manifest issues, and it wasn't paying off to just plaintively hope for better times. I prayed deeply, offering myself up, asking for clues, pitifully shivering with a saturnine dilemma, with the sharp double edge of a choiceless choice. The rain fell mercilessly.

"*OakDragon*". That's what came up. What? "*OakDragon*". Long silence.

"*Camps. OakDragon. Nationwide. Education, empowerment, initiation. Family and clan. Reach out to people. A university on the green Earth. OakDragon Project...*"

Words to that effect. Much more came too, in no logical order. A new picture was forming.

It was like a virtually instantaneous snapping-together of a thousand threads, stretching between the past, the timeless and the future. It was an articulation, a download. I saw it, in a trans-dimensional moment of compressed probability. I was to start a new project - this time one with a capacity to last and to prevail. By the time I was beclothed, striding soggily down the mountain, I felt like a grounded ET on an exacting mission. And I was looking forward to a warm log fire and some resuscitating food! It had all come clear. I had my vision.

I saw the possibility of a large committed family, a tribe of people with shared aims, gathered serendipitously from all walks of life and many beliefs, running camps and drawing in increasing numbers of people. People would be able to rise to their full stature through such an involvement, through carrying out such service. Some would come to run the camps, some would teach, others assist, and some would live and work together, creating a network of abodes and workplaces, building up a mutual support system and a shared life, developing other services and businesses too as spin-offs and fund-raisers. How long this might take was unspecified, but I guessed it to be at least seven years. It

was a big dream – and in this vision-manifesting game, I was still a junior. Though I didn't know it at the time.

The aim of all this was to evolve new organic social, educational and business structures, to educate and to learn by doing it, creating learning environments and a community infrastructure. The key issue was the learning, the evolution and the process. We would neither seek sheltered perfection nor hide from the world in a rarefied bubble. It would be a noble experiment in social and spiritual unfoldment, reproducing itself molecularly by osmosis and precedent. A mighty vision.

I thought it all through. OakDragon was to have three pillars: an organisational structure, a family of people committed to social invention and to staging initiatory learning events, and a clan of supporters dotted throughout society who would act as a support network and a bridge to the mainstream world.

When I later presented this grand idea, some lit up, some thought I was crazy or megalomanic, some thought it had little consequence and others sought to hijack it. Little did I know that when the idea of a clan was broadcast, many people would underestimate the time, process and bonding this would take. Some would join for what they could get out of it. It was a fire-cracker. In retrospect I should perhaps have held back, quietly beavering away at it as a background, longterm possibility. But at the time I was driven by a dream, a sense of urgency to contribute to make something happen to help the world change.

Over the years which followed, this vision faded into memory, as complexities, mistakes, power-wranglings and financial difficulties trampled it into the mud of late 20th century complexity. People who later joined the OakDragon never heard of its starting vision, nor even of its founder.

Perhaps this was just as well, since we humans are unused to working steadily with vision and working to fulfil a sense of history – we tend either to crusade for or to corrupt our dreams. Yet at the time this vision and possibility seemed so potent, even inevitable.

The dragon, an ancient symbol of the soul of Britain (also of China) and of the subtle energies coursing through the landscapes of our planet, is a rugged entity to take on. It guards treasures in the dark depths yet it also flies high in the heaven-worlds, where the light and the panoramas are immense. Yet this was an oaken dragon: oaks are ancient, stable, forbearing, protective and grandparental, carrying wisdom accrued from watching and remembering.

Some people thought I was finally losing my marbles when I spoke my vision, though others saw what it implied. OakDragon was a potent energy-symbol, and it has worked well. Though what has mattered has been the embodiment of this image, through the long hours, months and years of work invested by so many good souls, working away come rain or shine, come success or crisis, in growth and in service. Many have been cooked in the fiery breath of the oaken dragon.

It was necessary to start an organisation with its own identity – no-one's property – with a group who would run it and a circle of folk who would join in such a deeply shared experience. People bond when they go through it together. At the Glastonbury Music and Dance camp of 1986, I called an initial meeting of interested people. By late summer, some of us met in South Wales at Ros' woodland, and found our first finance, our first core of people and our first plan of action. A tryst was made – and while storms have buffeted it, OakDragon survives to this day.

Ferngrove

That winter, we founded our HQ at Ferngrove Farm near Castle Cary in Somerset, instituted a company, arranged publicity, raised more capital, roped in people, bought equipment and planned a series of seven camps for 1987. We arranged a season of camps covering the subjects of Earth

Mysteries, Healing, Astrology, Arts and Crafts, Music and Dance, Celtic Mysteries and a Clan Gathering.

We were plunging in at the deep end. Had we been more 'sensible', we might have started it in 1988 – things may have been easier, less of a roller-coaster. But a driving force was propelling this forward: we just had to do it. We aimed to take on the Harmonic Convergence of August 1987 – and in doing so, we mounted a bucking bronco!

The Glastonbury Camps, undoubtedly a blessed gift, were over, after three seasons and seven camps involving some 1,500 people – all of whom had searched each other deeply in the eyes, held hands and taken a mighty step together. Many still tell me this was the turning-point in their lives. One, a manufacturer of missile components who turned up at the first astrology camp, sold his company, joined our site crew and later became an international kite-flying demonstrator. Another, a City financial analyst, eventually became a horticulturalist. One, a former convicted criminal, 'owned up', changed his life, met his Kiwi wife-to-be at a camp and became a family man in New Zealand.

My own turning-point had been a near-death experience in 1974 in North Wales, followed by some years with Tibetan Lamas, and I knew what the feeling of total turn-around was like. Without such experience, I could not have catalysed such changes in others. In such turn-arounds there is no longer any going back – it's a turning deep in the seat of the soul. We were widening this process from a personal to a social phenomenon: it was a microcosmic taste of the transition the whole world must go through, I believe, if humanity is to survive the twenty-first century.

OakDragon!

The first season of the OakDragon camps was both brilliant and traumatic. We took on so many new matters at once. We started with mostly new people in the crew, and many former campers spun off in a variety of directions. Most of the courageous Avalonians who had nurtured this seed had given of their all and needed a rest - and they had other things to do. So did I, but I couldn't accept dropping the matter – I

felt driven, feeling a need to take it to a stage where I could hand things over and move on.

Invoking a dragon – albeit oaken – invited a dragonesque response, with no half-measures and lots of raw truth. Launching our project in the decisive year of 1987 was risky - these were the days of Gorbachev, humpback whales, freedom, democracy and recycled everything. But with hindsight it was invaluable. These camps were to be educational in every possible way – we were to learn more than we bargained for! It was sink or swim.

OakDragon Camps 1987

The first OakDragon camp took place in Sancreed in West Penwith, the granitic Atlantic toe in the far west of Cornwall, at Beltane, May 1987. (Twenty-five years later, I landed up living there from 2012 onwards, even with the same landlord!). It was mostly camp veterans who came, and we enacted the birthing of the OakDragon in full ceremonial form. There was a handfasting in the centre of a labyrinth we had laid out under Sig Lonegren's guidance, and we made group pilgrimages to stone circles and ancient healing wells.

One powwow went on for hours: we moved into such a mighty consensus and stream of consciousness, in which everyone became each other's spiritual teacher, that we lost track of time and nobody wished to close the circle – even though we were damp, cold and hungry, and the kitchen crew were fretting over the uneaten dinner! It was like a group-psychic channelling, as if the whole world were represented, as if we were radiating light globally. West Penwith is a good place for such

things as this - provincial, yet very much connected psychically with the wider world.

The weather was windy and cruel, bringing out our determination and concentrating our minds on achieving what we had come to do – to overcome the inertia of comfort and normality, to 'lay up treasure in heaven', to pay forward for the future benefit of the world. It reminded me of stories our fathers had told of vivid moments in World War Two, when people risked life and limb to expose themselves to the immensity of Life in all its dreadful and challenging glory.

Things went well at first that season, but then complications arose. Sid, bless him, the then 'King of the Convoy', had sought shelter in the Glastonbury Camps in the controversial days of the 'Battle of the Bean-Field' near Stonehenge, and now he was with us in the OakDragon. I had not wanted him, but I was overruled by others - he was popular and somewhat populist, needing to be boss. He was driven by an urgent force, anti-authoritarian yet Churchillian in style. His driving force met mine in a growing clash.

Over time he coalesced a body of opinion against me and us, inviting in friends and proxies who challenged us severely. I never found out how much this was intentional or unintentional – like me, he drew people to him. Amongst the OakDragon organisers we did our level best that summer, with degrees of success and degrees of failure, yet we found ourselves under attack from a vociferous caucus of dissenters. Sides were being taken, and things were getting heavy.

Added to this, members of a therapeutic community from Ireland came to one camp carrying their own rather emphatic and confrontative agendas. Other individuals swooped and rattled around with a spectrum of callings, obsessions and objectives, adding to a rich array of curdling interests and unconscious dynamics which altogether were proving to

be too much. Sharing, mutual trust and growth were turning into weariness, bitterness and acrimony amongst the crew – though many campers had a fine time, hardly aware of these background frictions.

Things got complex. Many people were sliding out of their depth. In the end, it was a no-blame situation – we were all bravely swimming in the deeps, and no one had a clear overall grasp of all that was happening. In the OakDragon core group we were overstretched. I was wearing too many hats and others in the core-group were in crisis-management mode. There were serious financial shortfalls. Two people brought in to help with financial management began undermining and sidelining me, making decisions behind my back. Wires were getting hot and tangled. However, the camps of that season were still remarkable.

What amazed me was how varying different people's perceptions were – our critics were offering us entirely contradictory statements, sometimes about the very same single issue. I was having to learn how to distinguish between projection and genuinely useful feedback. Energies were spicy, rising to a crescendo at the Harmonic Convergence in August 1987, in the middle of our largest-ever camp.

Miracles were happening too. This Music and Dance camp, attended by some 450 people, took place in front of a wonderful old mansion in mid-Wales – Nanteos, the valley of the nightingales. I had found the location in a magical way. When searching for camp sites, I had gone to the Cotswolds, finding a site near Prinknash Abbey – this eventually fell through. I searched in the Brecon Beacons in Wales, finding a site aside the tranquil Llanthony Abbey – this eventually came to nothing.

On an earlier tip I hadn't followed up, Ros and I went to Nanteos in mid-Wales, calling in at Strata Florida Abbey on the way. The owner of Nanteos welcomed us and happily gave us a site for the camp. What

relief! The site was perfect, with soft green grass, majestic trees, a river and lily-pond, and a very atmospheric feeling.

She then told us a story of an old chalice which had been kept at Nanteos since the late 1500s – it was now in a bank vault somewhere. Some suggest it was the chalice of the Last Supper. On the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1560s, this chalice had been secretly brought from Glastonbury Abbey by four monks. Get this: their path had gone to Prinknash, to Llanthony, to Strata Florida and then to Nanteos! What the actual significance of this 'coincidence' is, I have never found out, but I took it as a sign that we were on the right trail!

The high moment of this camp was the appointed day of the Harmonic Convergence. We had designed the camp in a large six-pointed star shape, marked out by marquees at each point, with smaller geodesic domes marking an inner hexagon. This had been controversial, since many people didn't like being organised like this, but we managed it. And it worked.

Most people were there at the open centre of the camp that afternoon, under roasting sun, in a large circle of about 250ish souls, all singing. For hours we sang and swayed together. We came to sing a song which went: "...I am a circle, I am healing you. You are a circle, you are healing me... Unite us, be one. Unite us, we are one...". It went on like this, trance-like. It was a strong invocation. People were transfixed, entranced.

I opened my eyes and looked around. There, amongst us, I saw a miracle. Despite our invocation of the power of the circle, we were actually standing in an exact and perfect hexagon! The site layout, a hexagonal star, had worked! Amongst other things, this was an object lesson that what one thinks is happening (a circle) is not necessary what actually is happening (a hexagon). Nevertheless, to organise 250 people into forming an exact hexagon is itself a miracle – especially when no one asked them!

By the end of the season, things had become complex. We had staged some remarkable camps, and yet there was dissonance. We were tired too. We had not done well economically – returns had not reflected our

planning estimates, and costs had, as always, been higher than expected. Our 'listening bank' (Midland, later re-branded HSBC) had changed their minds and let us down on our loan arrangements. Our financial controller had suddenly dropped out at a critical stage, leaving us adrift – he later formed his own camp organisation, Unicorn Camps.

Many people had caught on to Sid's rousing 'We, the People' speeches – he portrayed me as some sort of Stalin or Louis XIV – yet behind this were concealed personal power issues hiding behind egalitarian-collectivist ethics. Others around the core team acquired hurts which weren't possible to process properly in the cacophonic melée of the time. Our valiant organising team was worn out and battered. Ros and I landed up holding the centre and we were under attack. The final assault came on the very last evening of the season, in late September 1987. We were outrightly criticised by a caucus of people at the camp, and a surreptitious takeover of OakDragon was happening.

We needed time, understanding and perseverance to sort out all the complex strands of difficulty which had arisen. Objectively, the camps had largely been successful, yet there were crucial glitches needing attention. Criticism and dissent had taken root and a jostling dance for power had arisen. In the core-group, differences over financial matters had come up – the new money-managers decided on cut-backs, and the HQ was to be closed down, to save money. I was to be made homeless, and much of the organising team was to be, in effect, deposed.

Then Sid and 'We the People' called a powwow on that fateful last evening. The accused were Ros and myself, found guilty of a heinous abuse of power. We were surrounded. Some fifty people, some of whom had been, we thought, close trusty friends, seemingly agreed that we two were plain wrong and needed to go. Ros and I spoke up for ourselves well: clearly we were being misunderstood, and there was an anarchic energy behind all this that was excessive. That day, we could

not make big decisions over OakDragon's future – we wanted to go home, to work at it over wintertime. The kangaroo court eventually ended, unresolved. 'We the People' went off to party.

I was furious. Ros was hurt. Before the 'closing circle' next morning, many people apologised of their own volition, implying that they had got carried away and didn't mean it. But bombs could not be unthrown. A shadow had fallen over OakDragon. Sid and 'We the People' decided it was their right to take over the OakDragon – though weeks later, after the season ended, I heaved myself out of my sick-bed to tell them they could do this over my dead body. Who was going to be first to attack?

With this, they faltered. As a result they split off to form the 'Rainbow Circle', to run competing camps. Nominally, it was to be organised by a free and democratic tribal circle of people. Tragi-comically, in the end few landed up holding authority and, in later years, they were found by a new rendering of 'The People' to be committing the very same 'crimes' as we - autocratic dictatorship and absolute corruption, in the fierce judgement of people with loud voices. But that's another story!

Devastation. However, 'The People' took away with them many of the people we did not want – travellers and freebooters who, like wasps to honey, had crowded us out in 1987, seeking safe havens rather than spiritual breakthroughs. The honey was now elsewhere, with the Rainbow Circle, and OakDragon was regarded as a goner, a failure.

The Rainbow Circle achieved success in its own more anarchic way, and Sid their figurehead scored both triumphs and failings, as we had. My only regret was that they had breach-birthed their organisation, nearly killing OakDragon in the process. Neither project was really helped by this. Perhaps, if OakDragon had started up a year later in 1988, all this might have happened differently. Or perhaps not.

Yet it happened as it did, and time has brought its forgiveness, learning and truth. Ros and I were now on our own. Many supporters had fled, and others went quiet, drifting off. Somehow we had blown it, though it was difficult to divine exactly how. Somehow we had stood at the confluence of several simultaneous storms.

I was by now exhausted. I had lost my home and livelihood. I fell ill, landing up in hospital, to be treated for internal poisoning from a tooth abscess which two dentists had failed to deal with – apparently I was within days of brain damage. As I went into the operating theatre, I offered myself up, just like in Cwm Pennant eighteen months earlier, visualising myself resting in the open hands of the mother-goddess. I prayed that I may learn from my mistakes. Then I went under, from the anaesthetic. The consultant visited me afterwards, a friendly chap, glad about the successful operation: "I knew you were special, and I wanted to help you". That was deeply moving.

Later, I went to USA on a lecture tour and for a break. I landed up one day on San Diego beach, in hot January sunshine, watching pelicans skimming the waves. I was anguished within. I'd been damaged, though not fatally. It took three years to throw off this gloom, though it was a fruitful soul-searching in the end.

After all, I had set in motion something far bigger than me, and I had beaten a path into new ground. Thanks and rewards are not necessarily to be expected. The politicking had hurt deeply: this was not what I had bargained for. But then, to quote John Lennon, life is what happens when you're busy making other plans.

1988

By sheer force of will, Ros and I pulled the OakDragon together again for the 1988 season. Ros was in the ascendancy. We ran six camps, two at Tewkesbury, two in the Forest of Dean and two near Avebury, at Alton Barnes. The magic was still working, though some vital clarity and dynamism, the hidden factor X, was diminished – we had had to go one step back, to rebuild.

A temple was constructed at one camp, by group design and effort. The ANC anthem rang out at another camp. OakDragon was settling into a longer-term rhythm.

Individual stories were touching: the women in their 60s who were adopted as camp grandmothers, or the families who went through family healings, or the single mothers who found support when they asked for it. There was a gentleman who once had been a top aircraft engineer, who now had serious Alzheimer's: he would emerge from his tent, heading in some direction, then he would stop and look puzzled, forgetting where he was going – people took him in hand to prompt him and make sure he ate and had all he needed. Some cried in joy at the love and support available to them: after a night of strange dreams, a person would be intercepted with a hug and a hearing ear.

One of our teachers, David, a rather inspired though driven, rather manic shamanic teacher, began showing a need for psychiatric help and we supported him as much as we could, though he was not helpable. The love people felt for him could not equal the deep despair and resistance to change he was evidently experiencing within himself.

A nurse who came quiet as a mouse left having made a powwow speech of great poignancy. A woman who came visibly bearing a dark shadow and heavy burden at the Healing camp broke through and lit up - later she returned to run the camp shop and became an OakDragon director. A senior civil servant pronounced us 'the Greenpeace of humanity', and a video documentary was made. Objects were carved on rustic pole-lathes, stories were told, truths shared, chorales sung and a distant dying person was supported in a large healing circle.

The power-games were not over. The couple who had worked hard to straighten out our finances were inconspicuously engineering a new

takeover and it became clear they wished to get rid of me. The chattering network was being fed with cynical impressions of me and doubt in the principles I had laid down. Ros was being pragmatic, and I was sticking to principles, and we were growing distanced. The season went quite well, but by now I was seriously burned-out. I did not have the bottle to pull off a looming battle.

One anecdote from this season is worth recounting. We held two camps at Alton Barnes, near Avebury in Wiltshire, and two more there in 1989. During these camps there was a lot of 'circle-working', both powwows and circle-dancing. There was even a session invoking UFOs at one point – part tongue-in-cheek and part dead serious.

Nevertheless, next summer, 1990, at Alton Barnes, very near the camp site, there appeared what was until then the greatest of the crop-formations, hitting the world's headlines and attracting thousands of visitors. I cannot help wondering whether our camps and our 'circle-working' had helped with the arrival of this phenomenon. The crop formations, still tabooed and ridiculed by the media, remain a mighty mystery which is likely to be very important for humanity. A connection is now accepted amongst cereologists between crop formations and both UFO phenomena and human thoughts and actions.

We'll never know if OakDragon had a causative influence, but a connection was visible. Especially since the farmer on whose farm all this happened had been the first farmer to invite us to hold our camps on his land. All other landowners had had to be persuaded and suitably bribed! Was this his reward?

Parting ways

At the end of the 1988 season, I wrote to Ros from Cornwall to say that I had to take a year off. I was letting go. It turned out to be four years of absence. The money-managers soon left, and the OakDragon now rested on Ros' shoulders - intentionally or unintentionally she had engineered this. From 1986 I had planned to give it seven years until 1992, but reality turned out to differ from plans.

Leaving was both a relief – an end to the power-games – and an immense disappointment. I lived for some years with the weighty feeling that I had somehow failed in my mission. It was not the first time in my life that all the blame was dumped on me. I had to make an act of faith that all would work out in the end.

This sense of guilt later proved to be an excessive self-judgement. In 1991, I was engaged to compile a book of channelled communications, *The Only Planet of Choice*, for a group of people who had been communicating psychically with some non-earthly advanced beings called the Council of Nine. I was interviewed for the job by the channeller and the convener of the project, Phyllis Schlemmer and Sir John Whitmore – and then, uncannily, I was interviewed by these intelligences themselves, in a channelling session. The Nine welcomed me and said, to my astonishment, in reply to a question from me about whether I was the right person, that I was welcome, since I was the first to come to them who needed no preparation. Gulp! Perhaps I wasn't such a no-good after all.

This experience helped me look in hindsight at the rush of profound events in the late 1980s, to reassess things in a more balanced way. The Nine taught me a lot. I wondered whether they might have been behind this whole operation, without my knowing. Further, I came to understand how collectives of people create symbolic heroes and villains who embody collectively-unconscious archetypes - then to be raised up or felled by what often can be quite cruel social projection. If I were to continue in such work, I would need to be willing to undergo more of the same without getting hurt or disempowered in the way it had been in 1987.

Humanity needs time to evolve and mature – this was coming clear. Social transformation takes decades and there's no quick fix. Group

evolution and inner growth are far more complex than personal growth – and societies move as fast as their slowest members. There's also a degree of violence to the collective - things said, judgements make, acts committed - which later are regrettable. Each individual must learn for themselves at their own pace. Meanwhile, it rests on innovators to force the pace and open doorways – and sometimes to precipitate difficulties and crises in order to catalyse valuable social shifts. Two steps forward, one step back. Light and dark constitute truth – I had embodied both.

I attended further camps in 1990, though my need now was to attend to personal matters. I had become a father once again in late 1989, to Marieka – though I confess I did not do well in my relationship with her mother. Marieka, born underwater at Ferngrove Farm in the heated time of the East European revolutions, was my third child, and she came as a healer and teacher to all who mix with her.

I had had two children in Sweden in the 1970s. The breakup of our marriage and family – much to do with the pressures of the home-birth campaign we were running – had brought me deep sorrow and loss. Yet, the pain arising from this was a major motivating force in moving me to start the camps in the 1980s. Perhaps I sought to redeem my pain by bringing healing to others, through staging the camps. My Swedish daughters played a vicarious part in bringing joy to thousands, yet they never attended a camp. How I had wished otherwise. Quite legitimately, they felt I had abandoned them. To be honest, I was faced with a sharp dilemma, a choice between financing 2-3 trips a year to Sweden to visit them or financing the camps. Both were not possible.

In the early 1990s I restored my humanness and reconstructed my personal life. Meanwhile, OakDragon carried on. People reported that it had lost its vital spark, but at least it survived – much as a result of Ros' perseverance. The special thing about camps is their not-quite-perfection: each camp has its glitches, bad weather or button-pressing crisis, yet people rise to the occasion, using it as a beneficial inner growth-enzyme. Were camps easy and light-filled, they would omit to teach certain basic lessons.

Human endeavour seems to boil down to three decisive things: *money*, *power* and *sex* (or greed, envy and lust). Many spiritual communities

and growth groups aspire to be exempt of such issues, yet they land up with a carcinogenic shadow of unacknowledged, covered-up agendas that sooner or later weaken their human fabric, landing on scapegoats or detonating eventual devastation. People often expect squeaky-clean, risk-free spirituality without realising that, if this were so, so much would be missed – cosmetic appearances could override genuine realities. One of the things I've always liked about the camps is that there is no such pretence.

OakDragon had had its fair share of painful shadow-play. Yet working with imperfection brought me and many others immense uplift and growing strength. OakDragon people have experientially tasted social triumph over obstacles and and also collective collapse, together with the accompanying feelings of empowerment or bleakness. We have tasted the reality of miracles and the congruence or contrariness of differing reality-levels. We have experienced much of what world change really implies.

Return, return...

It brought me joy to re-enter the OakDragon in 1993-4. I was welcomed back. Everyone had grown and matured. Much of this was due to the determined resilience of Ros and many others, who had stayed on the case even when the going was rough. Ros has now moved to the side too, herself hitting popularity problems – she's done her stint. Others now hold the wheel.

The past is forgiven, forgotten or, by newer people, not even known. People have come and gone and accumulated experience has grown. They're a formidable team. With everyone working voluntarily, in service, there are few thanks and few rewards – except what we become by doing it, carriers of an inner wealth which moth and rust cannot eat and thieves cannot steal.

In the 1980s, perhaps I had ambitiously presented too many possibilities all at once – yet, over time, much has been assimilated and digested. The OakDragon as an inner entity has been doing its work. The leadership has changed towards a collective fusion – people know what

to do, and new campers pick it up easily. People have been involved not for gain, neither for clout nor glory, but out of dedication and choice. I honour OakDragon folk for that. It has all been worth it. Also, there is the future...

So many spin-offs have arisen from the camps that it is impossible to chronicle them. Many camp organisations came into existence – in Slovakia, New Zealand, USA and Lithuania too. The OakDragon and all its offshoots and consequences are still profoundly unfolding. Yet there is also room for improvement, and I feel the Great Work for which OakDragon was forged is probably yet to come.

It has been preparing individuals for larger social change. It has consolidated an assemblage of people and a strong energy-field which opens up whenever a camp starts, palpably closing down when it ends. A week-long camp becomes an aeon, and closing it down and packing it up feels rather like dealing with the end of a civilisation after its inhabitants have deserted it – a profound heart-wrench rather like leaving home, to re-enter the madness of roads, cities and false appearances.

Such a juxtaposition of realities strengthens the soul, preparing people to welcome a new world. This, to members of the public who have not tasted such a new world, can feel threatening at first, even though it is probably their heart's actual desire. When the chips are finally down, and truth stares the world's peoples in the face, it is important that at least some people are accustomed to such truth-facing processes, accustomed to swimming adeptly out of their depth, in the sagacious knowing that humanity can rise safely to its full potential even in the deepest of crises.

In 1993, Sheila my partner, Marieka and I joined the OakDragon Sacred Space camp in the hills above Dunster, Somerset, near Exmoor. It was

like a homecoming. On this site, in 1990, January Jane and Ivan Macbeth had run an excellent Healing Camp for OakDragon, in which the symbiotic teamwork of OakDragon people had truly showed its worth.

At the beginning of each camp there is an introductory session for campers new and old, in which facilities and programme are described, and the circle is 'opened'. That introductory evening, it worked like magic, even though unrehearsed. The setup was described to campers by representatives from each department of the camp, and then a chant was started. Through the darkness of the evening, a child came bearing a flaming torch, which she applied to the pre-laid fire, and... whoosh! The fire grew, spirits rose, music started and, unannounced, unbeknown even to the organisers, hot tea for a hundred people was carried into the assembled throng.

It was as tight as an army corps, yet organically spontaneous. That's the special quality which group soul-bonding can produce. New campers were duly amazed - they thought we must be well-rehearsed professionals. The crescendo of the camp – a magical journey through the woods – was scuppered by a howling gale, but the camp was so uplifting that it mattered little. The medicine had already worked.

My enduring memory of that Sacred Space camp was a quiet, dark evening when a fire labyrinth was lit. It was Sig Lonegren again: he demonstrated the use of the classical Cretan labyrinth as an inner problem-solving device, by building one and then initiating us into its use. You weave into the centre of the labyrinth – quite a walk – pondering on an issue, and then you weave out again. By the end of this process, things become clear.

This night, however, was very special – a fire labyrinth, made by laying paraffin-soaked sawdust along the boundaries of the path of the labyrinth and setting it alight. I had been busy doing other things and heard chanting downfield. I looked out, and there, in the darkness, people were threading the labyrinth, looking as if they were walking through the flames, weaving round and back, treading the path of the Mystery, chanting. It was one of those moving snapshots of enchantment, unforgettable, haunting and timeless, watched over by the stars. Utter magic.

In 1994, at the Myth and Magic Camp near Shepton Mallet, we planned a magical heist, for the climax day of the camp. The idea was that the nine teachers would dress up and station themselves at different points along a pathway through a limestone gorge some miles away, presenting to unsuspecting campers on a magic journey a series of choices and situations representing stages along the spiritual path.

Luckily, we worked out a 'plan B', in case of inclement weather. Inclement weather indeed came, so we staged it at the camp site. Each teacher occupied a dome, dressed up. Campers were released in ones and twos at five-minute intervals, to follow a trail from dome to dome, meeting an archetypal encounter at each stage.

So there I was, acting as the last stage in the line. By the time they reached me, people had already met a fairy, a sky-god, a druid, a goddess, an oracle or two – and I was a wizard – Merlin to some, a Mongolian or a space-being to others – dressed in my Hungarian pointed hat and Chinese dragon robes, and meditatively transmogrified into an archetypal, altered state of being.

On announcing themselves at the door and being invited in, they encountered me in my arcane state, addressing them: "The road is long, and you have already travelled far. The journey through your many lives has seemed like an infinity. There have been many turns of the

way, and there are many more turns to come. I am going to ask you a question, and the question is this: when you have completed your life, and you are preparing to pass on and are looking back over your life at all you have seen and all you have done, what is it that you most would like to have done before your days are over?" For youngsters, I asked them what they would like to do when they were adults.

The pauses were sometimes long. One boy wanted to be a sky-diver, and another a good father. A girl wished to be a famous film-star and another wished to plant lots of trees. One grown-up wanted to resolve things with his father, and another wished to travel the world. Some wished to prove that they could truly be a good person, and others sought peace of mind. Another wished for a child. They then, to their surprise, received a florid and fulsome blessing through me, giving them full permission to entertain and achieve their wish. "...And when you are there, and you have attained what you seek, just remember that you asked – and you received." Already bowled over by their previous encounters, this one finished them off!

This kind of special fairytale occasion, a journey into dreamtime, changes the patterning of people's lives. Even if, back in Manchester, Massachusetts or Milton Keynes, they bury the occasion in busy amnesia, the experience stays there, lodged beneficently in deeper consciousness, acting as a seed of future growth and awakening. It makes a difference.

Nowadays we are rarely genuinely blessed or initiated into new realities. We often make do with the lives we get and we struggle on without encouragement, seeking to rise to our true greatness. Through experiences such as these people are deeply healed of woe, fear and self-limitation. And a splendid time was had by all – kids and adults, women and men, under the sun and moon, watched by trees.

Whatever next?

When I came to that camp, I had been cogitating re-entry into the core of the OakDragon, to help iron out challenges in money, public outreach, presentation and spiritual atmosphere. It took but one day to

realise things were progressing well enough without me. Whatever changes were needed, they amounted to 10% adjustments, not drastic transformations, and people already involved were in a position to crack it.

Then, one morning, I awoke with the realisation that I needed to start a new kind of camp – one which was more focused, and which would be set to work with the world's problems. So Sheila and I, with our combined growth-skills, contacts and abilities, later decided to run a prototype camp in summer 1995 called *Hundredth Monkeying* – designed for people who followed various paths and who sought a next step, from personal growth to serving humanity. In order not to interfere with OakDragon, we decided to run it independently, to break new ground and experiment with a new equation and a new collection of people.

This proposed camp would bring together what I had learned through OakDragon, through the Nine and in my work on world psychology. It was a fusion of inner growth and world work, an application of the fruits of growth-work in a focused meditative aid project. The Hundredth Monkey Project would have to work with tightened camp standards and agreements, to create a sound framework for more advanced spiritual endeavours. Intentional sparking of the hundredth-monkey effect: if sufficient people envision a positive thought-form strongly enough, it can influence the psyche of humanity to the extent that people the world over, in their own situations, may raw benefit from it.

Sheila and I were aware we would be taking a risk in setting up this project, yet we believed many people would be up to it. So we went forward and did it – and M100 did three years of interesting work. It

was followed by a newly-founded, smaller group, the Flying Squad, which went on for a whole twenty years.

In most things that a man is supposed to do, I'm pretty useless. The assets I have are unusual and quite specific and, over time, I have learned not to hide them behind a bushel for fear of the consequences. Even though hiding my light may help in terms of money, reputation and career, pretence is not what I was born for, neither what makes me happy - later in life I discovered I'm an Aspie (with Asperger's Syndrome, or Wrong Planet Syndrome).

I make no apologies for being a somewhat way-out visionary, and sometimes I wonder whether my ideas are perhaps about thirty years ahead of their time. Yet the challenge is to demonstrate how to turn dreams into reality – and to stay alive while doing it! Watching the world still torturing itself, a paradoxically patient sense of urgency still wells up inside me to bring forward manageable world changes.

Meanwhile, the people of the OakDragon chose to go 'offline' for a year or two, to rebirth and re-vision themselves. The OakDragon still meets up, though in a smaller format. Sig started a Maple Dragon outfit in Vermont, USA. A camp grew up in New Zealand. Another in Ireland. People who had attended camps started their own camps and variants of camps (such as the Buddhafields festival). Others who gained an inspiration while at camps went off to pursue their visions. The consequences for many individuals were significant - it had been a life-changer.

The unnamed people who cooked the food, raised the marquees, fired up the wood-fired showers, taught the workshops, sat through long

meetings, did the accounts and entertained the children have kept the OakDragon on its legs over time.

The funny thing is that most of the public knows nothing of what has been going on in the fields of Britain! They were busy looking the other way. They were staying home, in the real world. Perhaps that was sensible, or perhaps they've missed something priceless – an opportunity to gain real-life experience in handling some of the wild and pressing issues of the twenty-first century, in real life.

And then, in 2023...

Here's what I wrote about my stay at the 2023 OakDragon camp, with the theme of The Triple Goddess. Years had passed, I had done ten years as one of Glastonbury's town webmasters , written books, done many visits to do humanitarian work in Bethlehem, Palestine, moved to West Penwith in Cornwall, and had gone down with bone marrow cancer , by now aged 72...

Guess what? It rained. Not all of the time, but at times it rained quite a bit. Nevertheless, Oak Dragon has been doing camps for 35 years, and British weather doesn't stop it, even in force nine gales.

Under the shelters, into our tents and vans, or into the domes we went, and sat it out, chattering. When I came home my joints and muscles ached, and it took three days for that to go.

But the compensating factors, the payoffs, far outweighed all that living in a planetary-body decrepitude I now live with. It was great. There's a deep, magical spiritual uplift that dawns on everyone, and a family feeling, and there's something special about disconnecting from the world for a week, as if going to another planet (which it is) - something captivating and engaging, moving and clarifying to the spirit. It's like a multilevel recharge, and people's souls start shining through.

In a way it's a taste of future society. Conditions while camping are quite simple (we've got all the kit for it though), yet there's something here about a potential society where people have reunited and re-entrusted themselves to each other, and where the energy-saving effect of living in a community lifts off, opening out the possibilities for everyone.

One of the biggest things is the profound everyday sharings between people. Exchanges and connections, with an openness that allows us to experience more of the soul more and less of the adopted, conditioned behaviours in each of us. But group events - simple yet moving ceremonies, mystery-journeys, shared meals and the amateurishly uproarious show on the last night - create a kind of experiential sharing that is memorable to have been a part of.

One day, a wicker coffin was built in the middle of the camp. We all thought about ancestors of ours with whom we sought to reconnect, and wrote messages to them, during the day. Meanwhile an enormous pyre was built, with a flower-bedecked coffin containing our messages. With due aplomb, up in flames it went, and our thoughts and prayers went with them, and we could feel the ancestors close, and all of us were entranced by the enormous blaze.

Special moments. The theme of this year's camp was 'the Triple Goddess' - the maiden, the mother and crone (though I think 'the biddy' is better). The camp was divided in three parts and we explored each aspect of the Goddess sequentially through the week. That was great. On the first night we were taken in small groups on a journey in the dusk to meet the goddesses, one by one (enacted by members of the camp), and we were given teachings and face-paintings and oracular moments.

As the founder of Oak Dragon (our first season was 1987), I was deeply moved by all this - I was shedding tears daily! In sharing circles I've even learned how to talk lucidly while crying buckets! They're still here and at it, the Dragons, and many of them thought this was the best camp for many years. It's particularly touching on a deep level to realise how, had I and we not started this, hardly any of these people, this family, would even have met. Many children would not have been born. Many lives would not have been reset and restarted. Many other miracles would not have happened. There's something deeply moving about this and I felt privileged to witness it and play a part in it, as the Dragons' kinda grandfather.

Also, I was so happy and relieved to see twenty- and thirty-somethings taking the reins, leading the circles, making the rules and teaching us wisdoms afresh. Many Millennials give me a feeling of confidence that the world will be alright in future times - they've got hearts and brains, good hands and broad shoulders. There was a good spread of ages at the camp, and there are signs that Oak Dragon might still be around in 35 years' time.

You missed it. But there are coming years (it happens in late July and early August at Lughnasa). If I can, I'm going back. You can do that: you can come and go each year, and return years later, and the family, the tribe, rolls on, and you become part of it - your presence is your membership. You can come for the first weekend of the camp if you wish - though everyone who does so tends to regret leaving just as the camp is gaining momentum, so I don't recommend it!

Now it's true, I'm good at writing PR blurbs for things I like supporting, but actually, though clearly I am thoroughly biased, what I've written here isn't too biased, actually. So it might sound like a sales pitch, but actually it's pretty close to the mark. I had a great time, and it

has changed my perspective, and I'm looking at life in a different way from just three weeks ago. Personally, I was honoured to be there, and I seem to be under strict instructions to come back next year. I'll try. For me, it's a bit like taking medication for the soul. I'll leave it at that.

I even had the sneaky thought that it might be really good dying at a camp! What a way to go.

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