

4/20/21

In the Stream of Consciousness

Chapter 9 – Cherish Your Fantasy

The next two chapters feature one Portlander in each, both having made their first appearances in the 1971 Portland Gurukula. This chapter focuses on Nico Wind, who met Nitya at age 10 but was 11 when I met her later, in the Gurukula. Those of you in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary thread will already be somewhat familiar with her—I’ll clip in what she shared there, in Part II.

Nitya had a special connection with children all through his life, and he’s not exaggerating when he writes:

I am happily afflicted with a chronic father complex, and at least six to seven hundred young people around the world look upon me as their father. When my hair and beard were long, I could easily pass myself off as Father Christmas.

Where adults could be inhibited on a first meeting, children instantly flocked to him, and he cherished their directness and naivete. I, who had taken an earnest vow at around 6 or 7 to never forget the feelings of childhood, took it as a revelation to me of what I had already lost in “growing up.” *Love and Blessings* has several passages showing how Nitya honored children, including:

In the fifties I wrote articles for children in the Gurukulam magazine under the pseudonym “Zia.” My [temporary] break from the Gurukula ended my pen-pal relationship with the children of Kerala, but now I thought of reviving it. I designed a magazine for youngsters, made a dummy complete with cover picture, and filled it with exciting articles, short stories and poems. It was a good creative effort. All the contents were mine but under different names.

So the fantasizing of stories with ten-year-old Nico, recounted in this chapter, was no anomaly. Here she is sixteen, already an accomplished guitarist and singer/songwriter, and he's also addressing the transcendental effects of music, and of art in general, another lifelong passion of his:

Now, when I try to recapture what I was living at that moment, I realize that my flowing mood was not stumbling on word formations and the syntactical obstructions of language. I cannot but marvel at the magical changes that come to the articulating mind as soon as we are favored by any one of the nine Muses.

“Growing up” is the process where we learn to replace direct experience with conceptual and word formations. While useful tools, affixing them all too often becomes an end in itself, with directness being abandoned in favor of clever interpretive manipulations. A substantial part of the bliss of art, sport, meditation, or other joyous practice is the restoration of our connection with our own beingness. This became one of the more important themes of the class discussion.

Deb could tell Nitya isn't merely extolling the beauty of music, he is trying to explicate, through his experience of it, a consciousness that is not restrained by a body, time duration, or even space. Creating and listening to music adds variety to our consciousness, where it flows and changes and takes us to different places, at once to the center and the far folds of eternity. He is inviting us to an experience of how varied our consciousness is. She quoted from the back of the book:

We are not outsiders watching the course of this stream from its banks. We are in it, and we are that. The flux of the stream makes it impossible to stand and stare or to have any precise scrutiny. But this disadvantage is more than compensated for

by the ceaseless flow which enables us to be one with the stream, to go wherever it flows.

(The full excerpt is in Part II.)

Bill gushed how when you listen to really beautiful music you don't just hear it, you feel it. All your senses run together in the experience. He loved Nitya's amazing description of the colors, the movement, how it opens him to the depth of things.

Steven related a time in his life when he was determined to understand classical music, wondering why people make such a fuss about it. This was when pop music on the radio was the uniting experience of the culture, not classical. He smoked some marijuana, which as we know can make you more open to sensory experience, especially listening. He had purchased a record of Beethoven piano sonatas, and one of the slow movements struck him as poignantly, unbearably beautiful. It was as if a sword had gone through his heart and split him open. He found himself in tears, shaken to the core, amazed at the power of that music to communicate so much. Discovering what it means to truly experience music deeply started his obsession with classical music.

Steven was vaguely aware that Nitya was into the arts, how they could transport you. He remembered Peter O taking Nitya to the Woodstock movie, with all its mud and music, hoping to "turn him on" to the sounds we loved, vast gatherings being an experience that epitomized the way our generation was collectively shaped by them. His sense was Nitya's reaction was a little bit deflating.

I'm sure it was, because though Nitya loved a wide range of music, rock was not included. He once called it musical masturbation. Furiously strumming a guitar can even look like that. Nitya was sexually restrained, to say the least, and sex was palpable in much of the rock'n'roll tunes. I'm sure that was a factor in his aversion, and likewise in our attraction to it.

Nitya was a great lover of the arts. All through his life he was intent on bringing all of experience together under the heading of a

Symphony of Values, where every aspect of your life was musically alive at all times. It was never fully realized, but served him well as an operational dynamic. In 1989, at a time when Indian music was little performed publicly, he started holding annual music festivals, bringing incredible talent out of the woodwork up to the Fernhill Gurukula. Fred Cantor and I attended that first monthlong celebration. I gave a piano concert on a battered piano at the Y, (including Beethoven's Waldstein sonata) with the queen of Jaipur in attendance, and Fred played in the prayer hall. It was "a hot time in the old town tonight!"

Deb mused that what Nitya is talking about is being in a place where you are not grounded to ego: like with works of art, your consciousness leaves that little place. She was referring to Nitya's reaction to Nico's song:

When I listened to her, I was not merely listening to her words. It was like the soul leaving the body and effortlessly moving into another world, a world where sounds, forms, colors and movements all blend and share the prevailing mood. I could feel and experience a palpable tenderness in my mind, my heart and my soul. It was as if I was seeing the tenderness, listening to it, feeling it fondle me, as if my soul was filled with its soft fragrance.

Nitya adds:

How is it I could crowd myself into my center and simultaneously flow in all directions, as if the crosscurrents of consciousness don't ever clash? The experience of nearness with my sight resting on the far-off fringes of infinity cannot be adequately described with words.

It set off a series of reminiscences in the group of moments of aesthetic arrest, where artistic awesomeness stuns the left

hemisphere into shutting up for a moment, making room for the right hemisphere's ecstatic awareness of being.

Andy waxed rhapsodic about a trip to Europe he took at age 14, with his father. In an old monastery in Colmar, France, he was stunned by the great treasure of the Isenheim altarpiece, which he still considers the greatest crucifixion and nativity scene ever, all rolled up into one breathtaking tableau. It struck him like a thunderbolt of realization, that people could imagine such a thing and paint it. He couldn't get his head around it; it was life changing. Before that he had dreamed of becoming a nuclear physicist.

Deb recalled a time after our baby Nate had died and she was still having a very difficult time, a year later Miles Davis came to Portland, with his ultra-cool, intense, late-stage jazz. The experience of listening to that music broke through how she felt. It was a huge relief, and a vision no words can describe, but it was actual and palpable at the same time.

Susan exalted about choral music, how it makes her feel like she's flying around with the angels. She gets a similar feeling when looking at icon paintings all over Italy. They are so gorgeous, she can never get enough. Though what is depicted in them is not historically accurate, she still gets a rise from them.

We moved to perhaps the most important aspect of the chapter, the role of fantasy. Should we cherish our fantasy, or not? Here, we clearly should. Nitya writes:

The term "fantasizing" has a pathological coloration. That is a great misfortune to which the western world is exposed. This universe itself is a fantasy of our mind, but then again there is nothing more beautiful and worth cherishing. Jesus Christ spent a whole lifetime and even died on the cross to bring home to us the beauty of what he fantasized as the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven within.

For all that, Nitya often upbraided us for our fantasies, when they

were out of joint with reason. He came to America at a time when drug-induced New Age beliefs were running rampant. Many of the people he met expected him to confer enlightenment on them, for instance, since that's what holy people did. He criticized us sharply for such untenable beliefs; ran for cover when necessary. Hey, most beliefs are untenable, so it's incumbent on us to distinguish those with value and those without. How to do that made for an excellent conversation.

Bill offered an important delineating factor: whether *you realize* your idea is fantasy or not. This is much harder than it sounds, by the way. We humans tend to hold more doggedly to fictions than facts.

Deb felt our fantasies falter when they get out of lock step with logic. Many of our delusions and fantasies are aggrandizing to our egos, yet there's also the type of fantasy that elucidates our experience.

Andy cited the fourfold scheme of the Mandukya Upanishad, describing the different ways knowledge presents itself: in one quarter as an individuated self facing the world of objects; in another, it's autonomous; in another, collapsed on itself; and there's a fourth of which you can say nothing.

It's apparent that creativity and fantasy are close cousins, if not identical. In both instances, there are versions that liberate and those that bind or destroy, which is another way they can be distinguished.

Jan asserted Nitya is describing a shared experience filled with joy and sweetness. It's like love, a loving wonderful moment they had together, experiencing music. She quoted him, "what first captivated my mind was its softness, pathos and the sublimity to which it was silently soaring. Then there arose from the very core of that place, which was neither inside nor outside us, a spark of joy brimming with a series of non-differentiated connotations such as sweetness, satisfaction, contentment, good cheer, gratitude, and grace." Jan sweetly added that in our class we share these same feelings together; we reach a place of beauty together that we often

can't achieve alone. So true!

I thought that spoke to another crucial distinction we need to make: the impact of our ideas on others. If it's demeaning or destructive to other people, your fantasy is deranged. This is also true in relation to one's self, but we have a wide tolerance for self-destructive behavior these days, and that's fine. Until it bleeds over into antisocial activities. Which it often does.

Steven acknowledged that fantasy is a broad term. One can't imagine the arts without imagination and fantasy. In artistic practice or experience, especially if you're creating something new, or opening yourself to a work of art, there is an activation of some deep intuitive part of the psyche. It seems to be very much in tune with the idea that there is something about that kind of experience which is transcendent of the ego, which is also positive and integral to spiritual practice.

I mentioned my book of Soviet-era art as filled with often-hilarious examples of overly-constrained artwork, and Steven made a great point: when the power of art is harnessed to politics, it becomes propaganda. For a time after the Russian Revolution art was honored to an extent, but when Stalin comes along he squelched everything. The artistic spirit needs freedom.

And yet, the greatest art arises from conflict. Andy's crucifixion scene is hardly mere sweetness and light, daffodils and violets. Beethoven's power comes from alternating tension and release. We love stories that are suspenseful, and then resolve. The Stalinist oppression of composers literally killed off some of them, but the survivors, especially Shostakovich and Prokofiev, gave us some of the most immensely beautiful and inspiring music of all time, in reference to the oppression. For that matter, the Sixties Rock Revolution was in part stimulated by the chaos and conflict of its mini-Renaissance. So, we aren't just after pretty things. We crave meaning. Ananda. And oppression will always be with us.

Deb had just read an essay by Seamus Heaney about the poet Osip Mandelstam, who valiantly tried to write what Stalin wanted, but couldn't do it. His poetry emerged from the fight going on

within him to obey or not. And he couldn't capitulate. It speaks to the bravery of allowing what your vision is to come forth. It's a kind of vision that each person has, that is being transmitted through them.

Anita has been reading and listening to Jill Bolte Taylor talking about her left-brain stroke and the euphoria she got from it. It's showing her that "genius" is something we all have, it's just that some of us are slower in moving into that space. It's not something gifted only to some people, they just managed to fall into it. The important thing is how we manage to coordinate the abilities of our right and left hemispheres. Even an artist has to work with space and physicality of art, utilizing their left-brain skills to effect experience in the right hemisphere.

I wondered if we didn't all remember having that astounding ability at 3 or 4, when you instantly learned new language and new concepts. At that age we're still having the open mind that some adult artists seem to retain. More usually, at around age 2 the brain begins to be pared back, so it can concentrate on the areas we're most fond of—our intrinsic nature—and we become more limited. It's not all bad: it helps us to function normally. Living with a creatively open mind is difficult if not downright awful. It can be fatal in a dictatorship, or a closed society. It seems that openness is always part of us, but when we have become enamored of those skills we've learned to manipulate and defend our lives, we risk forgetting the glorious terrain within. I believe the joy we experience through art comes from the restoration of the contact it brings about with our blissful inner nature.

Steven noted that this type of understanding is leading to different philosophies of child education. In Finland, for instance, they allow children to play a lot more than other places, don't hit them with a strict curriculum, and they accelerate later on, testing at the top in the world by high school. Kids need open-ended play, so what would it be like if we were allowed to keep that playful part of us going? There would be euphoria during the creative process, as when musicians talk about improvising together—they



feel their ensemble melds into one mind.

Charles talked about his life as both an artist and an anti-artist, and has send some links to what was on his mind, which I'll tuck in Part II. He had been thinking of the ugly duckling, and the Swan of Tuonela by Sebelius. The ugly duckling due to fate or karma got thrown into pond with the Duck Dynasty, the quacking ducks. The swanling is considered an inferior duck, feeling pretty bad about it. But there's a voice, an actual song: born that way, I was born that way, I'm on the right track. It's a Lady Gaga song. Anyway, the swan woke up suddenly and flew off to some lake in the Himalayas, where you have the Sebelius piece. He got away from the Duck Dynasty. There's an autobiography here, I believe.

Being different isn't always easy and highly honored—it can be a lonely road, fraught with challenges. Therein lies the attraction of following the herd. It serves as a disclaimer for our little classes—take them seriously at your own risk. Once-over-lightly is a breeze.

## Part II

Nico's reaction to the first memoirs of the first Portland Gurukula:

Cool!

I don't remember everyone on this trail of words, but I think I was the only child that lived at that house while Nitya was there.

As Nitya said in many of his writings, children were drawn to him and looked to him as a father figure. I was one of those kids. I held a place in my heart for him and his teachings my whole life, even now, I talk to him in times of introspect.

His spirit led me to my Native American roots and my ancestral spirit- community is well aware of his contributions to my awakenings on this life path. I look forward to hearing from all the people who experienced and appreciated his beauty, its a true gift to have special people come in and out of our lives, who inspire and summon our best selves to walk in a good way.

Remembering and honoring makes the fabric strong and resilient.  
Cantecikiya (my heart is inspired by you)  
Mitakuye Oyasin (all my relations)  
Aho (amen)  
Lakota language.

Love  
Nico Wind (Lafreniere)/Cordova

\* \* \*

Nitya's full quote from the back cover (front flap in the first edition):

We are not outsiders watching the course of this stream from its banks. We are in it, and we are that. The flux of the stream makes it impossible to stand and stare or to have any precise scrutiny. But this disadvantage is more than compensated for by the ceaseless flow which enables us to be one with the stream, to go wherever it flows. It is more than incidental to experience the counterpoints the stream makes to the curve and contour that welcomes or resists the course of its winding path. Reading meaning into what could be incidental or accidental is the grandest of all amusements, which humans proudly proclaim as science or philosophy. There is the even more exhilarating experience of becoming conscious of the stream. That is to stand in awe and wonder and embrace the eloquence of silence or to sing the glory of this never-ending stream of our own consciousness.

\* \* \*

Charles' not-missing links:

Duck Dynasty: Top 5 FUNNIEST Moments | Duck Dynasty  
<https://youtu.be/unB7eQaL-d4>

Lady Gaga - Born This Way (Official Music Video)

<https://youtu.be/wV1FrqwZyKw>

Dalai Lama - Lady Gaga in Indy <https://youtu.be/Xwz2hgfHqGE>

Sibelius : The Swan of Tuonela - Karajan\*

<https://youtu.be/HjyLWoJvtME>

Part III

Beverley's contribution:

I have been rereading Cherish your Fantasy with growing appreciation. Here is an image to accompany what Guru says here....

When the song began, what first captivated my mind was its softness, pathos and the sublimity to which it was silently soaring. Then there arose from the very core of that place, which was neither inside nor outside us, a spark of joy brimming with a series of non-differentiated connotations such as sweetness, satisfaction, contentment, good cheer, gratitude, and grace.



Part IV

Steven sent musical suggestions:

There was mention of Sibelius during class.

People should watch Ivo Pogorelich (who has come out of hibernation) perform Sibelius' "Valse Triste" on YouTube. He takes great liberty with the tempos but it's astonishing nonetheless. Then there's Segerstam. I heard him conducting the Radio France Orchestra in a performance of one of Sibelius' symphonies. Again, a revelation. He slowed it way down and all the colors came out, like watching a flower bloom. Exquisite. He has a recording out of the complete symphonies but I'm not sure if they match what I heard on Radio France (if you haven't tried it, the app My Tuner is great for accessing radio stations all over the world.)