

The Spirituality of the Caribbean Tales

John Stark & Glenn Chesnut

John Stark set up an A.A. meeting in the garage of his little house on Genessee in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he got at least 200 people drug-free and sober, most of them former members of motorcycle gangs or ex-convicts. Doug M., one of the people whom he sponsored, told me later on that when he read something in one of my books and found it over his head, John would explain it to him in much simpler and more colorful language, and it all would become clear. And this in turn helped him and many of the other people whom John sponsored — atheists, agnostics, and total skeptics many of them — to finally find a Higher Power whom they could recognize and call on for help in ways which totally transformed their lives.

I count John among the small handful of the best friends I have ever had. If you have tried reading some of my books, and have found them to have too many big words and highly complicated philosophical concepts, try reading some of John's explanations

here. The one thing I can guarantee you is that, if you listen to John's words and follow them, you will get sober and stay sober. John's way of doing it works.

— Glenn C.

[pp. 2-3] And yet life doesn't begin at birth, or end with death: it's eternal. Perhaps it's as the Buddhists believe: Western man's reality is but a dream. But if we can dream in the right way, maybe we can learn how to turn our dreams into reality.

Row, row, row your boat
 (but without drugs)
 Gently down the stream.
 Merrily, merrily, merrily,
 Life is but a dream.

Life is but a dream—but illegal drugs steal our dreams.

[pp. 7-8] Back at Taboo Mountain, Barak [the fighting rooster] was unaware the witchdoctor had ended the chase so he continued his journey until he crossed the peak of Taboo Mountain, where he encountered a monk living in a cave. The monk (Brother Lamb) moved to that cave in order to escape the ire of an Italian governor who had vowed to get him. Brother Lamb had come from an Italian sect of holy brothers who believed that every human soul was born with seven deadly sins, and that only by mastering each of them in turn by practicing the opposite virtue, could the soul experience rapture. Rapture was defined by them as a peace, joy and serenity our physical world could neither give nor take away:

it was a marriage between the spark of the divine contained in every living human being and the Divine Master of our universe.

While he was still back in Italy, Brother Lamb had mastered six of the seven deadly sins—pride, greed, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth—and was diligently meditating on lust near a waterfall when a young girl came into his view. Brother Lamb perhaps had taken his vows of celibacy too soon, for he stared in wonder and amazement at this damsel disrobing in preparation for a shower beneath the waterfall. He justified his gawking silence by saying he feared embarrassing her, but whatever his reason, the sight of her elegant young body lit an unquenchable fire and burning desire beneath his robe that a million waterfalls could not have extinguished. And to make matters worse, it was the governor's daughter who had become the object of his lustful obsession. The growing fixation in his mind threatened to send his quivering soul all the way through purgatory and beyond, into the eternal fire of hell and damnation.

When the governor learned of Lamb's obsession for his daughter he wanted him hanged and flogged. Then he decided to flog him first because it was no fun flogging a dead man.

[pp. 12-13] Meanwhile as Shark Boy's dinghy climbed and descended one wave at a time on their way home, the monk asked, "Do you believe in God?"

Barak [the fighting rooster] said "Cock-a-doodle-do," and Shark Boy responded, "Big Jesse said, 'God was created in the mind of man and not the other way around; if a cow painted a picture of God, He would have horns.'"

The monk said, "My son, there's only two creators in this world, God and man. This dinghy, its motor, fishing poles, snorkel

and spear gun first began as a thought in the mind of man. All other things in our universe, including us, first began as a thought in the mind of God.”

Shark Boy said, “Don’t call me son, my name is Dave, and can you prove that God exists?”

The monk said, “No, but we can prove it to ourselves by doing a few simple daily actions. And you can call me Brother Lamb, which is short for my full name, which is Lambini.”

“Like what things?” asked Dave.

The Monk said, “First we must admit that we are not God. Can humans create a tree, a fish, or any other living things, even microscopic bacteria? Evoked or not, God is there. Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.”

“So you say Lambini, but if there’s a God, why do innocent children get abducted and murdered?”

Lambini replied, “Just as there are but two creators on this earth, there are also but two wills: man’s will and God’s will. God gave human beings free will and He will not take it back even if they use it to murder themselves or others! Most bad things happen because of the ill-use of human will.”

“But in doing God’s will is our peace. We must learn to say to God, ‘Thy will not mine be done.’ Do not confuse the ill-use of man’s will with God’s intentional will, His circumstantial will, or His ultimate will.”

“So you say, Lambini,” Dave replied.

[15-16] Lambini said, “Cheating is against Divine Law and these laws enforce themselves. They’re written outside of space and time, they’re eternal and not subject to circumstance: thus in the soul of man there is a justice that’s entire. He who does a good

deed is instantly ennobled. He who does a wrong deed is by the action itself made less noble. He who puts off impurity thereby puts on purity. If a man is just in his heart, then he is in God's likeness, and is in the safety of God and the immortality of God. With justice, the majesty of God enters into that man."

.... "If a man deceives, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being. Thefts never enrich, alms never impoverish; murder will speak out of stone walls. The least admixture of a lie—for example, the taint of vanity, any attempt to make a wrong impression, an arrogant appearance—will instantly ruin the effect. But speak the truth and all things, alive or brute, are vouchers, and the very roots of the grass underground there do seem to stir, and move to bear your witness."

.... "All things proceed out of the same spirit," said Lambini, paying no attention to the fishing line. "Love, justice, temperance, are but different applications of one thing, just as the same ocean is called by different names on different shores."

.... "In so far as a man avoids the truth, he bereaves himself of power. His being shrinks ... he becomes less and less until absolute badness and moral insanity leads him to alcoholism and drug addiction, and causes his untimely and agonizing death"

[pp. 39-42] As Dave and the monk hiked up the path to Santana's old shack, the monk noticed tears forming in Dave's eyes. The sight of the little run-down structure, the smell of the tropical flowers and blooming cactus, brought back sad memories of Santana's death. When the old man died, Dave was broken-hearted and totally overwhelmed by grief for days afterwards

Dave said, "How could any God allow a good man like Santana to suffer such a lonely and desperate death?"

“Life does not begin at our birth or end at our death,” the monk quietly replied. “Life is eternal, it’s just like energy and matter, it can neither be created nor destroyed. Every major religion—Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Moslem—believes in the transformation or transmigration of human souls; they believe life and death are but two sides of one door. One side says entrance and the other says exit but life exists on both sides of the door.”

Dave snapped at him, “Big Jesse said there is no God and when we die that’s it. It’s all over, it’s finished. He says his religion is the ‘Church of the Here and Now,’ and that’s the only thing that makes sense to me too.”

The monk retorted, “God gave human beings free will and they can believe whatever they want, but countless holy men from all different religions throughout history have all believed in life after death via resurrection or continual reincarnation. I don’t care if a few self-centered atheists who are suffering from a control neurosis believe differently, my common sense and years of practicing prayer and meditation force me to agree with the holy men.”

“You can’t prove there is a God,” said Dave.

“No, I cannot proved anything to a human being in possession of free-will and a closed mind,” said Brother Lamb, “but you can prove God exists to yourself by doing a few simple daily actions that include daily prayer and meditation. By doing these simple daily actions we can gradually remove more and more of our deep-seated resentments, fears, guilt, denial and shame. Those are what block us from the sunlight of the spirit; they are the barriers that prevent the almighty, numinous, omnipotent, omniscience and omnipresent spirit from entering our hearts. Atheists are like a scientist with an enlarged ego who refuses to conduct a simple

experiment because he fears it will expose a fatal flaw in his pet theory.”

“It is the great principle stated in the ancient Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus: ‘That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below, to accomplish the miracles of what is but a single joint coordinated Happening.’ All of reality is linked into a single marvelous hall of mirrors. As we move through the various levels of reality—physical, mental and spiritual—we see that what happens at one level is also simultaneously happening in some analogous way on every other level. The microcosm is an image of the macrocosm, and vice versa. Our spirit mirrors God-and-the-universe and is likewise reflected back into the divine realm.”

“In the Tarot card called the Magician, the central figure gestures upwards with his right hand and points downwards with his left hand, with the symbol of Infinity over his head, to remind us of this great Hermetic principle: ‘As Above, So Below.’ The ancient mysteries are all about developing the spark of the divine inside you, proclaiming man as a creature who is evolving toward *apotheosis*—the full revelation of the god within him.”

“The instant mankind separates itself from God, the true meaning of the sacred Word is lost. The voices of the ancient masters have been drowned out, lost in the chaotic din of self-proclaimed pseudo-preachers shouting, ‘We alone understand the Word of God.’ Ancient holy men, scholars, and philosophers alike would be shocked to see some of the legalistic religious systems trying to argue that if the letter of their laws and rules are not followed, the souls of the simple peasants listening to them will be condemned to eternal hellfire and damnation. Look at some of the modern TV preachers who have set themselves up as toll booths to

heaven, saying, ‘Send your money to God, but make the check out to me!’”

“The ancient Mysteries, the Bible, the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Torah, all contain instructions for creating a better relationship with a Higher Power by blowing on the spark of God contained within every soul.”

“It’s all right to grieve the loss of a loved one, but it’s not right to blame God. When we are confronted with the death of a loved one, our task is to trust in God and soldier on. We are truly powerless over everything outside of our own skin. But God can and will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.”

[pp. 47-49] Two of the guests were sisters who own and live aboard *Rosa’s Star*, an ocean-going yawl. Mona and Catrina Analusleiscu were born Romanian Gypsies but their parents moved to Sweden after Stalin’s troops invaded Bucharest Telling fortunes was a team effort for the two sisters: Mona told the client about his or her past by looking into a crystal ball and then Catrina read the Tarot cards and spoke about the client’s future. Finally the sisters worked together to construct, in great detail, an astrological chart for their clients.

The sister’s repeatedly proven ability to know and see personal events in people’s lives caused even those who were normally non-believers and skeptics to fear them. The previous owner of *Rosa’s Star* had suddenly abandoned his yawl and hurriedly left the island after Mona told him very specific things about his sordid past, that included the unsolved murder of his former Wall Street partner

A lighted lantern was placed at the center of the circle and Dave (everybody there just called him Shark Boy) asked Mona and Catrina to tell the hungry monk’s fortune....

Shark Boy placed a three-legged stool in front of Mona as she extracted her crystal ball from a large canvas handbag and placed it on the stool. She began by telling the monk about his sad past and about his poor mother who could no longer feed her hungry son and was forced to give him to a monastery. The monks fed him table scraps, used him for a slave, made him sleep with the goats, and frequently physically and sexually abused him. Brother Lamb sat in stunned silence during Mona's reading, but when she came to the part about him watching a beautiful young girl disrobe at a waterfall, he vehemently protested.

"Wait a minute," protested Brother Lamb. "Who told you that? That's not what happened. I was quietly meditating near the waterfall when the governor's granddaughter by accident didn't see me, and began disrobing."

"Enough," said Mona, as Catrina began turning the Tarot cards.

"I see," said Catrina, "that your future has in it a whitewashed building, and you're surrounded by many goats and children."

"Whoa!" exclaimed the monk, "I've already taken sacred vows of celibacy."

"And," Catrina went on, ignoring him, "there's more, much more. We took the liberty of obtaining the place and date of your birth from the customs house, and we have constructed your star chart."

"We know that you believe that the past fourteen years or so of your life has been spent in what seemed like failure and frustration. But the planet Saturn, as it circles the sun in its orbit, goes through twenty-eight year cycles. Your Saturn had to move through a seven-year-long Obscure Sector, and then spend seven more years in the Sector of New Beginning. But that will be coming to an end very soon, as your Saturn enters its seven-year-long Rising Sector, moving in turn through the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Houses.

That will be the harvest time, the period when the general public will be able to see you reaping the fruits of all you have been quietly working on, often without even fully realizing it, for the past seven years in particular.”

“To help you along, at the same time, Jupiter—which governs opportunity—will be well-aspected as it moves into your Second House, the house of wealth and property. And Mars—which governs your ability to be assertive and aggressive—will also be well-aspected as it moves into your Eighth House, which was traditionally called the House of Death, but in fact governs your relationship to other people’s money and possessions. You will be given a great opportunity, and you will have the strength and courage and audacity to grasp it.”

“Contrary to what the negativistic doctrines and dogmas of your restrictive religious upbringing taught you, neither money nor sex are bad in and of themselves, and religious vows made in blind ignorance do not gain you grace. At the material level, you’re going to have a very good seven years coming up, and if you have also reached a highly enough evolved spiritual state to deal with your new-found wealth, it will be a time of great blessing for you, and you will have another seven years after that which will also be good ones, when you will be able to quietly work on yourself and begin moving onto an even more evolved spiritual level. But beware: you must always keep your continuing spiritual development as your first responsibility, or money and material success will make your life worse, not better.”

[pp. 70-72] After [Dave] tossed the painter on the dinghy’s bow to Ryan, he stayed on deck and watched the rising moon. It wasn’t

just any moon, it was a reverse yellow crescent, and by early morning it would be setting just above the bright silver planet Jupiter against a coal black horizon. It's the same crescent moon and planet that ancient sorcerers and alchemists displayed on the front of their black cone-shaped hats. Dave lay down on a cockpit cushion and looked up at the stars while *Dream Weaver's* masthead gently swung from star to star in the Southern Cross.

He was about to nod off when he heard a mysterious chant wafting across the water. He sat up and squinted his eyes as he looked towards *Rosa's Star*, where the sound was coming from. Mona and Catrina Analusleiscu, the Gypsy sisters, had a candle burning in their cabin and they were conducting another of their mysterious rituals whose significance was known only to them.

Then Dave blinked his eyes in disbelief as a blue ball of light suddenly began to hover over the *Rosa's* masthead and descended to the spreaders and traveled down the mast until it hovered above the cabin. What could it be? Dave had never before seen anything like it. Maybe the Gypsy sisters had conjured it up, but blue balls of light like this had frequently been reported running along the rigging of sailing ships in the Caribbean. Columbus reported it in his logbook from 1492, and the author of *Two Years Before the Mast* recorded seeing it in the 1830's.

But Dave had never before seen it with his own eyes he quietly slipped over the *Dream Weaver's* rail, started the dinghy, and headed for *Rosa's Star* to tell Mona and Catrina Analusleiscu about the mysterious blue ball of light he had seen hovering above their boat.

The two sisters welcomed Dave aboard as he excitedly told them about the mysterious light; the sisters were of course concerned, but they were as mystified by it as Dave was. They wondered out loud what it could have been. It had disappeared as

suddenly as it had appeared, which added it to a host of other Caribbean mysteries for which modern science could provide no plausible explanation.

[pp. 72-75] The two sisters looked at each other with great satisfaction. The events which their magic arts had foretold about the monk were already beginning to come to pass. Dave said good-bye to them, but when he saw that his mother's cabin light was still on, instead of returning to her boat, he motored over to Ryan's sloop. Dave wanted to wait until she was sound asleep before he returned her dinghy.

As soon as he got alongside, he called out, "Ahoy Ryan, mind if I come aboard?"

Ryan came up from below deck and sat in the cockpit while he and Dave talked. Dave told Ryan about the blue ball of light he saw over *Rosa's Star* and Ryan confirmed that he too had seen it, but it was as much a mystery to him as it was to Dave and the Analusleiscu sisters.

Ryan smiled and said, "I wish my physics teacher could've seen that light. Maybe he could have provided us with a simple explanation, but even he was frequently forced to admit that modern science knows but little and there's more we don't know and cannot explain than what we know or can explain, especially when it comes to spiritual matters."

Ryan continued, "Dave, have you ever had any reoccurring dreams, and have you ever heard of Carl Jung?"

"I think so," said Dave, "Wasn't Jung a famous Swiss psychiatrist who was an associate of Austria's Sigmund Freud?"

"Sort of," replied Ryan, "both of them were pioneers in the field of psychiatry and Freud had expectations that Jung would become

his understudy and promote his theories, but Freud sometimes injected himself with cocaine, and because most of his theories were sex-based it finally caused a parting of their ways. Carl Jung's belief system was centered on the spiritual realm and archetypes, but both men agreed that our dreams have significance and they both dabbled at interpreting them."

"Once when the two great men were traveling together on their way to America as guest speakers at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, they agreed that each would interpret one dream that the other man had had. Freud being the older man, considered himself a father figure to Jung, and insisted that Carl go first.

"Jung told about one of his dreams in which he found himself on the top floor of a house, and then started descending down sets of stairs until he finally arrived in a subterranean chamber down in the very foundation of the house. It was a journey from level to level, down through centuries of human history."

Ryan went below deck and pulled a copy of Jung's *Man and His Symbols* off a bookshelf, and brought it back up on deck and read from Jung's words:

I dreamt that I was in "my house," apparently on the second floor, in a cozy drawing room furnished in the style of the eighteenth century. I was rather astonished because I realized I had never seen this room before, and began to wonder what the ground floor was like.

I went downstairs and found it rather dark, with paneled walls and heavy furniture dating from the sixteenth century or even earlier. I was greatly surprised and my curiosity increased, because it was all a very unexpected discovery.

In order to become better acquainted with the whole structure of the house, I thought I would go down to the cellar. I found a door, with a flight of stone steps that led

down to a large vaulted room. The floor consisted of large slabs of stone, and the walls struck me as very ancient. I examined the mortar and found it was mixed with splinters of brick. Obviously it was an old Roman wall. I began to grow excited.

In a corner, I saw an iron ring in one of the stone slabs. I lifted it up and saw yet another narrow flight of steps leading down to a sort of cave which was obviously a prehistoric tomb. It contained two skulls, some bones, and broken shards of pottery. Then I woke up.

“When Freud inquired to whom the skulls belonged, Jung was afraid that if he told him the truth about the way he interpreted this dream, Freud would laugh at him and never take him seriously again. Jung—who was just at the beginning of his career—was beginning to realize that every human mind went down in layer after layer, and that in the lower layers of our minds we shared in a collective unconscious, where we secretly thought the same thoughts, had the same urges, worshiped the same symbols, and dreamed the same dreams as medieval alchemists, Greeks and Romans from two thousand years ago, people from ancient India and China, and cave men and cave women who hunted wild horses and woolly mammoths back in the dim prehistoric past.”

“And that meant that ancient spiritual ideas were still present in every human mind, buried in the unconscious even if we consciously denied them. And it also meant, Jung was beginning to believe, that these spiritual concepts referred to things that were real and true.”

“But Freud was so bitterly anti-religious—everything to him revolved around sex—that Jung was afraid to tell him his real interpretation of the dream. So he lied and told Freud that the two skulls represented his wife and his wife’s sister.

“Freud exclaimed, ‘Perhaps, Herr Jung, you have indulged in wishful thinking?’”

“To which Jung replied, ‘Perhaps, Herr Freud, but at the least, it wasn’t a dream about the Oedipus complex.’”

[pp. 75-76] Dave asked Ryan: “Have you ever had a reoccurring dream?”

“Well, yes, I have,” Ryan answered.

And it seems that he was having one particular dream that really troubled him. It always started with him hearing, in his dream, the disembodied voice of his dearly departed uncle saying, “Look to the East.” When he looked, he saw what appeared to be a pitch-black tropical storm approaching from the East. While his mind was making a list of things he should batten down, he would suddenly realize that it was not an ordinary storm, but a single huge black wave, a tsunami more than a hundred feet high with a white ridge at its top edge and lightning strikes arcing in its ugly curl. He would find himself paralyzed by panic and fear as his mind computed the futility and hopelessness of his situation, and then he would awaken. He would lie there in a cold sweat, so badly shaken that any further sleep was impossible.

“What could it mean?” Ryan asked.

Dave remained silent for a long time and finally suggested that Ryan should share his dream with Mona and Catrina Analusleiscu, because the Gypsy sisters were specialists in every kind of mysterious phenomenon.

“My dad said all human beings have fear,” he added, “and that we must face it, or be destroyed. But he also taught me that most of the time, we don’t have to face fear alone, because we can share it with another human being and neuter the boogieman.”

“This was just a day or two ago that we talked about this, and I asked my dad about the night he faced hurricane Marilyn’s 150 mph winds alone aboard his yawl *Hirondelle*; he suffered eleven knockdowns that night. I asked him if he was afraid that night, and how he handled it. It took him a long time to answer, but after a while he said, ‘I wasn’t alone that night, there was an unseen spirit with me who kept saying, *It’s not how many times you get knocked down, it’s how many times you can get back up.*’”

“The monk was there too, listening to my dad and me talk, and he nodded and commented, ‘Fear knocked at the door, faith answered, and nobody was there.’ He said people who live by real faith in an almighty numinous Higher Power who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent can face any fear, and fart in the devil’s face.” he quietly slipped over the *Dream Weaver*’s rail, started the dinghy, and headed for *Rosa’s Star* to tell Mona and Catrina Analusleiscu about the mysterious blue ball of light he had seen hovering above their boat.

The two sisters welcomed Dave aboard as he excitedly told them about the mysterious light; the sisters were of course concerned, but they were as mystified by it as Dave was. They wondered out loud what it could have been. It had disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared, which added it to a host of other Caribbean mysteries for which modern science could provide no plausible explanation.

[pp. 84-86] Jesse asked the [gypsy] sisters, “Would you mind looking into your crystal ball for Labelle? She’s heard so much about you and she has high hopes that you will tell her fortune.”

“Yes,” said Mona in her heavy Romanian accent, “We will do a reading for LaBelle, but first Ryan would like to hear about his dream.”

Ryan and Shark Boy looked at each other in stunned silence and total disbelief because Ryan’s dream was a secret that neither of them had mentioned to any other soul.

Mona removed a crystal ball from her canvas bag and looked deeply into it as her eyes fluttered: “I see from behind Ryan’s eyes a gigantic black tsunami with lightning inside its ugly curl. This is a warning from the other side, delivered to you by ancestor spirits. You have already stayed here too long. Your destiny is in another place far from here, and if you don’t depart soon, you are in danger of becoming a prisoner of your own desires here in these islands.”

The thought of Ryan moving away and having to be without his friendship shocked Shark Boy—so shocked him that he remained silent about his own dream—along with his fear of letting anyone else in on his knowledge about where the lost pirate treasure might be buried.

Mona rubbed her crystal ball as if to erase the last picture. After focusing her attention intently on the glass ball once again, she looked up at Labelle and began speaking to her in a quiet voice. “I see many children and a promising political career in your future.”

Labelle and Big Jesse both blushed as Jesse began to stutter, “Well ... er ... shit-far, Mona, we ain’t even hitched yet.”

“Not to worry,” said Mona, “you’re not her future husband.”

Labelle blushed again and could hardly believe what Mona was saying, but her daydreams about her budding relationship with Jesse began to be invaded from that point on, by thoughts about the possibilities of other gentlemen friends.

Catrina remained silent through Labelle’s reading but after Mona finished she looked at Shark Boy and asked Mona to see

what the crystal ball saw about his dream. Shark Boy cringed because others, especially Jesse, were after the hidden treasure too, and now Mona was about to naively let the cat out of the bag.

Mona said, “I see the dearly departed Santana removing some rocks and climbing down into the ground, but he quickly climbs out again with his lost lamb, and re-covers the hole once again. Whatever he saw in there must have been evil or foreboding because he piled several more rocks over the hole for good measure.”

[pp. 109] Dave ... walked briskly up another steeper path to the highest cliff on the island, the place that had appeared in his recurring dreams. The wind suddenly accelerated and so did Dave’s heart rate when he saw a plume of dust blowing out of a rock pile near the cliff—exactly what had happened in the dream every time it had come to him in the night.

[p. 177] “He reminds me [Jesse says] of the old story about the monk who joined a monastery but was allowed to only speak two words a year. The first year he said, ‘Bed’s hard.’ The second year he said, ‘Food’s cold,’ and the third year he said, ‘I quit!’ ‘I knew it,’ said one of the senior monks, ‘that guy’s been here three years now, and all he’s done is complain.’”

[pp. 178-181] Dave’s dad ignored Jesse as he took Dave off to the side and confided in him that as soon as he traded boats with them, he was leaving the islands for a while to help an ex-girlfriend, and that Dave should watch out for his mother, and look after *Dream*

Weaver and the *Flying Circus*, especially since it was now hurricane season.

A sudden sadness passed over Dave when he realized that his dad was saying good-bye

His Dad hugged him, told him that he loved him, and then turned and walked away. Oddly enough, Jesse's boom box was playing an Allman Brother's song:

And I don't own the clothes I wear
 And the road goes on forever
 And I've got one more silver dollar
 But I'm not gonna let them catch me, no
 Not gonna let them catch the Midnight Rider.

Dave struggled to hold back the tears, but Big Jesse barked, "Man up boy, we're looking for gold here, get in the game, let it go, we've got work to do. Your old man is a survivor, he's always been one, and he always will be until the end of time"

There was nothing else that Dave could do. As his dad's friend from Waynedale liked to say, "Most days you can say to yourself—that is, if you quit looking for little, unimportant things to complain about and get truthful with yourself—you can say, 'Today ain't my day to suffer.' And then you thank God for that. But sometimes you hit days where all you can do is start learning how to live life on life's terms."

[pp. 189-190] They succeeded in reaching the cabin before the first big drops hit, but as soon as they had carried Delaney inside, sheets of rain began pounding the roof of the stonewalled cabin. Jesse put on a fresh T-shirt from his backpack, and scrubbed up with soap and water before Delaney let out a scream and pushed.

Thankfully the baby's head came out first and Jesse supported it with his hands, but its neck was totally limp and it wasn't breathing. Minutes seemed like hours, as the baby just hung there, not breathing or moving. Jesse began to sweat profusely, and snapped at the monk, "Pray, you bastard, pray!"

The monk prayed in Latin while the other girls said prayers in Dutch, and Dave nervously paced back and forth on the far side of the room. The lights blinked and went off after one of the powerful wind gusts sent the line pole between them and the generator crashing to the ground.

Jesse barked, "get me some light over here!" and the girls scrambled around and passed around the monk's ceremonial candles and lit them one by one. The glowing candles illuminated their faces and Dave noticed that Jesse's lips were moving, even though no words could be heard—he realized that Jesse the religious skeptic was praying too. Nobody wanted to be the first to say this baby appeared to be stillborn, but they were all thinking it.

Finally Jesse yelled at Delaney, "Push, damn it all, push for all you're worth," and she gave another big push and the baby's chest at last slid from the birth canal, and the baby's first audible sound was a muffled cry as she took her first breath—she had simply not been able to breath until her chest had cleared the birth canal.

[pp. 191-192] The next day, when the sun came out again Dave and Jesse walked back up the path toward their excavation.

Dave said, "You told me that you didn't believe in God. You said God was a figment of weak people's minds, and that He was invented in the mind of man, not the other way around. But I saw you praying yesterday when you thought Delaney's baby was going to be stillborn."

“Well,” said Jesse, “I thought I should cover every base, just in case I was wrong.”

“It must have worked,” exclaimed Dave, “Because no sooner did you finish that prayer than that baby’s chest popped out of the womb and she started breathing.”

After thinking a while, Jesse said, “Maybe it was a coincidence, or maybe it was like the atheist who at the end of his life got caught reading a Bible. His friend asked, ‘What are you doing reading that Bible? You’re an atheist.’ And the atheist replied, ‘I’m looking for loop holes.’”

[p. 210] “He ought to man up,” snorted Jesse. “Around here we live by the three S’s: no sniffing, no snitching, and no sympathy parties.”

[p. 237] “One more thing, Pop: I remember Santana once saying, ‘When our heart stops beating, we all have the same amount of money!’”

“Yes indeed, son, I’ve never seen a Brinks armored bank truck in a funeral procession. And if there was the relatives would have it picked clean before it reached the cemetery.”

[pp. 263-264] “Pop,” Dave said to his father once they were relaxing, “I hear what you’ve been saying about the government, and all the lying, stealing, cheating, dishonesty, and unfairness that goes on. But even though you’ve never talked much about religion, I know that you do in fact have some sort of belief system about nature or spirituality. Occasionally I’ve heard you say, ‘God only

knows,’ and other times I’ve heard you say, ‘Mother Nature is everybody’s mother.’ The monk certainly has strong religious beliefs: he prays all of the time. Whenever I hear you say somebody is praying like sixty mothers, I suspect that you’re talking about people like him, because he prays in earnest all of the time. But he takes it seriously, and there are times when you seem to take it a little bit seriously too.”

“So my question is, what do you really think? Is there anything really out there outside our own imaginations? A God or a higher power of some sort? Is there anything out there that is holy and just, that is a concrete and necessary part of the framework and structure of the cosmos? Does whatever stands at the foundation of the universe give us any real standards of right and wrong, of good behavior and evil behavior? Or is this a universe without guilt or personal responsibility, where the only rule is to grab what we can, and do to others whatever our emotions prompt us to do? Are the emotions of rage, lust, envy, naked greed, ambition without conscience, sniveling self-pity, blind fear, uncontrollable anxiety attacks, and the constant desire to control everybody else around us, the only real motives of human behavior?”

One time I heard Indiana John, your friend from Waynedale, say that ‘If a cow painted a picture of God, it would have horns,’ and it made me stop and think. If there is a God, how can we figure out what this God is like in some way that is logical and rational and based on observable facts, instead of just looking in the mirror at idealized and phony pictures of ourselves?”

[Chapt. 25, pp. 265-270]

God, religion, and acting morally

Dave's father's response

Everybody should have their own concept of God, but I never subscribed to the idea that I needed a priest, rabbi, or swami acting as a spokesperson between me and the Almighty Creator of our universe. I believe that I have just as much of a hot line to God through my personal spirituality as the greatest religious leaders do, and that includes the Pope, but I'm careful not to force my ideas on you. You must decide about spirituality for yourself: what you believe or do not believe.

A South Bend teacher, Professor C., once spoke about the writings of the ancient Greek philosopher Xenophanes (c. 570-c. 475 B.C.) and recited to me some of that philosopher's words, which still remain deeply etched in my mind:

Humans suppose that gods have been born and wear clothes like theirs and have voice and body. But if horses or cows or lions had hands to draw with, their hands would produce works of art as men do. Horses would draw the figures of gods like horses and cows like cows, and would make their bodies just as the form which they each have themselves. Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black, and Thracians that theirs have blue eyes and red hair.

Xenophanes pointed out how often we try to describe things by either portraying them as looking a little bit like other things that are already around, or by contrasting or comparing them with other things that we already know. As he said back then, "if God had not made yellow honey, people would say that figs are the sweetest things on earth." But in fact you cannot talk about God by just talking about man in a loud voice.

So in different parts of the earth, and in different centuries, human beings have pictured the supreme God in all sorts of different kinds of ways. Xenophanes, for example, spoke of

One god, greatest among gods and men, not at all like mortals in body and mind. As a whole he sees, as a whole he thinks and as a whole he hears. And always he stays in the same place, not moving at all, nor is it fitting for him to travel different directions at different times. But with no effort at all he keeps everything moving by the thinking of his mind.

And Xenophanes (along with Pythagoras and Plato and a lot of the other ancient Greeks) seems to have believed in the transmigration of souls. In one story it is said that

He was passing by when a puppy was being beaten, and he took pity on it and cried out, "Stop! Don't hit it! For it is the soul of a friend of mine, which I recognized when I heard its voice."

I also remember Professor C. telling the story once about a famous ancient Hindu religious figure asking to be allowed to see God as he actually was. He was rewarded with a vision of something like a huge totem pole, rising from the earth and ascending into the heavens with different faces spiraled around it: the faces of all the gods and goddesses of India, such as the blue-faced god Krishna, Kali with her necklace of severed human heads, the elephant-headed god Ganesha, the monkey-headed god Hanuman, Shiva, Vishnu, Durga, Indra, Varuna, Rama, Lakshmi, Parvati, and so on, along with the faces of all the gods and goddesses of all the other nations of the world. In other words, one God with many faces.

Professor C. told me that the story of the thousand faces of God stretching upward in a giant column reaching up into heaven came from the great Hindu spiritual work called the Bhagavad Gita. An ancient Hindu prince named Arjuna is standing in his war chariot at the beginning of a bloody battle where he will have to fight and try to kill some of his own cousins. But it turns out that the man who he thinks is his charioteer, dutifully standing beside him and holding the horse's reins, is in fact the mighty god Krishna in disguise. Then the Lord Krishna suddenly reveals himself, and starts giving him serious religious instruction, about how he has no choice, he has to fight, and finally gives him this vision of God with an infinite number of faces. Each face truly represents God, but none of the faces tells us more than a tiny bit of what can be known about God.

So we cannot make rules where we tell other people how they have to look at God. We also cannot make rules where we tell countless people that they must all mechanically do the same thing, no matter what the situation is in which they find themselves. The Bible puts it this way in a famous passage, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what was planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather them together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

The universe around us is constantly changing, so something which is a good practice to follow at one point might become the worst possible thing to do at some other time or in some other situation. But at any given time and in any given situation, there will be good ways to act—for a guide we can look to see how the good people around us are behaving—and this will be the way that we too ought to act. It's not just subjective, because in some situations it will be the duty of every good man and good woman to fight. And likewise, in other situations good men and good women will have the sense to let the matter go and just move on.

And there is also the matter of preserving the right kind of balance in our lives. Professor C. used to talk about the ancient Greek philosopher Plato's tripartite division of the soul, which teaches us some valuable things about the proper role of anger and fighting, for example, which are not necessarily bad in and of themselves. The human soul, Plato said, was divided into three parts, like a war chariot which was guided by a wise charioteer and pulled by two winged horses:

The wise charioteer was the rational part of the soul, who always tried to think before he acted. He had to ask, "What will be the consequences of doing this?" But he also had to ask, "Even if doing this will be very painful, would the consequences of not doing it be even worse?"

One of the two horses was a fine thoroughbred race horse, who represented a part of the soul that (when out of control), erupted in uncontrollable rage and murderous temper tantrums, but that (when balanced properly) produced *courage*. That was where all real courage came from, from the proper channeling and focusing of our aggressive impulse. That was the only horse with the guts to keep at it, no matter how bad it got, and still win the race.

The other horse was a lazy old nag who refused to get upset about anything, and kept on telling the other horse, “calm down, don’t get in such a sweat!” The important things in life, he insisted, were food, drink, sex, sleep, physical comfort, and mindless entertainment. “Go bowling,” he would tell you, “eat a pizza, get a bag of popcorn or pretzels and a half gallon bottle of Pepsi-Cola, and watch a basketball game or a rerun of an old comedy on TV.”

All three were in fact equally important and equally necessary to the good life. But you got in big trouble in your life if you let any one of these three totally take control. This included the rational part, who could turn you into a futile, helpless nerd.

The good warrior, Plato taught, had to practice the virtue of “justice” (*dikaiosunê*, right thinking), which to him meant the proper *balance* between the three parts, neither too much nor too little.

Now the opposite of being balanced is being *unbalanced*, which even today in modern English is just another word that means *insane*. So when Plato said that the good life was the just life, in which I practiced *dikaiosunê* at all times, a very good translation of that Greek word would be *sanity*.

The way I live the good life—what has to be my principal goal at all times—is to stay sane. Let us imagine what it would be like if I got accidentally locked in an insane asylum, where everyone else there was hopelessly insane. My best hope of survival would *not* be to become as crazy as they were—to get even with them? to show them how tough I was? to let myself act as crazy as them because none of these crazy people cared how I acted, so it didn’t make any difference anyway?—no, my best hope of survival would be to stay as *sane* as I possibly could.

According to Plato, the four virtues of the good warrior were therefore:

Prudence: planning ahead, thinking about the consequences before I acted.

Courage, where I could fail in either of two directions: I would destroy myself if I let myself become so paralyzed with fear that I was unable to act even to save myself. But I would also destroy myself if I started acting out of blind rage and out-of-control temper tantrums, or letting my actions be guided by obsessive resentments instead of thoughtful purpose.

Self-control: using my will to bring myself back in line whenever I became tempted to turn the guidance of the chariot completely over to the lazy old nag, who would soon have me slacking off and loafing too much. Using my will to keep going when I had to, in spite of heat or cold, physical pain or tired muscles or lack of sleep.

And justice of course: “right thinking” in the sense of preserving my mental *balance* at all times, and *staying sane*.

[pp. 299-300] “Gee Pop, will we ever see Carmen and her mother again?” asked Dave.

“Not if I can help it,” said the captain. “Remember the old Paul Simon song ‘there must be fifty ways to leave your lover.’ Simplest is best: ‘just slip out the back Jack, make a new plan Stan ... hop on the bus Gus ... and set yourself free.’ And don’t worry about Carmen and her mother.”

“Professor C. told me the story once of the beautiful young women called the Sirens, back in ancient Greek times, who sat on rocky coasts and sang a song so sweet that Greek sailors would

steer their vessels straight onto the rocks and drown as the waves pounded their boats apart. He claimed that he met one of the Sirens once, who was retired by that point, and living in a little apartment in Chicago. He asked the old woman what the song was that she and the others used to sing back when they were young, that would blind men's eyes and draw them inescapably to their doom. And Professor C. says she laughed and told him, 'it was a simple little ditty really—*only you can save me*—but it worked every time!'"

"So remember, Carmen and her mother were doing just fine before we showed up in Key West, and they'll do just fine without us. And they will never forget us because we are the ones who got away! Our clothes and the rest of this month's rent are a small price to pay for freedom."

[Chapt. 30, pp. 315-321]

Dave's phone rang: it was his dad calling from Key West, although he could barely hear him because of the wind noise. Even though Key West was getting its aft kicked by the weather, his father was anxious to re-launch the *Flying Circus* as soon as the storm passed. He was not able to find any crew there in the keys who were willing to make the trip back to St John during hurricane season, so he told Dave that he had decided to call on his long time sailing buddy from Waynedale, Indiana. His old partner agreed that no sane person would attempt such a trip during hurricane season, and then asked, "When are we leaving?"

The two old friends from Waynedale met at the Key West Marina, where the captain was chomping at the bit to get underway. No mention was made of hurricane season because the chop, big waves, and storm clouds said it all. In the years these two

friends had sailed together the captain set sail when he decided to go, regardless of threatening conditions, and this time was not to be an exception. Once underway no words or instructions were needed, and whoever was closest to the task that needed to be done, did it.

The first five days proved uneventful but then, as the seas began to build, it was obvious that they were going to get hard hit. There comes a time at sea when the waves grow so tall that if the helmsman doesn't have sufficient momentum to carry the vessel over the top of the next wave, he or she will lose steerage and broach, which is like rolling your house sideways.

When the helmsman has sufficient momentum to make it over the wave, then a new set of problems occur. Chain must be played out off the stern to slow the boat and prevent it from gaining too much forward speed and burying itself in the trough of the next wave. If the boat gets caught in the curl at the top of the wave it can cause a pitch-pole and roll the vessel end over end. But if everything goes well, the chain immediately has to be hurriedly hauled back in, so the helmsman can start gathering speed to make it up the next wave.

All of this business with the sea anchor causes extreme fatigue and no crew can keep it up for very long. And although the captain was known to be in possession of superhuman strength during his younger years, he and his Waynedale friend were now well past 65 years of age, and physical limitations were taking their toll. At last they decided their best hope for survival would be heaving to. By setting two small sails in opposite directions they could attempt to remain in one spot. After the sails were re-set, the captain went below and no sooner did he sit down than he fell asleep.

His friend stood the watch and wondered if they were going to be able to survive the oncoming storm. As he often did, the friend

began to shout at the storm about the size of his God. “My God is bigger than you, you’re nothing but air, and my God will soon make a breeze out of you.” This of course was not the first time he had done this. He had been doing it for a long time, and miraculously it seemed that whenever he did it the storm began to lessen.

After about three hours of just sitting in the water and making no progress at all, the friend from Waynedale hauled everything in and started the diesel engine. In spite of the storm, it was a magic moment at sea. Schools of sharks probed the flotsam looking for something to eat and dolphins played in their wakes, and when the clouds finally broke the sky suddenly filled with stars.

The captain awoke and didn’t know how long he had slept because his watch had stopped. But when he heard the engine running, he imagined that his friend was standing at the helm, and still half asleep, he ate something before he made his way up the ladder to the cockpit. Once topside, he realized that his friend was not at the helm or anywhere else on board—he had simply gone missing. His life jacket and safety harness were lying on the cockpit sole, but he was gone.

The captain’s mind went into shock as he watched the unattended helm, and saw that the boat was mysteriously steering itself. He had no idea at all about how long his friend had been missing, and could not find a single clue. With the size of the seas, finding him would be impossible, especially without a life jacket. The captain sat in disbelief as he watched the helm steer itself. The autopilot was turned off and even if it was on, it wouldn’t have been able to keep up with the wild gyrations caused by the storm.

He seemed to be trapped in a frightening dream and then, when he looked off into his distant wake, he saw a blue orb raise out of the sea and move towards the boat. It hung in mid-air over the mast

and then traveled down the spreaders and eventually hovered over the helm. What could it be, and what did this mean? When the blue orb finally vanished, the helm began to drift off course like it normally did when it was unattended, until at last he grabbed it and re-gained his course.

According to his earlier calculations, he wasn't supposed to get into St. John harbor until late tomorrow or early the next day, but to his amazement he saw the unmistakable landmarks of his home port already approaching. How could this be? Did he go through a time warp, or was he transported through space and time by the blue orb? The boat suddenly began to surge ahead, lifting the stern and threatening to turn him crosswise, but he had just enough rudder control to maintain steerage. The storm surge was taking him home at a hull speed unknown to any Columbia Fifty.

Meanwhile in Cruz Bay, Enzo had just woken up and was going topside on the *Dream Weaver* when he saw a lone sailboat off to the east. Could it really be his dad, and how could he be so far ahead of schedule? There must be a mistake, and it was most probably another sailboat, but it certainly looked like the *Flying Circus*. He called his dad's cell phone but there was no answer. Enzo waited a bit before he woke his mother because he didn't want to raise any false hope in her, but the longer he watched that sailboat the more convinced he became that it was indeed his father's boat. So why wouldn't his dad answer his cell phone?

Finally Enzo got his binoculars and confirmed that, yes, it was definitely the *Flying Circus*. Tears of joy filled his eyes before he began to wonder why only one hand was visible on board when there should be two. His joy turned to panic at the thought of having lost his dad, but then he realized his dad was the lone hand that he was looking at. So why wouldn't he answer his phone?

Enzo waited for what seemed an eternity before the *Flying Circus* was close enough to see his dad with his naked eyes. But what had happened to his friend from Waynedale? At last the captain was close enough to enter the harbor and although Enzo was there in the dinghy to welcome him home, his Dad said not a word.

Enzo scrambled aboard the *Circus* and secured the dinghy to an aft cleat and asked his dad what was wrong.

“Gee whiz Pop,” he cried out, “you look like you’ve seen a ghost,” but his dad said not a word.

The captain sailed directly to his mooring ball and tied up. Enzo suspected he wasn’t talking in part because he was so very tired—he looked very drained and totally tired out. Later Jini came aboard the *Circus* but still no words were spoken and the captain remained silent.

There exists a time limit for the amount of time a captain can wait before a man overboard report is filled out, but Dave’s dad gave no indication that he would comply. Jini eventually went directly to the U.S. Coast Guard and obtained the forms that were needed, but she couldn’t fill them out because she did not know the circumstances under which their friend from Waynedale had disappeared, and evidently the captain didn’t know either.

Neither Jini nor Enzo had ever seen the captain in such a deep state of shock and trauma, but they would have to deal with it or he would lose his captain’s license. After the captain had slept he put his rocking chair on the deck and began to rock. Several close friends attempted to talk to him and learn what had happened, but the captain still said not a word. Those who know the captain sensed that his silence might suddenly explode into a rage so everybody who approached him did so with extreme caution.

Big Jesse called Enzo and when he learned some of the particulars, he said it was obviously a serious case of survivor's guilt, and he asked his pilot to get the plane ready for a trip to St. John. He said he would bring a specialist with him who was trained at treating deep trauma, because if it is left untreated it might turn into a permanent affliction.

Enzo carefully reminded his dad of something their Waynedale friend often said: "When you're wrong admit it and go on, and when you're right simply go on, but either way, we must go on."

Although the captain still never said a word, a tear formed in his eye at that point. After a bit he asked Enzo to fill out the man overboard report and he would sign it. Those were the first words he had spoken in several days.

What happened to their friend? All that the captain knew, he said, was that they had set up the *Circus* to heave to when his friend went topside and started shouting at the storm about the size of his God. This was normal for him and so the captain thought nothing about it. When he woke up the engine was running, and they were on course, but there must've been a ghost steering the course because his friend was gone. He talked about the blue orb that ascended from his stern wake and then came down on the boat, about going through a time warp—which was why he was so far ahead of schedule—and how after the orb left, the helm drifted like normal once again until he grabbed it. Other than these things, he didn't know when or how the accident had happened, or what had actually happened to his friend from Waynedale—it was still completely confusing to him.

Enzo decided not to write any of that down, because he feared such a story would cast doubt on his dad's sanity. So he pulled out the accident form and just wrote down a couple of sentences: a massive wave had washed a man overboard, and the man's body

had disappeared into the depths without a trace. He left out the parts about the ghostly steersman and all of that, and his dad signed it.

The story of a man lost at sea in a storm in the Caribbean was, by itself, simply an age-old tale, and no one at Coast Guard headquarters would think anything odd about it.

But the true story was a very odd one indeed, involving an encounter with the uncanny mystery of the Beyond. The friend from Waynedale had often asked people to believe in a strange, numinous God whose power and might surpassed anything the human mind could understand or comprehend. And he had shouted out to the storm to beware the power of this God.

What had happened then? Had the normal fabric of space and time been twisted and stretched to alter the paths of life and death? Who or what was steering the boat at the end? Had a good spirit from the dead come back to intervene and rescue the living? Had there been shining angelic or spiritual or ghostly forces covering and shielding Dave's dad in their blessed light, and then bringing their friend from Waynedale to the end of his now weary and painful journey across this earth? For he had led a rugged and adventurous life, and his body was now worn out. Had the good spirits gathered him in their loving and comforting arms, and led his spirit up the shining path to the Land of Eternal Light?

Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

It is not necessary to be able to explain things in order to feel grateful for them. And Dave was as grateful as any young man could possibly be. He and the others would miss their good friend from Waynedale enormously, but they were also filled with joy and gratitude for having known him. Dave's father had survived

the storm, and the blue waters of the Caribbean once more sparkled peacefully under the tropical sun. It was a time to say thank you, and then wait for the next story to begin unfolding.



John Stark finished this last chapter on September 21, 2012 and died on November 10 at the age of 67. I will miss him sorely.