

IN THE CENTER OF THE FIRE

A Memoir of the Occult

1966–1989

James Wasserman

*I must Create a System
or be enslav'd by another Mans
I will not Reason & Compare:
my business is to Create*

—William Blake
Jerusalem



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This book is dedicated to

RICHARD GERNON

ANGUS MACLISE

GRADY MCMURTRY

HARRY SMITH

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Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

I THANK JAMES STRAIN AND CASSIE TSIRIS (Past Master and current Lodgemaster, respectively of TAHUTI Lodge) for inspiring me to finally tackle this book. I had tried for decades to make a record of my experiences with Marcelo Motta, Grady McMurtry, and the O.T.O. copyright battle of 1976 through 1985, but had succeeded in writing just two lonely pages. Cassie and James made clear that this history was my obligation.

The support that Donald and Yvonne Weiser of Ibis Press have demonstrated for this project has been especially humbling. I was twenty years old when I first met Donald. Little did we realize a lifetime friendship lay before us.

American philosopher Jeff Cooper wrote that, if one does not write something down, it never happened. Well, it happened. And here is the record.

I include the period beginning when I left home for college at age eighteen in 1966 to the death of Richard Gernon (Gurney) in 1989. I would have ended it at Grady McMurtry's death in 1985 for personal reasons that will become more obvious as this narrative proceeds. However, James and Cassie asked for more information about the early days of TAHUTI Lodge, especially Gurney's tenure as Lodgemaster and E.G.C. Bishop of New York City.

I pay my respects to Aleister Crowley. I don't think I've ever appreciated his Magical Diary practice more than when I had reached some 35,000 words of this manuscript from memory and realized I was helpless without the diary to identify proper sequencing. I had begun the diary practice in earnest in 1970 at Crowley's direction. This book would not have been possible without it.

Bill Heidrick compiled an extensive record of the documentation and evidence of Order history that was submitted to the

courts. His efforts to assemble and preserve this history not only helped us win the crucial 1985 copyright court battle in California, but helped me to make this book more accurate. He also generously provided additional materials and reviewed, supplemented, and corrected my text.

Tony Iannotti did me the favor of accepting the box of my letters with Motta around 1990. It had sat with me for some fifteen years until I couldn't take it anymore and gave it to him for safekeeping. He graciously returned the letters at my request ten years later. They remained in the sealed box in which he gave them to me for another ten years before I finally opened them in July 2011. Tony returned more than I had given him, including depositions of mine, Motta, Grady, and Donald Weiser, along with additional material that Heidrick had assembled, including early letters between Karl Germer, Grady, Crowley, and others.

Dan Gunther has been invaluable in reviewing the Motta-period history. Dan and Gurney rushed out to California in 1976 in answer to my call for help after Grady and I had secured the Germer Library. We three took our Minerval initiation into O.T.O. together. Dan and I are the only two left from that beautiful evening. Both of us lived through much confusion and I so appreciate the ability to be able to discuss it with him.

I thank Bill Breeze for his decades of friendship and for helping me clarify a number of memories from our shared past, as well as the intricacies of our legal efforts. I remain an unashamed partisan in support of his leadership of O.T.O. this past quarter century. I don't think he's ever been unaware of either my disagreements or grouching about, but I think the length of both our friendship and my membership speaks volumes about my baseline opinion of him.

This is as thorough and honest a record of what happened as I can make it. There are obviously many personal experiences and individual practices not recorded in this book. I worked on building a regular set of spiritual exercises for decades. While I more often than not fell short of my goals, I kept at it. In Brazil in 1976, somewhat disillusioned by what I read in the diaries and correspondence of those who went before me, I wrote: "The secret must be in continuously increasing the Will to overcome the inertia of

the flesh again & again & again & more.” That was an accurate assessment.

I have never publicly spoken of these events before and have watched for years as lies, slanders, and inaccuracies were piled on top of each other by people who did not know what they were talking about, and whose hostility toward O.T.O. is palpable. I do not expect my detractors to believe everything written here. But I am the only living person who was there during the critical moment in July 1976 between Motta, Grady, and the Germer Library. I hope this record will be of assistance to future historians. I do not pretend to understand why I was chosen to play such a seminal role in the development of the modern Thelemic movement. But I was. The title of this book is neither an accident nor an afterthought. You may accept or reject this record as you will. It is the truth insofar as I am able to understand and express it.

This is also the story of the birth and early years of TAHUTI Lodge. TAHUTI is the second oldest O.T.O. lodge in the world, and the oldest to have experienced successful transitions of leadership and remain flourishing and functioning as a full-fledged operation. As the New York City lodge, we are at the crossroads of the civilized world. I look back at some of the overall New York occult scene during the 1970s, the New York O.T.O. prior to the founding of TAHUTI, my six years as TAHUTI Lodgemaster, and Gurney’s leadership after me. Kent Finne picked up the mantle from Gurney at a crucial moment in the history of the lodge and that is discussed here as well.

Finally, I was a participant in the occult publishing renaissance of the 1970s—for which we have to thank Donald Weiser, Carl Weschke, Herman Slater, and their students and successors Ehud Sperling and David Young. These were the heady days when Crowley’s books came flying off printing presses in the U.S. and U.K., along with the writings of Israel Regardie, Dion Fortune, Frater Achad, Kenneth Grant, Francis King, Stephen Skinner, and so many others.

The past is indeed another country. In order to get myself into the rhythm of recall and give the reader a sense of the times and who I was when these events transpired, I begin with some stories

of my late adolescence and early twenties in Part One. Here is a tiny glance, through a series of vignettes, into a period in modern American history that seems long gone. I was part of a generation that lived with the ideals we learned from Jack Kerouac and his circle of friends and fellow writers. I read *On the Road* at thirteen and it was a major influence in my life thereafter.

A rapidly shifting intermixture of sacred and profane runs throughout these pages. Without the flow of the personal mixed with the spiritual and the historical, it would be an artificial creation. If one moment finds me poised on the edge of the empyrean and the next in a pratfall of comedic error, that's the way it happened. (I've often said, "I don't make the rules, I just work here.") To paraphrase Crowley's *Liber Aleph*, the paper on which this book is written is my skin and the ink my blood. There is a degree of self-exposure here that is way out of my comfort zone. However, I determined that, unless I was willing to share my life as my memory and diary reveal it, I would leave the reader no basis for the conclusions and criticisms I draw regarding Marcelo Motta and others. Similarly, in writing about TAHUTI Lodge history, my business efforts are often discussed. As a book designer and devotee of the Lord of the Word, it somehow fits.

Drugs and alcohol figure large in my story. They were long a part of my life that I have since moved beyond. Would that that had occurred earlier. My mind was opened by drugs. I turned on, tuned in, dropped out, and nearly killed myself in the process. I hope the opening of the psychic barriers of the post-WWII materialism of the 1950s culture that my generation helped advance—continuing the work of our beatnik progenitors in lightening the girders of the soul—has freed modern spiritual seekers from the need to damage their health and sanity as much as we did. If I have spent too much time detailing the last year of my drug use, I apologize in advance. Since it resulted in Gurney's death, it is important. I know it is ridiculous to hope that our story may serve as a warning to others—nonetheless I hope it does.

I have tried to respect the privacy of living friends who are not in the public eye or widely known as members of O.T.O. by using

first names only. This is especially true of women friends and members of the Order. Throughout the text, I follow the convention of beginning each season at either the Equinox or the Solstice in my subheads; thus “Winter” includes both the Solstice and the New Year through the Spring Equinox. I have included a short glossary to clarify some terms in the text that will undoubtedly be unfamiliar to the general reader.

It is impossible to share the extent of the love and gratitude I feel for the many people and life experiences recorded here. I know there is also much negativity in the pages to follow. I only hope, on balance, that the reader will experience a stronger sense of optimism and inspiration—as I do.

Love is the law, love under will.

PART ONE

1966 TO 1973



* * *

CHAPTER I

ANTIOCH COLLEGE AND THE WORLD OF THE SPIRIT

SUMMER 1966

WHEN I WAS A BOY OF EIGHT OR TEN, my parents took me to the Cafe Figaro at the corner of Macdougall and Bleecker Streets in Greenwich Village. I proclaimed that I wanted to be a beatnik, one childhood ambition I seem to have realized. When I visited Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio during my high school college-search period, I was sold. Long hair and beards on the boys and the coolest looking girls I'd seen since Greenwich Village.

I met my cousin Paul during that visit. We had not known each other previously because of my parents' discomfort with his parents' overt Communist affiliation. While my parents had been Depression-era socialists, and later committed Roosevelt/Steven-son Democrats, they were not Communists. Paul's parents appar-ently were and my red-diaper baby cousin was a committed radical activist and SDS campus leader. Students for a Democratic Society, founded in 1960, was the most successful of the New Left groups of the decade. Its socialist ideology spread like wildfire on college campuses, fueled in large part by the unpopular war in Vietnam and the mandatory military draft. Carl Oglesby, to be mentioned later, served as president from 1965 to 1966.

Paul had trampled a flag, perhaps accidentally, in a demonstra-tion and gotten himself in some trouble at school. But I liked him.

He was bright and had a sense of humor. He introduced me to his friend Jeff Jones, a year younger than Paul and a year older than I. Jeff was another charismatic student who later became a fugitive in the violent Weather Underground. He would emerge decades later as an environmental activist and consultant to the New York State governor's office. Go figure.

I entered Antioch just after my high school graduation and eighteenth birthday in June 1966, chomping at the bit to get on with my life. I took a class from famed civil rights activist Larry Rubin. I liked him. Soft-spoken and humble, he carried the scars of the beatings he had received from Southern sheriffs. He opened up racial consciousness to white, middle-class kids who knew few blacks, and to black kids who knew few whites. I think we all learned a lot from him.

Antioch was set up on the quarter system as a five-year work/study program. Since I had entered in the summer quarter, I would go off to my first co-op job in the fall. A civil rights attorney named Bill Higgs came to campus to recruit. He was the last white lawyer working for SNCC, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. (Stokely Carmichael had proclaimed Black Power that spring.) Higgs had been a courageous civil rights activist and suffered greatly before leaving Mississippi, ca. 1963, to continue his work in Washington, D.C. During his inspiring talk, he asked for volunteers, promising room and board and \$15 a week or something like that, and I leapt at the opportunity along with three or four other students.

That summer, I also smoked pot for the first time. Like many of the ideas and experiences of that period, pot was wrapped in a messianic mystique. It seemed a real path to Higher Consciousness. For me, it required several sessions to begin to get the more in-depth effect of the drug.

Jesse Colin Young and the Youngbloods came to campus for a concert that summer. It's difficult not to smile when considering the lyrics of their most popular song, which expressed the idealism and innocence of my generation to perfection: "Come on people, smile on your brother, everybody get together, try to love one another

right now.” A few short years after these touching sentiments were embraced and hymned by many thousands of flower-power advocates, a bomb-making factory located in a Greenwich Village townhouse exploded. Three Weathermen (named after Bob Dylan lyrics, “you don’t need a weatherman to tell which way the wind blows”) were killed, while several others—including Jeff Jones—fled into hiding for over a decade.

FALL 1966

I went to work for Bill Higgs in Washington, D.C. doing legal research at the Library of Congress. I met some of the real luminaries of the contemporary civil rights movement—including William Kunstler, whom I despised, and Fannie Lou Hamer, for whom I had a great deal of respect. Some of the people who walked through that door should have been in a zoo. I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable, realizing that I was essentially working to substitute one group of power-mad sociopaths for another. Things were going from bad to worse with Higgs. He was a depressive and totally disorganized in the food and money department. I started selling hot dogs and beer at the local football stadium to earn money to eat. One day, I had a rare conversation with him while we stopped in a park and sat on a bench together. I asked him if he was concerned that our efforts against the Vietnam War might really be helping the Communists as many people were saying. He told me that he didn’t care and that he did not automatically reject Communism. I did.

During the summer of 1966, I had written a statement to my parents about my acceptance of socialism as a means of achieving social justice. I wrote them again to say that I now rejected politics as the way to improve the human condition. Instead, I believed the only true means of redeeming humanity and ending suffering was through individual spiritual development with meditation and inner-directed awareness. I left Higgs under less than ideal circumstances and went to visit friends at nearby St. John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland—a small school devoted to a true classical

education. At the time, it was inhabited by a lot of very brilliant potheads, many of whom would be expelled as the college sought to hold back the cultural tide of the Sixties.

WINTER 1966-1967

I returned to Antioch after the Christmas break and took one of the most important intellectual and philosophical excursions of my life with visiting professor Carl Oglesby. A past president of SDS, Oglesby was teaching a class on Existentialism called Absurdist Morality. We read Camus, Sartre, Borges, and De Sade. Oglesby was brilliant, if troubled. He described himself as a Marxist.

Oglesby posed a question for the class: Imagine we are given a personal audience with U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who tells us America is in Vietnam because of the resources it holds. Forget about stopping the spread of Communism or helping the people. It is simply about greed and power. We are there because we *can* be. The class assignment was to give Rusk one absolute moral principle to convince him we should withdraw. Well, I tried amphetamine that night for the first time, drinking it mixed in a glass of water. I stayed up all night pondering the assignment. I realized that, even though I knew what the “right” thing to do was, there was no absolute principle I could quote to Rusk that everyone agreed upon—one that could make an evil or cynical person do the right thing. It was that simple. Oglesby then took us to the next level by explaining that the Existentialist accepts this position of absurdity as a given, then decides on a moral principle for himself and lives his life passionately *as if* it were true. This has been my position ever since.

Later in that quarter, I took LSD for the first time with my good friend Brian Crawford. We read *The Joyous Cosmology* by Alan Watts at the more experienced Brian’s suggestion. Brian was the quintessential long-haired hippie and something of an acid evangelist. I had some difficulty with the trip. Acid was a mixed blessing for me. While I took it several hundred times, I was never particularly comfortable. I did make continuous progress in self-

awareness with the drug, but often at the cost of considerable personal agony. When I was offered STP by someone years later—smiling and telling me it was like a three-day acid trip—I shuddered and politely declined.

That winter, I met Dennis Deem, another significant character in this story who long remained a friend. (He died during the writing of this book.) Dennis was visiting from California and had some very pure acid. He dressed in a corduroy sport jacket with leather-patched elbows, carried a carved walking stick, and sported a beret atop a shaved head. I was intrigued. I left campus soon after for my co-op job in New York.

SPRING/SUMMER 1967

The next period at Antioch was made up of six-month stints, either at work or school, alternating each year. As I had entered in the summer quarter, my first double-quarter rotation was a work session. I was majoring in psychology and began working at Wiltwyck School for Boys, a residential treatment center for disturbed eight-to-fourteen-year-olds sent there by the courts. The boys could not be either homicidal or suicidal, but were otherwise a severely disturbed bunch. Their personal stories of abuse were absolutely heartbreaking. The book *Manchild in the Promised Land* by Claude Brown describes the school. I was assigned to work with the chief psychiatrist, Dr. Mishikian, to write a paper on psychological defense mechanisms in order to help the counselors better understand the boys' often erratic behavior. I was also to pay particular attention to one extremely disturbed boy named Julian, who had been institutionalized since the age of five.

Julian was a brilliant youngster who had just turned fourteen. The staff was concerned because he was becoming too old for the program. Julian and I did become friends quickly and talked about many things. Among these were his psychic powers. He had been at a dance, met a girl, and felt that they could communicate at a distance. I was a firm believer in such matters, with some little amount of experience at this time. The problem was that Julian

was also deeply schizophrenic and prone to hallucinations. It was a fine line, but I was honest with him. I unfortunately lost touch with him after I left Wiltwyck.

I was living in an apartment on Jones Street and West 4th in Greenwich Village with three fellow Antioch student roommates. One worked at *Newsweek*, another at *Time*, and the third at Wiltwyck with me.

I saw the Fugs, one of the all-time great bands, at the Players Theater on Macdougall Street. They represented a transition between the beat and hippie phenomena. Ed Sanders and Tuli Kupferberg ran the Peace Eye Bookstore on the Lower East Side and were involved in *The East Village Other* underground newspaper. Many years later, I found myself riding in the same subway car as Tuli and reflected on just how much I loved living in New York. (Many years after that, in 1992, Ed Sanders and Tuli Kupferberg, along with Allen Ginsberg, Peter Orlovsky, and other bohemian luminaries, would attend the Gnostic Mass we performed to honor Harry Smith at Saint Mark's Church.) During that long-ago summer, I sat no more than fifteen feet from the stage when Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead played at the small and intimate club, The Bitter End on Bleecker Street.

On my nineteenth birthday, I took a very strong acid trip. I was accompanied by my friend Charlie, who was deeply involved in psychology. Charlie was a brilliant but extremely neurotic person with many deep-seated conflicts. He was my "guide" for the trip, but was really more like a babysitter protecting me from the urban environment of New York City than a Leary-like leader through the byways of LSD. There was an underlying tension between us concerning his girlfriend, Jean. She and I had met at school the previous summer and there was a mutual attraction. But we had each gone off to our co-op jobs and she had hooked up with Charlie.

Charlie and I wandered around the Village—me in a rather ecstatic positive state, possibly wearing on his nerves as I proclaimed my newfound birthday unity with the cosmos. We entered a tourist head shop and I saw a distorted glass novelty Coca-Cola bottle. It set off a paranoid reaction because it mimicked reality in an unnerving way. My state of joy darkened. We left the store and

began walking down the street. Things grew worse. Every aspect of the street began to repeat itself in my perception. I began to feel as if I were in an endless loop and would never get off that street—with the same people forever passing me in both directions.

We returned to my apartment. Everyone was gone. Charlie and I walked into the kitchen. My fear was growing out of all proportion. He tried to help me analyze it. That only seemed to deepen it. We discussed it as fear itself, rather than as fear “of.” At one point, I was leaning against the stove, with my back pressed to it and hands placed behind me gripping the edge. I fell. The logical explanation is that I slipped, but I am not sure that is what happened. I believe I was in so much terror that I ceased to believe in the solidity of matter. If that is true, it would not be technically inaccurate. Matter is made up of atoms and molecules separated by relatively enormous distances. Reality is a common agreement between each of us and three-dimensionality. I believe I may have entered a state of cellular consciousness in which my agreement with reality was momentarily superseded by my fear. The many stories in mystic literature of people who walk through walls is exactly what I think happened to me—the drug and the fear substituting for the firmly disciplined, calm concentration necessary to achieve that state on purpose.

After that trip, I moved out of the communal apartment and took a place by myself on 7th Street between Avenues C and D, a sixth-floor walk-up. The Lower East Side was a part of town that was definitely not the gentrified neighborhood it is today. My rent was \$46.75 a month—bathtub in the kitchen with a living room and bedroom. As I was lugging my cartons of books up the stairs, a neighbor named Junky George asked why I kept books I had already read. How often I’ve reflected on that question! He was part of a scene that turned the disappearing remnants of the middle-class kid from New Jersey on his ear. I remember George standing in front of a mirror picking at his face with a Bowie knife when his jacket parted to reveal a revolver tucked in his waistband.

My new neighbors included Leo, a long-haired Puerto Rican, living with Janie, a leather-jacketed, hard-edged woman with an infectious laugh that melted her roughness. And I won’t forget

Rita, who used to be Ronnie, walking into Leo's apartment one day and offering anyone a case of the clap with which she had just been diagnosed. Adam, an efficient dealer and student from the University of Colorado in Boulder, was another member of the scene whom I would meet again in Boulder. He seemed to hover above the turbulence that engulfed his many customers.

It was an amphetamine universe with opiates liberally thrown in the mix. One day, I was in Leo's apartment and he was in a fury trying to find a vein to inject himself. The scene was so appalling and incoherent that I can only defer to the memory of anyone who has ever witnessed anything like it. It is virtually impossible to describe the chaos. In any case, Leo's ordeal went on for over an hour. Finally, he achieved his goal. An older black junky named Brother John stood near him with a calm look on his face and a melodious richness in his voice. He gave an approving nod, and intoned: "Drive on in, Brother, drive on in."

I was terrified of needles in that spider-to-fly modality. I arranged to get the materials together to inject myself for the first time, having carefully observed the technique. I did it alone in the kitchen at the Jones Street apartment. The horror reversed into obsession.

One night, when I was tripping alone in my apartment, I heard a sound at the door. I opened it to see the diminutive but beautiful Barbara, wearing a black-and-white dress with a huge black hat on her head. She told me she was just passing by (on the sixth floor!). I invited her in and we spoke for hours. The acid angel left, but I felt much affection for her. She was intimately entwined with the Andy Warhol crowd at the Factory on St. Mark's Place. I learned that she had been a student at Antioch. She was deeply involved with amphetamines. I developed a very protective sense toward her. I invited her to return to Antioch with me as my work/study period was nearing its close, but she did not come.

FALL 1967

This was an especially pivotal period. I was assigned to a very small college dorm off campus in Marshall Hall, a student residence more

like a private house. Brian and I were roommates. This quarter was particularly laced with drugs, women, and spiritual seeking. School was simply off the radar. Brian and I were good friends and equally committed to the psychedelic lifestyle. We were very different philosophically, in that he was and is a committed atheist, and we aired our differences constantly (we still do although less frequently).

This was long before the scourge of AIDS brought an end to the free and open sexual experimentation of that long-ago era. The conjoining of sexuality and psychedelics opened the early stages of what I would later begin to understand as sexual magick. The expansion of consciousness beyond the boundaries of the ego was the first key.

An unusual group of students and non-students came together, all of us committed to spiritual seeking, drugs—particularly amphetamines and LSD—and what we perceived as the personal messages in Bob Dylan's newly released album *John Wesley Harding*. The critical messenger was a traveler named Jesse. He looked so much like Dylan that I introduced him as such to several people on campus who believed it. He was a heavy amphetamine user and the first vegetarian I'd ever met. I became a vegetarian through his influence and have remained so.

Jesse had a pure energy that surrounded him with a mysterious aura, an inner kindness, and sincerity. I have no diaries from this early period so it is hard to be more specific, but he had an aerial quality about him—thin, otherworldly, as if not fully present in three dimensions, wise beyond his years. There was also some delusion, as I remember him describing the band Pearls Before Swine as a cryptic musical group led by an old speed freak who anonymously dropped off their first album at a record company. I learned instead, decades later, that the leader was a young guy who ultimately became a lawyer.

Jesse also had an ego. We went shopping for boots in New York City once and I learned that he was very particular about his image. Yet he is the first person in my life I can clearly identify as my spiritual teacher. Jesse manifested the dying god archetype. Dylan's lines, "And picking up Angel who just arrived here from

the Coast/Who looked so fine at first but left looking just like a ghost,” describe him perfectly. I never even learned his last name and wonder how long he lived after he left Yellow Springs.

Susan was an important elder within our group. She was a full-blown psychic who had had a terrible accident as a child and been blinded for a time. The experience opened her inner vision. She was the most developed medium I have known. Dennis was the Magus, deeply involved with Aleister Crowley and obsessed with Yoga and Qabalah. He taught me mechanical drawing or drafting, which we would do for hours at a time while on methedrine. The drugs were so pure it was ridiculous.

Claire was sixteen. She had run away from home (although her parents lived in town) and was living with Dennis. While she was painfully shy, an occasional disarming smile would escape her disquiet. She has since grown into a woman of great character, courage, and resilience, and is one of the most important people in my life. Her brother, Louis, was a master guitarist. He once confided that he used self-hypnosis to learn to play along with Jimi Hendrix albums. He is the best guitarist I have known.

I don't believe I had ever heard of Crowley before meeting Dennis in February 1967. The only Crowley book that was even reasonably available back then was the Castle edition of *Magick in Theory and Practice*. Everything else had yet to be reprinted or was limited to the rare-book market and/or specialty occult bookstores like Samuel Weiser's in New York City. The foundation for the Crowley resurgence was being laid, however, as Jerry Kay of Xeno Publications put out an edition of *The Book of the Law* in 1967 and the Beatles included Crowley's photo on the cover of their *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. The Crowley floodgates really began to open in 1969, when John Symonds and Kenneth Grant released their edition of *The Confessions* and it was reviewed in *The New York Times Book Review*. In that same year, Weiser's published Crowley's bestselling study of the Tarot, *The Book of Thoth*, which was the precursor for a slew of additional reprints released in 1970 and subsequently.

I read Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* around this period and learned about the Bodhisattva Vow. In essence, one swears to reject

the fruits of one's own spiritual labor—personal liberation or Nirvana—until every blade of grass is prepared to achieve Enlightenment as well. I was determined to take it properly.

Another obsession that later bore fruit was my desire to become a Roman Catholic priest. Now this was really weird, because, first, I was Jewish—a faith with no recent tradition of either priests or communion—and, second, I was and am so far from believing in Christ and Catholicism it is a joke. I couldn't understand the apparently absurd desire, however, nor could I rid myself of it. A dozen years later, I became a priest of the Gnostic Catholic Church (E.G.C.), with which I have been passionately involved ever since.

I was exposed to A. E. Waite's book, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* at this time.

I went on a New York City drug-buying run from Yellow Springs during that fall quarter. I had told some lunatic—I don't remember how I met him—that I could help him score through Leo and Janie. During the drive, I learned that he had brought a gun with him. I was terribly disturbed, but there was nothing I could do. Fortunately, it all worked out peaceably. While waiting for the deal to be set up, I ran into Barbara. I again suggested that she come live with me and said I would try to help her clean up. (I'm sure there is a note of irony here, but I was dead serious about rescuing her.) She said she might stop by Leo and Janie's later. I did some heroin while waiting for the deal to conclude. Janie told me afterward that Barbara did come by to speak with me, but I was passed out from junk. This plagued me for years; it still does. I finally saw her on the street nearly a decade later. We spoke for a short time and she appeared to be doing well. But something was lost because of my unavailability that night.

Back at school, a non-student who had been released from a mental institution was brought to Brian's and my room to beg for drugs. We shared some with him and he later came back and stole the rest. As angry as this made us, we were lucky. An undercover narcotics agent named Tony was trolling the campus for what would become a huge drug bust. He was the roommate of a friend of ours—the nicest kid, quite straight. Tony asked him, as a favor, to help him buy some grass. They came to our room together. We

told them we had just been robbed and couldn't help. The narc busted our friend later, after he helped find some other kids with pot. It was a travesty. Over thirty students were arrested. What part of private, non-violent behavior do these busybodies not understand? I was not saddened to learn that "Tony" was killed some years later in a drug deal gone bad in California. Apparently he had found some real criminals.

I remember one day looking out over my fellow students in the cafeteria and realizing that my use of drugs was not normal, even for the drug-besotted Sixties culture and bohemian Antioch campus. I attempted to attend a class like a normal college student, but rushed out in the middle to throw up from dope. Ultimately, I decided to drop out of all my fall 1967 classes and just repeat the quarter. Walking over to the administration offices to withdraw, I learned that school had already been closed for a week for the Christmas break.

My brother came to pick me up for the vacation. On the way home, I had a psychotic break from amphetamines. I experienced a state of complete disassociation and depersonalization, in which I narrated a third-person biography of myself to my brother, including my choice of parents and natal family, early experiences, and subsequent life events all leading up to the car ride we were on. As unusual as this was, it was part of a continuum of out-of-the-ordinary experiences of the time, and I do not remember doing anything more than reflecting on it (as I still do). A decade later, Grady McMurtry gave me copies of some of Jack Parsons' writings, including a paper called "Analysis by a Master of the Temple of the Critical Nodes in the Experience of His Magical Vehicle." My eyes almost popped out of my head when I read it, because it mirrored the mysterious event that had happened during the hours of that drive from Yellow Springs to Youngstown. (I do not pretend to understand what either his or my experience meant, but Parsons' text is included in the appendices.)

WINTER 1967-1968

I don't remember much of what happened during the Christmas vacation at home. I took my next co-op job at the Antioch bookstore, feeling way too raw to uproot myself and leave Yellow Springs again for three months. While working at the cash register, I met Mary. A pretty student, she was quite nervous. We'd have these funny interactions in which she would pay and drop her money and I would drop her change. One thing led to another and we began living together, my first experience with that depth of relationship. Then all of us in the group mentioned above came down with serum hepatitis for obvious reasons. The campus doctor explained that, fortunately, we were not contagious, save through further misbehavior with needles, so Mary was safe.

I went home to my parents and entered the hospital. I had an interesting experience with Jean, now Charlie's ex-girlfriend. I woke in the night in the hospital room and saw her flying through the window in the exact form of a Ba spirit (although I did not know this until years later when exploring Egyptian iconography). I phoned her in the morning and she told me she had been writing a late-night letter to me while listening to an album I had given her—*Changes* by Jim and Jean. The attending physician despised me as a "dirty hippie"—the generational culture war being in full bloom by 1968. He wrote my draft board assuming it was his patriotic duty to keep me out of the army and I received a 1Y classification. Mary dropped out of school and came to live at my parents' home during my convalescence.

ON THE ROAD

SPRING 1968

RECEIVING A CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH, I accompanied Mary to her mother's house in northern New Jersey. Mother Joan was a gardener with a green thumb. Among the lush and exotic plants in her garden were some very rare oriental poppies. I would go out early in the morning to scrape the top of the plants and then head to work as a car-stereo installer at Gem Electronics, drilling holes for speakers in doors and bolting 4- and 8-track tape decks into customers' cars. Then home to my now-dried, if rather weak, opium.

After a couple of months, we headed off to Boulder, Colorado on our way farther west. Mary and I lived in a closet in a house on Marine Street with some students from the university and some non-students. We both read Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. The book has a complex and confusing ending. One day, puzzling over it in my bed in the closet, I felt a personal merging with Cohen's consciousness, a theophany of sorts, in which I understood that he had subtly merged the two main characters into a composite figure. It was an extraordinary act of literary virtuosity.

I reconnected with Adam, the dealer mentioned earlier from the Lower East Side. While visiting his house in a small mountain town outside Boulder, we met and smoked some excellent grass with folksinger Judy Collins and musician Stephen Stills. I'm afraid I acted inconsiderately with her. She had recorded many of Leonard Cohen's songs. I camouflaged my natural sense of intimidation at meeting such a famous celebrity by questioning her about Cohen, while pretending that meeting her was not as significant to me as it actually was. If I had been able to be more honest, I would have told her how much I loved her work and how honored I was to

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