

PENELOPE STUART BOURK, EDITOR
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JOURNEYS
OUTWARD
JOURNEYS
INWARD

*Travel and
Transformation*



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Caught Changing — melaleuka wood carving by the editor, inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (left). Editor, Penelope, carving a story (right).

Introduction

by Penelope Stuart Bourk, Editor

TRAVEL, LIKE LOVE, INVITES THE MYSTERY of the “other.” This book on elder travel opens to that mystery. Essays, poems, and visual art offer intimate witness to the transformative journeys of 24 “later-life” travelers who range in age from 55 to 83. Explore with these authors their expanding vistas, visions, and sensibilities. Share their discoveries of the gifts, costs, and quality of being human — *here, now*, in a world moving ever closer and — with our collective attention — growing ever more dear. Feel artistry at work, as the honed chisel of that most ancient of sculptors, Experience, carves out, for traveler and reader alike, a more spacious and inclusive interior.

Whether journeying far afield, rambling nearer to home, or as an armchair pilgrim, entranced by an exotic page-turner, older travelers — to whom this book is primarily addressed — will find here courage and encouragement as the authors share their stories of exploration, contemplation, integration, contribution, and global community-building. For the reader eager to go deeper, resource lists follow many of the essays. And throughout the book, inviting oases of poetry offer refreshing pauses.

The book contains six sections — six stepping stones through a moss garden where the reader may pause, look outward at the rich landscape and inward to their own yearnings. **Part 1** invites the reader to enter a world *beyond the familiar* and — in **Part 2** — to awaken to difference and to growth — to the *rush* of the amazing diversity of place, life forms, livelihood, initiatives, limits, responsibilities. Our travel in the outer world inevitably sparks inner transformation, *odysseys for the soul* that offer initiatory experiences — for the three authors in **Part 3**, initiatory experiences into elderhood. **Part 4** invites the reader to consider how the past both follows and leads — how in William Faulkner’s words, “The past is never dead. It is not even past.” For those who would be *intentional*

travelers, **Part 5** offers tips and examples for journaling and sharing their travel experience. The essays in **Part 6** enter the *precincts of the sacred* where the secular and sacred converge and travel becomes *pilgrimage*.

In the ancient art of pilgrimage, the setting out, the seeking, the adventure, the quest, the offering were essential parts of the journey. But bringing home the gifts of the experience and sharing the gleanings with the community were equally a part. It is not only the professional travel writer and the travel channel that have insights to share. Great travel stories — to tell and to hear — peek out all around us. What I discovered in my outreach as editor is that we need simply ask.

The older traveler *will not* find in these pages suggested packing lists, special luggage features, or bargain vacation spots. He and she *will* find support, insights, and strategies for “unpacking” the meaning of the journey, whether local, abroad, or through life. The book offers vivid adventures and misadventures. It models recovery from misfortune, injury, and disappointment. It gently introduces us to the necessary accommodations to aging, while at the same time capturing the stunning adventures still possible for elders of this generation. It celebrates Life Emergent in our advancing years. “Old,” I was recently reminded, derives from a word meaning “to nourish, to grow.” May it always be so!

OVER THE CENTURIES AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, people have traveled for so many reasons: leisure and renewal; romance and escape; exile, refuge, and survival; spirit and service — or even just to get out of the house for a breath of fresh air! As editor and contributor to this collection, I have been touched by its tales of transformation, by the effects of travel, both from outside in and from inside out. I have also been led to ponder whether elder travel — on a scale that is unprecedented, as the number of people over 60 years of age around the world approaches one billion — might itself be a change agent in the world. Many, for various reasons, will be called to travel. Some will need help, both in preparation and along the way. We may all be called to host or to become considerate guests. Are we not also obliged to ponder thoughtfully what the trillions of dollars we may collectively spend on travel might do in the world?

According to the website for ATME, the Association for Travel Marketing Executives, the boomer generation will be a “pig in a python.” As the industry gears up to squeeze “the moneyed masses” through

packaged and predigested experiences, might not aging boomers — so good at changing the game! — insist on a more informed and thoughtful experience? I hope the offerings in this book will help the “second journey” traveler choose wisely among the options and make the best of journeys.

AS FOR ME, AS EDITOR, I conclude this introduction with an offering of gratitude to the many authors, photographers, and visual artists who have so generously and with good heart contributed their efforts. I am especially grateful to Bolton and Lisa Anthony of *Second Journey* whose invitation, editorial guidance, and technical expertise, along with the work of the talented and patient graphic designer, Michael Brady, have made this book possible. In few other tasks in my life have I felt so well-used. Finally, I thank my husband, Terry Bourk, for his many-faceted know-how, his considered understanding, his concise cure for overwhelming challenges — “do the work” — and his full support throughout this year of editorial discovery.

Penelope Stuart Bourk, M.A., the editor of this book, draws inspiration from myth for her current work as writer, weaver, sculptor, and teacher. Her essays, stories, and poems have appeared in journals, books, and newspapers. A “second journey” artist with a late-life passion for carving stumps and roots, her multi-media sculpture series contribute to programs at universities, conference centers, and churches in the Northwest. Recently commissioned by a choreographer inspired by her *Odyssey* series, she created props for a new modern dance called *20XPenelope*.

Photos of some of her sculptures appear alongside essays in this volume: a few from her series **SPIRIT CAVES** which explores the Sacred Feminine; a few more from **WEAVING ODYSSEUS HOME**, her reflections in wood, fiber, and bone on Homer’s *Odyssey*. Her imaginal landscapes — or “islands of experience” — juxtapose Odyssean motifs explored throughout this book: venturing and abiding, transgression and transformation, war and reconciliation, and the journey home. View her work at penelopestuartbourk.com.



Weaving Odysseus Home

Accumulation of Days

A Poem by Linda Beeman

We age, we bemoan
slippery memory
broken sleep
chronic pain

We reach for grace
iced forsythia on a February morning
the shape of an owl's wing in slow flight
wood smoke smells in old textiles
acceptance that what's undone will wait

Accumulated insights layer one upon another
knowledge sifted through humility
justice measured with compassion
beauty sculpted by imperfection
love honed with patience
hope balancing wisdom

Our voyages out
eventually bring us home
where we acknowledge
the unknowns we sought
were coded

deep within us
all along

A Village Far Outside Shanghai

A Poem by Earl Cooper

they say you
can get drunk here
simply from the air

this high in mountains
the geese never stop
you can hear them pass
all honk and appointment
during early light
the sounds their wings make
lifting and lifting

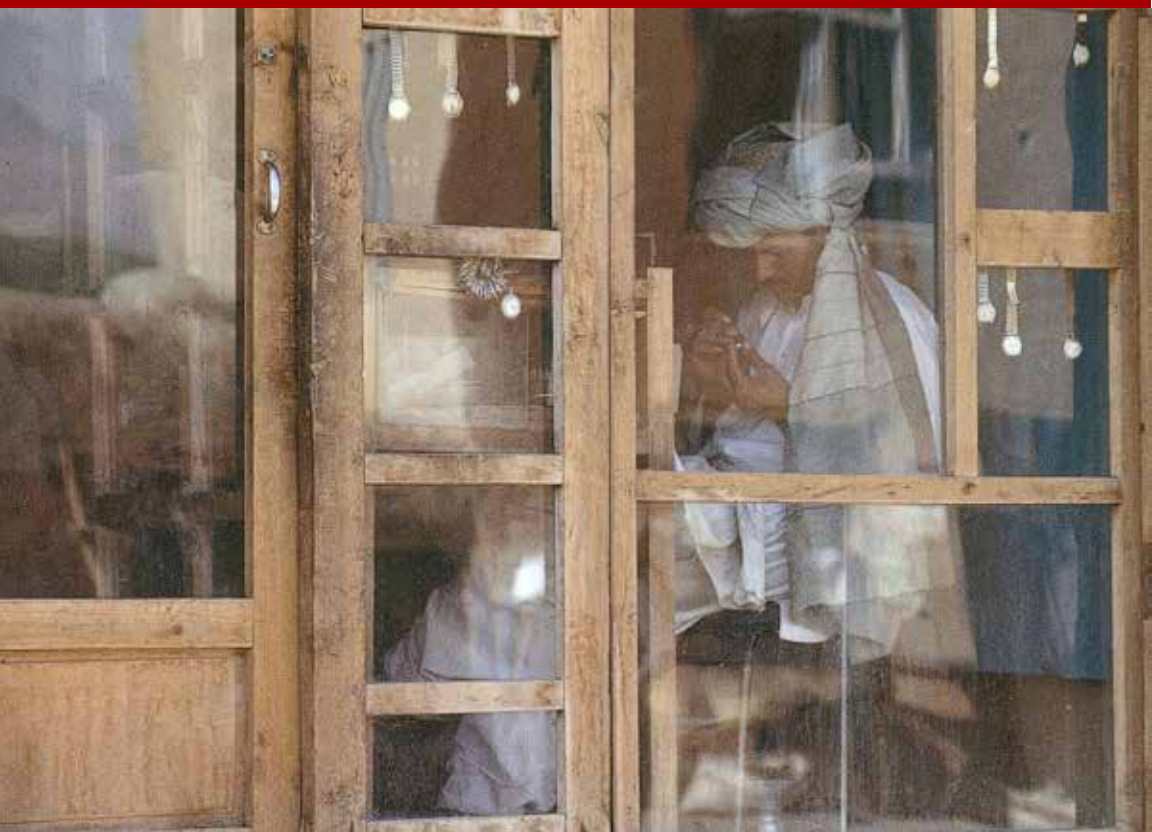
within the village
a woman begins to sweep stones
bathing them with dippersful of water
while on the roof of our hotel
an old man is gently
filling the sky with calligraphy

come, I say
let us walk out this morning
among the leaping green ridges of tea
and be like the air
that never ends

immortal as light
empty as this cup

2

Life Rushing In



The Watchmaker of Bamiyan — in his tiny shop in the town of Bamiyan, 200 rough kilometers north of Kabul. **Photograph by Earl Cooper**

*When we get out of the glass
bottle of our ego and when we escape
like the squirrels in the cage of our
personality and get into the forest
again, we shall shiver with cold and
fright. But things will happen to us
so that we don't know ourselves. Cool,
unlying life will rush in.*

— D. H. Lawrence

The Mirror of Travel: Seeing Myself in the Face of Morocco



by Kendall Dudley

IF WE'RE LUCKY, WE GET TO TAKE advantage of times of change and uncertainty to make course corrections. Travel — whether in the outer world by foot, bus, or plane, or through an inner process of journal writing using travel metaphors — provides a creative lens to see our changes.

What follows is my record of taking a group of eight to Morocco in 2012. Everyone was over 50, employed in a variety of occupations including law, mental health, the arts, community service, and medicine. What they had in common was a desire to look below the trappings of culture and established roles and see what ticked. Our goal was to see what the land and people might evoke in us and how, through mindful attention and creating a journal record, we might live more fully. Here is my experience of those 12 days.

*We travel to lose ourselves and find ourselves again.*¹

— Pico Iyer

MY FIRST NIGHT IN FES, I'm standing at the head of a dark alleyway staring at an illegible sign that may say Riad Dar Tamo, site of my room for the night. It is late, maybe 9 p.m., and weak street lamps give the stucco walls a shadowy B-movie look while I fight back urban instincts to use my cell phone for some kind of bailout. I push forward down the dark path. I'm in Fes, after all, to do this exact thing, to push the edges, to see and do what I don't do at home and to learn from whatever I encounter. The alleyway is not wider than a donkey and a half, and it weaves, with wires and the juttings-out of the upper stories of houses above. I don't feel in danger, just on unfamiliar, stony ground.

I knock on the heavy wood door marked #89 and a man (I guess, age 50) in a grey shirt looks at me, white guy (he guesses, 60?) in a blue vest. I confess, “My name is Dudley. I have a reservation.” For a moment I think I’ve disoriented him, but he ad libs, “Dudley, yes, the Internet. Come.” He leads me along the tiled vestibule to the three-story atrium, where a French woman is dragging herself from the TV and says, “Welcome. You are Dudley.” “Yes,” though suddenly I’m not sure I want to be Dudley at this minute. “Would you sign here?” she asks. I scan my options: flee, chill, trust fate... I go with trust fate. She peers at my words. “You are Kendall, not Dudley?” she says not unkindly. “I am both. I have two names.” “Just so,” she says.

She has nailed it directly. I do have two names, one I know well (the Kendall), but the other is still less familiar to me (Dudley) for it’s the name of my father whom I know too little about. Already I’m alerted to a task I hadn’t realized lay before me, to fill in the missing parts of my father’s life. She hands me the key to the room at the top. “My husband, he will help you with the bag, and breakfast is anytime. Just come down.”

As I follow husband up the steep irregular steps of this tenth-century house, I realize I am climbing steps that people have been climbing for 1100 years! I am astounded, and with each step, I think of the children who grew old in this house and passed on, yet the steps remain. I am but one more step climber, one more trav-



At home or away, the journal helps us “see” what’s there.

eler wooed, one more pilgrim who has found his way to Fes not knowing fully why he has come... and that is the point. To have just enough intention to make the trip but not so much knowledge as to create “spoilers” that dampen surprise.

So why have I come, and why in this manner? There are many reasons I know about. My deep interest in Islamic architecture and Middle

East culture nurtured from my Peace Corps years in Iran... my interest in the life cycle and the voyages implicit with each life stage... my belief in the vivid language of color and form to convey meaning... and my professional yakking to life-design clients and program participants about the advantages of intentional travel. For these “known” reasons I have come to Morocco while suspecting that others lie out of reach. Perhaps there lies my real motivation: to see beneath the surface of my known intentions.

Pico Iyer says, “We search not so much for answers but better questions.”² Indeed, living the questions, as Rilke suggests,³ is a form of the high ideal. Better to set in motion that next life chapter with good questions, or at least some that may take you to the right ones. For me, “Why am I *really* here?” is a good enough question.



The next morning, I go up more of those same steep steps to the roof, where I am breathtakingly surrounded by the 10th through 21st centuries — soft distant mountains,

minarets, grey-brown houses, and alleyways, roof gardens, plane trees, telephone poles, hundreds of satellite dishes, and the insistent drone of Egyptian soap operas. This is the oldest part of Fes... time has burnished it with additions woven in throughout the years: a house renovation in Andalusian style, an Ottoman influence here, a choice of colors from a French colonial palette there. Like the houses, we bear the markings of our journey even if we’ve forgotten their origins.

Some part of me is aware that it’s raining and I’m getting really wet! I take a quick last look knowing that I will not see this specific sight again. The image saturates my eyes, and as I head carefully down the

steps, each one requiring a strategy of its own, I hear Frost⁴ and Hallmark Cards saying “I may not go this way again.” Hey, it’s also true I may never get to Zabar’s on Broadway again... but I haven’t heard this internal voice before. Hmm, for all my dismissive banter about birthdays being a cultural phenomenon hyped by the card industry, my body has its own wisdom and has been keeping track — there will be just so many Fesian moments to record on my life passport!

As I make my way with my roller bag and overweight backpack through the 10th, 14th, and more “modern” centuries of Fes to our rendezvous at the Dar Batha Hotel, I feel the vibrancy of the city and its

many arresting sights. Is it traveler’s eyes that let me find fascination in the way the rain stains the earthen walls and flows quietly along the stone walking paths? A bicyclist slaloms by me. I note the way



Instead of seeing the beauty and tradition of the tanners of Fes, I saw mostly suffering.

that fiber optic and electric cables are pinned to available wooden structures and electric meters like large watches are fitted into the carvable walls. Here centuries are colliding. Men in bright blue suits pick up discrete amounts of garbage from houses, while others in yellow are making repairs to the twisty walkways. No signs saying Danger! Cuidado! or Men Working Above! No, everyone watches where they’re going — they have Fesian eyes that tell them to pay attention to the moment. At home, they have to contemplate each step, whereas in Boston, codes and the anticipation of lawsuits have lessened the need for “paying attention.”

I land at our hotel meeting place and find out that two of our members are stuck in the Rome airport, the result of djinns in the form of labor strikes and cancelled flights somewhere along the line. A nice event to show the irony of careful planning, but I quickly catch myself. When people are upset and losing a day at Fes is not the time to enter the on ramp of philosophical musings. Already, even getting to Fes is providing us friction for defining our edges and recalibrating our tolerances.

I am having to switch from being the traveler through personal space to the leader of a group of eight through a maze of schedules, hotel arrivals, long van rides, weather changes, grumbles and exasperations, mis-timings, the disappointing of some to maximize what I hope is the group's benefit. We see much, perhaps too much, and while most of us are gluttons for this kind of thing, each of us has our limits for ups and downs, and our own individual capacity for delight. When we are in sync, it is marvelous. When not, we take our council and learn from many sources: pleasure and disappointment, physical comfort and irritation, the sweetness of the tea and the risks inherent in food experimentation, as we each stretch our own zones of routine, comfort, and curiosity.

I am both watching and participating, trying to monitor the shape of each person's experience and judging when to say what. I am up late reviewing each day and what has spilled out of people's mouths, trying to discern what needs attention and intervention and what is part of the natural, if complex, unrolling of experience. I discover a distressing need to please everyone and take it hard when someone runs aground. This takes me back 40 years to times I was my mother's mainstay and guardian, a memory that keeps me up late in Morocco all these years later. The past is not really past, it is merely lying low for the moment.

Our guide, Mark Gordon — an ex-pat American who lives in Morocco and runs tours on his own and for a travel company — is a font of knowledge of the facts and the bizarre. He is bright and knows his way around the people and monuments we encounter. He is also a lightning rod for anxieties and countertransference. This guy (age maybe 55?) is more accustomed to saving adventure travelers from the jaws of hypothermia and bravado than he is to divining the needs of a quirky group of 50–70 somethings who poke their heads into journals and talk about process and meaning. Some of whom want miracles! “It is now raining, will it rain tomorrow when we are in the desert riding camels?” one woman

asks. He responds, “Yahoo says there is a 60 percent chance of rain near there. But it rarely rains in the desert.” She counters, “But are you sure it won’t rain while we’re riding — if it does rain I don’t want to go!” I remind people they are asking for a degree of prediction that is impossible to offer even in Kansas.

What is really happening here, at this moment? We are midway through our trip. It has rained more than we expected, it’s been colder than we thought... people are resilient, but a little disappointed in the weather. Then there is the desert. We have talked about it as one of the lures of the trip, a highlight, but it has many elements to it. For most of us, it represents the unknown. It is literal, storied, iconic, psychological. We are all embarking on this voyage with awareness that we are, to varying degrees, going to an edge. It will be fun, but the shape of that fun cannot be known without our having done it. Discussions of weather and requests for guarantees are largely a sign of a collective anxiety. In polling a few people, it seems clear that the group as a whole feels more anxious than the individuals in it do.

Nonetheless, rain or not, we are heading to the desert, and though it is hard to see it yet from our van, we know it is coming. The land is thinning and, interestingly, we start to talk as if no one will remember what



Our conversations at the edge of the desert
wandered into deep, necessary places.

we say. “Are you happy?” turns out to be a provocative question as we pass the roadside farms and villages of the Saharan rim. We take turns listening and speaking of the hopes we had and have for love, the present station of those feelings, and the shifts we’ve made to hold these realities.

At times the thrum of the engine acts as our drone instrument, signaling the passage of time and the eternal aspects of our questions. For some, we are telling one another what we have come to Morocco to hear ourselves say — and in the very saying, perhaps we make that real and manageable and changeable if need be. That I am recently divorced rings louder here in me than it does in the U.S., and the word ripples in me as I flash through the vast history of divorces in my family... and the reasons why I know so little about my father.

During a lull, I suggest we ride in silence and make notes in our journals. I draw a picture of my father. In my imagined re-creation of his leaving when I was five, I give him a bent back. Perhaps it is the movement of the van that produces that exaggerated line and this wounded interpretation of his departure, but my drawing radiates through me and I feel immensely sad at the loss to him and to me of our decades of separation.



And then the desert. We are mounting our padded saddles and holding onto the pommel as we wait for all of us to similarly be seated before “standing up” — camels take cues from one another, and if one gets up, its neighbor may get the same idea, whether the rider is ready or not. I am starting the odd three-stage

standing-up process when I hear Anna moan in terror as her camel starts its ascent. “Hold on tight, you’ll be fine!” our guide calls out. He knows adventure after all. She wails and hugs the saddle. Her camel is paying little attention to her anxiety, but we are all concerned. “You can walk,” I say, “others are choosing to walk.” “No, no. I have to do this,” she manages to say.

This is the desert. The slow endless turning of dunes, pushed by the wind, reconfiguring themselves every day. There is nothing to say. I am in

the thrall of the moment, aware of time being measured in eons. I sense a letting go... and I experience what it is to be totally present. Every sense is alive. My mind flickers to T. E. Lawrence, the Camel Corps, Rommel, Nilotic slaves, and the trade in dyes, salt, and metals. After my cavalcade of nonsense, I come back to the reality of the chafing sound of camel pads on sands and the steady beat of my heart.

It is night and we are in our Bedouin tent being served couscous with goat, chickpeas, and carrots and drinking wine we have sacredly carried with us. "I need to tell you something," Anna says. "I came on this trip... to ride that camel." Her voice rises. "When I was a child, I was trampled by wild horses and have been terrified of large animals ever since. I had to get on that camel." Her story chills me. What immense courage it took for her to do this. The air is alive as it was in the bus. I say, "This makes me want to tackle my own fear of water — I feel imprisoned by it..." Another says, "I have been anxious this whole trip. It is what I do. But I am not anxious about a thing right now. Just being here is all that matters. And I wouldn't have known that it could be so, without coming."

I sleep in the presence of the wind and the awareness of stars covering me.⁵ I get up around 4 a.m. to pee and watch myself in moonlight standing in the dunes. It is chilly, and gusts of wind blow through me. I take a handful of sand and hold it. I have the idea of taking some home and being buried with it. It is only when I am out of the wind that I realize tears have formed in my eyes.



We see ruined fortresses and sleep one night in a hotel carved out of rock at the base of a vertical gorge. We see immense long valleys of fig, almond, and palm trees with towns scattered in their midst. And then we arrive at the fantastic hill village of Ait Ben Haddou, site of movie backdrops and UNESCO's protection.⁶

It is midafternoon. The sun plays on the adobe houses and tapering towers carved with enigmatic signs and symbols. As we walk towards the village, the towers appear to shoot up from thick walls that hug the

hillside. Like the desert, this village evokes iconic forms taken from an alternate mindset. Tracing its architectural roots to sub-Saharan and Malian architecture only fuels my thinking that



The hill village of Ait Ben Haddou seen from a distance

West Africa has links to knowledge systems that the West has lost or perhaps has yet to encounter.⁷

We come upon men and women outfitted in North Face, filming Jesus and Mary for Moroccan TV. As I watch these storied roles being played out, I wonder how I would tell my own story. How would I divide my chapters, and which ones would I have to rewrite before they yielded fresh insight? I realize I get invested in interpreting events in certain ways. And as long as I do that, I can't see into the nuances of my life, overshadowed as they are by fixed ideas.

The next day we spend moments in silence as we time-travel over the Atlas Mountains past stone villages, flocks of sheep, cell towers, and women's rural co-ops. It is on these longish bus rides we collect our thoughts that we may later share during the collective journal writing we do each evening. In this way, we see what others saw and learn from the differences in how we're wired and how our wiring may be shifting. My own wires seem to be scanning for the meaning that lies behind what I see... I am looking more for signs than at the color and surface of things.

We hit Marrakech, drop our bags at Riad Dar Saad on the outskirts of the bazaar, and head for the Djemaa-al-Fna. We are in high gear. This is the finale of our trip and the Assembly of the Dead is calling us, or at least that's one Arabic translation for the place we are about to see! Electrical and plumbing stalls flash by us as do butchers, hanging meat,



...and then viewed from inside the village.

and vegetable stalls, each with its own sounds and pungency. The market for painted drums and stringed instruments pulls at us and then come the spice, cloth, and souvenir merchants.

Finally, we are released into the wide sea of space and people that forms the Djemaa-al-Fna! School's out and many people are milling and roaming, scanning the juice wagons and food stalls. Circles form around palmists and storytellers, snake charmers and acrobats. Japanese in face-masks consider land snails and broth. An animal trainer is almost clipped by a biker, whose black veil balloons out behind her. Actors, some in drag, lure us into being their audience, while drummers, horn, and string players vie for our attention by drawing us away with their rapid twisting beat. Women in black sequin veils sit by pillows with cards that see into the future. This is theater on a grand scale, full of history, ritual, invention, reality, and suggestions of the occult. But which is which, and what does all that mean?

Our last hours together, we meet to write of what we will remember of this trip. We discuss moments we stepped out of ourselves or took on unfamiliar roles. We look at emerging skills and tastes and dreams and pause to capture flickers of the future. We start to say "Goodbye" but change it to, "Be seeing you." Much is in flux as we make our way towards more familiar shores.

I head back to the Djemaa-al-Fna and seek out the amulet maker. Seeing the low facades of the shops, restaurants, hotels, and parking areas that define the edges of the Djemaa, I'm aware of the "planning" behind all this. During 20th-century colonial rule, the French decided that

Morocco would become a culture park and Marrakech its tourist home. This meant old Marrakech had to retain its antique qualities so that it appeared “oriental” to travelers. What’s more, writers say that Morocco partially came to define itself through the images foreigners created of it.⁸

At first appalled to think of these manipulations of culture, I realize they provide a segue to seeing the effects of my own culture on me. Culture is often invisible from the inside. It is by traveling, in part, by getting on the outside, that I see the system of beliefs that defines me and keeps me bound to feeling “at home” in my culture.⁹ And though I know why there are few palmists, card readers, and bibliomancers in America, it doesn’t stop me from believing that there is something of imperturbable value here. My task as a traveler and seeker is to see through the cultural distortions to what may still exist at the heart of things.

This impulse has me talking to the amulet maker who sits on a stool near the used clothing sellers. In his yellow robes, he looks like a shaman as he asks me what protection I desire. I tell him I want health for myself and my loved ones and peace for this troubled world. He pauses and then takes a small brass object the shape of an amphora and sets about breaking and selecting bits of bird wing, ginger, and myrrh, along with



pinches of what appear to be herbs, mineral powders, and silver dust. He pauses and the Square falls silent. I watch him open a small blue box. He takes out a pinch of red earth and inserts it into the capsule. He then carefully twists closed the top with a brass stopper and presents it to me in his palm.

While culture strongly determines what it is we value, it is ultimately up to me to sift through the forces shaping belief to see what may be true for me. In the work of the amulet maker, I'm choosing to find great value and to see — in the choices he made — links to belief systems and a cultural heritage I may never understand. But he is teaching me to imagine a larger, more multisourced palette from which to frame my life. Coming to Morocco is not enough! I will have to travel further by reading, reflecting, writing, and conversation. All along I'll be trying to name those life tasks, the sacred and sublime, that I have yet to undertake. I see them forming a kind of map into the future that shapes my choices, time, and resources. This trip helps me see my unfinished "work" with my father. It sensitizes me to wider spheres of knowledge. Above all, it is helping me pay attention to my life and surroundings in such a way that every day can be a travel day if I'm willing to look at life with those eyes.

One thing I've learned is that travel provides a necessary *friction* that helps me encounter myself in unanticipated ways. It clarifies my interests, fears, values, and desires. Even to make the trip in my armchair and not on the road, I need ways to introduce friction. I use the imagery of travel to describe the inner journey I am to make. I want to be able to identify the "stops" along the way before the train reaches its final destination. (Engage with my father's memory, explore Islamic folk beliefs and architecture, draw freely every day, experiment with alternative forms of knowing such as tarot and *I Ch'ing*, etc.) This may mean confronting the border guards that don't want me snooping around my past or looking foolish. It may mean emptying from the suitcase of the heart a host of outgrown roles, responsibilities, and identities, creating a packing list of "mysteries to explore," denying visas to sacred cows, and safekeeping insights gleaned from roads already traveled. By whatever means I and others may undertake our journeys, recording it not only in words, but also including questions and images, reveals what we know and gives shape to it. If we are ultimately travelers seeking our right road, let us renew the search with creativity and courage!

¹ Pico Iyer, *Why We Travel*, Salon.com; March 18, 2000.

² Ibid.

³ See Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet (1903)*, Modern Library, 2001.

⁴ See Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" from *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, edited by Edward Connery Latham. Copyright 1923, © 1969 by Henry Holt and Company, Inc.

⁵ See Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, Harcourt, 2002.

⁶ Ait Ben Haddou has appeared in *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Gladiator* among other movies and is a recognized World Heritage site by UNESCO.

⁷ See René Gardi, *Indigenous African Architecture*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1973.

⁸ See Assia Lamzeh, *The Impact of the French Protectorate on Cultural Heritage Management in Morocco: The Case of Marrakech*, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011.

⁹ See Albert Camus, *The Stranger (L'Étranger)*, Everyman Library, 1993, and Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, Pantheon, 1984.

The Dogs of Bhutan

by Dianne Shiner



NO MATTER HOW WELL-PREPARED, brilliant, and guided a traveler may be, it is foolish to believe that one can come to really know a place in a brief

sojourn. In my initiating culture shock in India more than 40 years ago, I found that the longer I stayed, the less I knew about India and the more I learned about myself. The British essayist, Alain de Botton, in *The Art of Travel*, has said that travel agents ask the wrong question when they ask, “Where would you like to go?” but rather should say, “What is it that you would like to change about your life?” Though we may anticipate, we do not really know what changes will befall us on the road; in fact, most travel rarely goes according to plan, and it is often the spontaneous and incidental that will have the most impact. The dogs of Bhutan surely fall into this category.

The millions of us who are searching for a more balanced inner life and who hunger for a vibrant connection with the natural world need Bhutan to prosper. There may be no place on earth that can better teach us wiser ways to live.

— Carpenter, *The Blessings of Bhutan*

In 1961, I “discovered” Bhutan in a *National Geographic* article in my college library. A desire to visit was planted deep in my heart, even though this Himalayan kingdom was closed to the outside world. As part of my second journey, I am reawakening and exploring those nascent intentions, the spiritual bucket list. So, a year ago, after two weeks of travel in Bhutan, I found myself in a closing circle near Paro with three guides, two drivers, and 13 guests (never once referred to as tourists).¹ Having just returned from an arduous trek to Taktshang Goemba (the Tigers

Nest Monastery), we gathered, weary and reflective, for an intimate tea. As we shared our gratitude and highlights of the trip, four people commented that the dogs were most remarkable. Now, in a spectacular country once known as the Forbidden Kingdom, the last Shangri-La, the Land of Gross National Happiness, it is surprising, to say the least, that Bhutanese dogs would emerge as singularly cherished in our memories. What about them spoke so deeply to us?

My comments on Bhutan come from limited, but liminal, experience. I must acknowledge that somewhere in Bhutan, perhaps in the capital city of Thimphu, there exist mangy stray dogs who are shooed away as dangerous, flea-bitten rascals. I only know we never saw any. We never heard a



dog bark. Never followed a chase. Never saw a territorial fight. Never had a dog beg, even when they sat amiably among us while we picnicked by a river or snacked on a trail. They certainly noticed the food, but were never aggressive or pitiful in obtaining it. They sometimes volunteered as companions up steep hikes to monasteries, waiting patiently to bring us back or simply ignoring us. Guardians, perhaps, but hardly guard dogs.

Well-cared-for pets? Not really. There appeared to be only a few pet owners; in fact, I think the very idea of “owning” a dog is alien to most Bhutanese, and the pet obsessiveness of my culture funny indeed. Yet these dogs were healthy, calm, and everywhere. More than man’s best friend, dogs embody religious symbolism in Tibetan Buddhism. Bhutanese believe that, from among sentient beings, dogs have the best opportunity to be reborn as humans. In Garth Stein’s wonderful novel, *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, the storytelling dog Enzo says in his dying: “Not all dogs return as men, they say; only those who are ready. *I am ready.*”

Dogs are also said to be helpful in the afterlife, leading us through the darkness with a light glowing on their tails to a better place. In ancient Bhutanese folklore with which Buddhism is intertwined, dogs

interceded with the gods who were displeased with human greed and decided to withhold the natural bounty of the earth. Because of their pleading, the food left behind for the dogs is what we survive on today. Many Himalayan Buddhist saints had close dog companions, and monks integrate the care of dogs into their daily spiritual practice. No wonder that the novice pilgrim in Bhutan finds the dogs awesome.

In the opening tea circle, our leader Karma Dorji welcomed us to Bhutan by saying that “Buddhism is the air we breathe.” Every day, we experienced the freshness of a culture still immersed in a lively and shared sense of the holy. The sheer lightheartedness of the Bhutanese people, manifested in easy smiles and twinkling eyes, is ever the “most infallible sign of the presence of God” (Teilhard de Chardin). Early in the trip, I witnessed our hotel clerk being berated by a dissatisfied guest. Never have I seen a young man with such gracious boundaries; he was neither stressed nor defensive nor obsequious. I came to find that this odd combination of amusement and respect was indeed the cultural norm, whether with children or with the wizened.



At the other end of the scale, even government policy is deeply informed by an authentic religious view. For example, their spectacular Himalayan peaks will never be scaled, and perhaps trashed, by mountain climbing expeditions, because villagers asked the government to protect the sanctity of the peaks, the home of the deities, from intrusion. National parks and biological corridors comprise over 40 percent of the country, preserving Bhutan’s amazing biodiversity. Economic development is intended to be slow, sustainable, and balanced by priorities in art, education, health care, and ecology (some of the measurable goals of concrete Gross National Happiness). The Dzongs (magnificent fortresses) equally house each district’s monastic body AND government offices. Prayer and devotion punctuate the day whether in golden rice fields, domestic temples, numerous monasteries, or casual businesses. Even the one

and only golf course asks that you circle and apologize to a tree if your ball should strike it!

Bhutan is certainly not perfect; and indeed this very cohesiveness is at risk from modernization, however carefully and intelligently it is managed. To some, this homogeneity is naïve, even dangerous. For others, there is conflict between piety and progress. Yet I found myself more than just nostalgic for the cultural Catholicism of my childhood. As early as 1904, Max Weber (in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*) was writing about the disenchantment of a secularized world, as opposed to traditional society where, for Weber, “the world remains a great enchanted garden.” For a brief 18 days, we were invited to reenter that garden of everyday mysticism, and to return changed by its vigor and delight.



What does all this have to do with dogs? Indeed, they are different in Bhutan. Like the canary in the mineshaft, they manifest the quality of “the air we breathe.” In entering another culture, it is easier to see the pattern and influence of the “atmosphere” on individual lives and values. If I live in a world of fear, I am more likely to be afraid. If I live in a world of kindness, I am more likely to be kind, or trusting, or compassion-

ate. If I live in an enchanted or re-enchanted world, I am more likely to “see visions and dream dreams” (Joel 2:28). As I age, these simple truths become more profound....and urgent.

In my journal, I noted an irony: The Buddhist understanding of karma seems to place huge responsibility on the individual, yet its practice of interdependence is imbued with a communal identity with all living beings. In a Christian milieu as I have known it, the doctrine itself is definitively corporeal (the Incarnation, Corpus Christ, the Body of Christ), but its practice has often been very individualistic with an emphasis on *my* soul being saved. My favorite Bible scholar, Dan Erlander (in *Manna and Mercy*), says that the message of Exodus is clear: We do not go to God as



individuals, but as a people. For me, this vision was transparent and embodied in my brief time in Bhutan.

Doctrinal differences of the many spiritual paths are no longer that important to me, but the *sharing* of the path is essential. In Bhutan, for all its isolation, communal spiritual consciousness is a given. I returned to cherish our church community, my women's circle, our couples' group, and the other anam cara of my life with new appreciation for the way we inspire, challenge, and cocreate the quality of our lives. For me, these are mutual lifelines to the holy, even, and particularly when there is no single word to describe the "air we breathe."

As a college freshman, I did not realize that I was about to lose my religious naïveté and walk the foggy path of disenchantment, never able to go "home again." But Bhutan was planted then as a way back, so to speak, to my first language, beyond words, where my dog and I understood each other perfectly. "*The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.*" (T.S. Eliot)

I do not live in such a cohesive nation as Bhutan; here, dogs are both abused and pampered in the same city. We do not have a milieu of common values and practices, let alone devotion. I both long for and fear such unity of spirit, wanting to hold both diversity and single-heartedness in my hands. I only know that the experience of a deeply spiritual culture is transforming for all beings, including, and perhaps especially, the dogs.

¹ The excellent tour company I used in Bhutan is Skykingdom Adventures; contact Karma Dorji at info@skykingdomadventures.com or 1-877-248-8728.

About the Contributors

Moira Allan, co-founder with Jan Hively of the PassItOnNetwork.org and of Le Cercle des Seniors Actifs, recently retired from directing an occupational health organization located in Paris. Previously she worked as a journalist and public relations consultant in France and in South Africa . She holds a degree in professional coaching from the Paris 8 University and is a member of the Association European de Coaching and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council. Contact her at moiraallan@yahoo.fr.

Linda Beeman is an award-winning non-fiction writer and poet living on Whidbey Island in Puget Sound. She is the author of *Wallace, Idaho* — a chapbook of poems celebrating the history of her gritty silver-mining hometown. Her poems have been published in *Windfall: A Journal of Poetry of Place*, Colorado Mesa University's *Pinyon*, and online at Adanna and the University of Chicago's *Euphony Journal*. Her exploratory travel articles have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Foreign Service Journal*. She researches and writes extensively about antique textiles from South and Southeast Asia and believes that curiosity extends the cat's life.

Margaret Bendet, an award-winning writer and editor, teaches classes in memoir. For nine years the chief interviewer for an international oral history collection, she specializes in drawing out people's best stories, helping them present those stories effectively and contemplate what the stories mean to them. Margaret has a degree in journalism from Northwestern



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Molly Brewer lives on Whidbey Island near Seattle, Washington, where she tends her woodland garden, hikes, works as a physical therapist specializing in craniosacral therapy, and travels as much as possible in her T@DA. She is currently exploring and becoming a “Mama sin dolo,” one of a global group of older women dedicated to nurturing “beyond pain” toward healing and wholeness.

Earl Cooper is an Elder of the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe in Tokeland, WA. He has been a traveler on the Ring of Fire — raised in Alaska, schooled at UCLA (Oriental Languages), further educated at the University of Hawai'i (Chinese Literature and fiction writing), then hired as a full-time Language Specialist at a university in Japan. He spent all the 80s teaching in what was then the Land of the Rising Yen, while learning about Buddhism (being Mindful) and Japan's fondness for ritual and ceremony (many dress shirts and neckties in his wardrobe), plus using Japan as a springboard for photo expeditions to China and Asia (learning how to travel light). Later, he returned to Seattle and for 15 years taught language and computer skills in the Edmonds Community College program for Immigrants and Refugees (most fulfilling job ever and no tie needed). Now that he is an elder and retired, he splits his time between the West Coast and the Far East.

Kendall Dudley became forever fascinated by Islam and Islamic architecture after a stint in the Peace Corp in Iran. His work, however, took him into the field of career and life design, that grew to include teaching, life story



Molly Brewer



Earl Cooper



Kendall Dudley

writing, painting, leading programs in life direction using writing and art, stinting at Harvard for 15 years, presenting at national conferences, winning grants for his public art and social justice projects, and leading life-direction programs to Morocco. He runs Lifeworks Career & Life Design in Belmont, MA (kendalldudley.com) where he has a private practice while also consulting to myriad organizations. Because he trades in new ideas, he's drawn to adventures that lead him to them.

Jan Hively lives up to her personal credo of pursuing meaningful work, "through the last breath." After a career in government and education, Hively received her PhD from the University of Minnesota in 2001 at age 69. Then she co-founded three organizations dedicated to empowering older adults: the Vital Aging Network, ArtsAge, and SHiFT. Now living on Cape Cod, Jan has recently focused on engaging older adult leadership through two projects: 1) ALPA, an on-line advocacy leadership training program for service providers; and 2) PassItOnNetwork.org, spreading programs developed for and by active agers around the world, co-founded with Moira Allan. Contact Jan at HIVEL001@umn.edu.

Kurt Hoelting is an Alaskan wilderness guide, meditation teacher, and climate activist with a passion for adventure and a lifelong commitment to the restoration of our planet home. He lives on an island in Puget Sound and is the author of *The Circumference of Home: One Man's Yearlong Quest for a Radically Local Life*.

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Since an early age, **Lois Mathews** has enjoyed drawing with a pencil or painting with watercolors; since retirement her interest in painting has renewed. Her daily exercise is taking short and long walks on Whidbey Island, where she lives. She likes to share her impressions. The discovery of creating journals with watercolors has been her most enjoyable learning experience with paints. Her goal is to continue painting lifelong and creating watercolor journals of her life journeys. Check out her blogs: lois-sceneonwhidbey.blogspot.com and bilomathewsblog.wordpress.com

Ron Pevny, M.A., recognized his calling as a wilderness rite of passage guide in 1979 and ever since has been dedicated to assisting people in negotiating life transitions and creating lives of purpose and passion. He co-created the Choosing Conscious Elderhood retreats in 2002, is founder and Director of the Center for Conscious Eldering, and is a Certified Sageing® Leader. His life coaching practice is focused on individuals over 50 who are committed to aging consciously. He also developed and co-leads “Meeting Ancient Wisdom” pilgrimages to experience the indigenous wisdom of Tarahumara (Raramuri) elders in Copper Canyon, Mexico. Ron’s forthcoming book on conscious eldering, *Beyond Words*, will be published in early 2014 by Simon and Schuster.

Jan Phillips is a writer and retreat director who connects the dots between creativity, spirituality, and social action. Her most recent books include *No Ordinary Time: The Rise of Spiritual Intelligence and Evolutionary Creativity*; *The Art of Original Thinking: The Making of a Thought Leader*; *Divining the Body*; *God Is at Eye Level: Photography as a Healing Art*; and *Marry Your Muse: Making a Lasting Commitment to Your Creativity*. She has taught in over 25 countries, and her work appears in many newspapers and journals. Sign



Lois Mathews



Ron Pevny



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up for her monthly newsletter, see her books, CDs, videos, and learn more about her Livingkindness Foundation at janphillips.com.

John C. Robinson, Ph.D., D.Min., is a clinical psychologist with a second doctorate in ministry, an ordained interfaith minister, and the author of seven books on the interface of psychology and spirituality. His recent works include *The Three Secrets of Aging*; *Bedtime Stories for Elders: What Fairy Tales Can Teach Us About the New Aging*; and *What Aging Men Want: Homer's Odyssey as a Parable of Male Aging*. You can learn more about John at johnrobinson.org.

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Marlene Schiwy

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John G. Sullivan, a native of Newport, Rhode Island, is Powell Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Elon University and Elon's first Distinguished University Professor. He is a long-time participant in the work of Tai Sophia Institute in Laurel, Maryland, where he continues to teach. He is active exploring issues in the spirituality of later life through his work with Second Journey. John is author of four books; his two most recent — *The Spiral of the Seasons: Welcoming the Gifts of Later Life* (2009) and *The Fourfold Path to Wholeness: A Compass for the Heart* (2010) — are published by Second Journey. His newest book, *Integral Living*, will be released in the fall of



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2013. His abiding interest is the place where philosophy, psychology, and spirituality — East, West, and beyond — intersect and mutually enhance one another. His regular contributions to *Itineraries* may be viewed at secondjourney.org/JohnsCorner.htm.

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ABOUT SECOND JOURNEY

Second Journey is among a small number of emerging social-change organizations helping birth a new vision of the rich possibilities of later life...

- to open new avenues for individual growth and spiritual deepening
- to birth a renewed ethic of service and mentoring in later life
- to create new model communities — and new models OF community — for later life, and
- to marshal the distilled wisdom and experience of elders to address the converging crises of our time

Captured in the shorthand of our logo... *Mindfulness, Service and Community in the Second Half of Life.*

We pursue this mission through publications, including our online magazine, *Itineraries*, and occasional book releases; through workshops and Visioning Councils with their focus on the challenges of Creating Community in Later Life; and through the rich resources on our Web site.

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