

Memorial for Jim Briggs

Part 1 of 2

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To give a brief statement of the events in the life of the deceased. I shall do that a little later; but first I wish to read a letter sent to Mrs. Helen Briggs by a young and brilliant philosopher:

Though it must pass for a time from our vision, that anything is immortal in this life of ours, it is the beauty of love and fellowship. What, after all, did we love in Jim? Not what was visible so much as what was never visible. And what have we lost? Only the visible—he is invisible now, but then, he always was. What we loved and still love is neither nearer nor further than it ever was; it is the invisible that is important. I know that you believe this, as I do, yet you must feel as Wadsworth said at his daughter's death, but "oh, the difference to me." I want you to please believe that you and Jim are again and again in my thoughts with a prayer of gratitude.

Preliminary to the review of Jim's life, I wish to say some words on the subject of death and these are thoughts with which Jim Briggs fully concurred. And indeed, I shall lay more emphasis upon the thought of Jim than upon the physical events of the sensuous life. Death is to be considered in two senses—the physical and the psychical. The physical death is that which the physician knows; but death is also a psychical event, and its meaning concerns us far more than the physical event. There are differences of philosophic opinion here, but upon the basis of long study and of much evidence, we hold—and Jim held—that the psychical entity was an inhabitant of a habitation. As Plato held of yore, and as Sri Aurobindo reaffirmed in our own day, and thus we reject the psychosomatic hypothesis of Aristotle, where the fall of the body implies the fall of the psyche. This is not based upon a blind belief, or merely upon the words of the wise, but there is a certain basis of verification and I shall present something of that basis.

There is another sense in which we may speak of three forms of death: the little death, which is falling to sleep, in which nearly everybody participates at least once every twenty-four hours; then there is the middle death, this when the psyche departs from the physical body and is the one which we are honoring now; and then there is the rarer but greatest death of all, that known as the mystical death, which is the highest fulfillment possible—as yet known to but few, but ultimately to be known to all. Another factor to take into account in the study of the subject of death is that it is a great error to view it as the opposite of life, and so viewing it indeed is the very factor that makes it seem tragic to most people. Death is not the opposite of life, it is the opposite of birth; it is part of a process which is part and parcel of life itself. There is no death without a birth, and there is no birth without a death. When a child is born, it leaves the prenatal life, dies there, to

be born here; and when one dies here, as we shall see more completely later, we awaken and are born on the other side. And when we speak of the mystical death, it is but one side, the obverse side of which—the reverse side of the coin—is the mystical birth to an incommunicable and inexpressible glory.

Dr. Carl G. Jung has said of death that one side is brutal, the side of the parting, but the other side, which he to know before he finally passed in, is one of a noble marriage, a glory. Now I have been able to gather some testimony throughout this life from individuals who have gone part way through the dying process, but were brought back—usually very much against their will. This is the testimony that is in common: when they depart, psychically, from a dying physical body before it is completely passed away, and then, the reported experiences of this sort—that they find themselves in space, not supported upon a tangible medium like a floor or earth, but just dwelling in space, and that the experience is so inexpressively delightful that again and again, when by the ministrations of aid that was in time they were brought back into their bodies, they resented it and even fought the effort to bring them back. The last person who told me of an experience of this sort did so on Sunday before last, as we were on our way here from California. It was a case where he had been in an accident, severe one, as a child of eleven: his leg was crushed, there had been suturing of arteries, as well as placing the leg in a cast after straightening it; but the sutures broke, and there was bleeding, and he found himself drawn in, and he fought it. But in spite of himself, he was drawn over what it called the hump, and then he said it was the most magnificent thing he ever knew. In time nurses found the condition, quick surgery closed the sutures, and he was drawn back, fighting again just as hard as he fought in the first place, not to come back.

We get some knowledge of this through the testimony of individuals who have gone part way through the process, not too far. There are, however, other means of tracing the process. A few individuals have a developed capacity called clairvoyant perception, which can cross over into other zones of our life or consciousness, but can only trace what is on the other side part way. There are also those, who have testified to me, a memory of past experiences of death in other lives, and here is what appears to be the case: that just beyond this realm, there is what might be called an intermediate zone from which it is possible to have returned, as in the cases of these were the service of the doctor made it possible, or in the case of more evolved entities, can be achieved by the appropriate act of will. This intermediate zone is not a place where lingering should take place; they ultimately leave, or should leave, this zone and then go on into a realm that is not easily traceable. The word is that Jim has so gone on; otherwise, he might be listening here now.

In August of 1914, I was at a small community about fifteen miles south of the town of San Luis Obispo, a place called Halcyon. There was a cornfield between the post office there and a place of certain residences nearby. Once walking from the post office, I met Jim as a child, scarcely six-years old, for the first time. He was a highly introverted child—shy, recessive. His mother had separated from his father, and she was at that time, living in this little town of Halcyon near the Pacific Ocean. During the war—First World War—while I was in the Spruce Production Division in Washington, Jim's mother

divorced his father. And in 1920, Sarah and I were married. Those of us who have known her in more recent years have known her as Sherifa, a title given to her by Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, the leader then of the Western Sufi Movement; and that is the name by which I shall speak of her.

Jim, in his early schooling, suffered as usually the more introverted children do suffer, by the bullying of more extroverted children. As a matter of fact in those days, you would hardly have picked his career as being that of a successful manager; you might have thought of him as potentially an artist because he was an exceptionally sensitive child. In 1922, Sherifa and I and Jim with us, moved to San Fernando where we purchased an orchard, orange orchard, and this will come into the story a little later. Jim, part of the time, was with his father in Los Angeles, part of the time with us. He did not take hold too well in the public high school, and was finally sent by his father to a private school at Los Gatos south of San Francisco, not too far from San Jose. There he made a chum, friend, and that will play a portion in the continuing story.

After he left high school, there was a time that he was virtually a dropout—had no ambition for any particular future activity, did not care to go on to college. Now here are certain steps that play an important part in this early phase of this one who became a general manager. In 1927, a Dr. and Mrs. Strong, Sherifa, Jim and myself took a month's trip into the Southwest country. This involved the north side of the Grand Canyon, the crossing of the ferry over the Colorado River, going over the Mormon Dugway, which was something of the trial in those days; over to Chinle, Cayenta Bluff, Mesa Verde, back across through Cedar Breaks and Bryce Canyon, and then up to Tonopah, Nevada. Here is [where] the father of his chum lived. His father was the manager of a mine at Tonopah Extension, six or seven miles out of Tonopah proper. He took Jim and myself, and this is the point, out to see his mine. At that time there was a strike so it was is not operating, but it was possible to get down in it, and we went down in it, and that fascinated Jim. We also saw the operations of another mine in Tonopah, they were still taking out silver, we saw the reduction processes and the rest. This gave Jim something of interest. In 1928, Sherifa and I went on a lecture tour involving several cities, and we had an orange orchard; and we gave Jim the task, and he accepted it, of taking care of that orchard while we were away. And that turned the trick—he was not a child of the soil, a natural agriculturalist, and he saw that if he did not complete his education, the prospect ahead was not very bright. And from that moment he took hold. His interest in mining had been awakened at Tonopah, so he chose the Colorado School of Mines, rather than a regular academic education, and graduated from there in due course—I think it was either 1932 or 33. This part that I have covered so far is probably known to no one else directly than myself, for both of his parents have gone on, but from this point on, others know the story.

He found in Denver a girl that very greatly interested him and neither one wanted to chance opposition from parents, so they were—on their own—quietly married. I remember the day a little later, they didn't know the blessing, or the criticism, of Jim's mother. They need not have worried, for Jim's mother instantly approved of his selection. That was in the depths of the Great Depression; at that time Sherifa and myself were up

in the mother lode country, where several thousand others had gone, for a gleaning of the possible gold that might be left by the 49ers. There was very little left, but a good many did not go on free handouts because of that gold. Jim and Helen came there briefly; meanwhile, he sought employment in his field—a very bad time, mines were not employing. He did however get an offer from the Alasko-Juneau mine; they were employing only engineering graduates, not for engineering jobs, but for even the humblest jobs possible, working with a muck stick, or shovel in our ordinary terminology. I don't know that he was a very long on a muck stick; he was very soon in charge of a room which was part of their mining methods there, and went on from that, but he was not engaged in his prepared field of engineering. In 1936 and while there, their first child Doroethy, was born. And I remember when in 1936, they came down, came out to our place in the car, and Doroethy was in a little sort of seat, the back of the automobile seat, and she was keeping her counsel and not telling anybody anything about it.

From that he went on to Jerome, Arizona, where he got employment as an engineer in the United Verde mine. He did not work so very long there before he was called into the military service, as he was in the reserve. However, there he made a decision, which he told me, to shift from engineering to production, and that proved to be a fateful decision. That the engineering opportunity led more or less to a dead end, as chief engineer, but the production could lead on to a more ample professional future. However he was called away by the Army and was absent for some five years; then returning first to Jerome, where he was told that the mine was winding up—they were pulling the pillars at that time—it had no more future, and that he should seek employment elsewhere. So he went to Morenci and there he got employment, and so did his close friend, Peter Geshell. At first so he told me he was in charge of the blasting gang that handled the large boulders that were too large for the shovels, and he introduced a method of mud-shooting, which while it takes ten times as much explosive reduces labor costs substantially, and the move was approved of by the mine. He became next, assistant shift manager (shift boss), then shift boss; later was transferred back to his engineering field, was assistant chief engineer in charge of the mine at the time; he made certain innovations in locomotive design and certain other features with which I'm not now familiar, which proved to be even more economic than his prognosis had been, and such moves are approved by the high command in the mine.

He was later, when there was an opening at Ajo, transferred; I was told over four who would normally have had prior right, to Ajo. First as assistant mine superintendent, in which he was somewhat tested as to whether he could handle the diplomatic problem involved. For instance, there was a mine foreman who was quite competent in his field but have no capacity for paperwork, which disqualified him for the position of mine superintendent. Jim apparently, very quickly, had a harmonious relationship with this mine foreman; very soon he was promoted to mine superintendent. But he held that position not too long before they promoted him to general superintendent, a position which is not constant, or was not constant at Ajo at that time, but only when they are preparing one for still further promotion. In due course, he was promoted to general

manager. And I suppose those of you who come from Ajo have known him in that position.

Through him I have come to know and meet a good many of the mine people of Phelps Dodge Company, at Jerome, and at the other mines, and I came to know a good deal of how Jim was valued. Jim proved competent in his field, but more than that, I have found evidences of a real warmth of feeling from those who knew him—both from those who were above him in the line of command and those who were below him. He seemed to him a sympathetic rapport with the labor side, as well as a rapport with those above him. Only yesterday I met the two top officials of Phelps Dodge, who had come out, who came here, to see Helen, the widow of Jim Briggs—the president and the vice president.

But about six years ago, Jim contracted the ailment that is so common with middle-zone executives—stomach ulcers. This is something that is evidence of concern, worrying concerning the problems; it is even called the executive's disease. I have not heard that politicians are subject to this ailment. It testifies to a depth of concern upon management that would seem to transcend the concern of the politician. There are ways that one may handle such problems, it is true. But my present wife and I were over at the time of his operation, and after that he no longer felt willing to go back to the problems of his job. And he told me those problems were not the problems of the mine, but the problems of the community in the company town, essentially irrational problems. So he took early retirement at the age of sixty, had already acquired this residence, and those years he spent partly in travel, partly in study.

And it is this period, a little less than six years, where he and myself came together in closest rapport. Here was the mature thinker, totally different from the child of 1914, capable of clear thought, clear judgment, and capable of decision. Now the function of decision is very different from the function of the technologist. The technologist deals with the problems that are essentially knowable, and usually the technologist, and that means the engineer and the scientist, go as far as they can in dealing with the knowable elements and then wash their hands of the job, turnover their results to the men that have to make decisions. But the man who makes decisions deals not only with the knowables, but with an estimation of the unknowables. To be sure, our scientific development has driven back further and further the range of the knowables, but by no means always, and so in every decision that is a real decision there is involved the daring with respect to that which you do not know and cannot know. The successful executive is the one who estimates predominantly correctly with respect to these unknowables. It is flair, not teachable; it also calls for courage, for where one does not know, he may be wrong and this principle is recognized and the man is allowed to be wrong, at least to a reasonable degree. But the executive remains an executive who is right most of the time. This implies a certain intuitive capacity, a capacity to evaluate that which you cannot completely know and with respect to the future. Jim had this capacity, in substantial degree, and he had the courage to dare in decision. But, the wear and tear of that is revealed in the stomach ulcers. The way of a man of decision is not an easy way; yet this sad world needs those men in rare degree.

Jim's last years, around five and six spent here, were devoted to philosophic interest, and here he and I became closer together than ever. There is a zone, not too well known, that belongs to the very depths of religion itself. What was it that happened when Buddha was enlightened under the Bodhi tree, and from that moment there began the greatest religious development of all time? What was it that happened when Sri Aurobindo had fundamental realization, this virtually in our own day? This is the field of interest that was fundamental to Jim Briggs in his last few years. And much to my surprise and gratification, within the last few months I have learned that there are serious scientists becoming concerned in this same field.

Recently I read an article by Stanley Dean, a professor of psychiatry in the medical schools of Florida and Miami. This article was in the journal, *Fields within Fields within Fields*.¹ In that article, there is a list of twelve aphorisms, which he calls "psychic aphorisms"; now this covers material which in other language would be essentially familiar with one was a student of Buddhist sutras, of Vedanta shastras, and of the mystical side of the Ben Israel religions known of as Judaism, Christianity and Moslemism; but here the scientific mind is now interested and note this well. First, faith is not fantasy; it is a form of precognition that has divined for countless years what science is just beginning to understand. Second, science and mysticism are fraternal twins, long separated, but now on the verge of reunion. Three, psychogeny recapitulates cosmogeny; namely, the developing mind includes an innate awareness of the origin and meaning of the universe. That is a new statement of the old formula, the microcosm reproduces the macrocosm. Fourth, evolution is not homogeneous but proceeds in two different streams: mental and physical; mental evolution is far ahead of physical. Five, the ultraconscious state bridges the evolutionary gap and produces cosmic awareness. Six, psi power is latent in all and an experiential reality to many. [Seven], thought is a form of energy, it has universal field properties, which like gravitational and magnetic fields are amenable to scientific research. Eighth, thought-fields, like the theoretical "tachyon" can interact, traverse space and penetrate matter, more or less instantaneously. Nine, thoughts-fields survive death and are analogous to soul and spirit. Ten, thought-fields are eternal; hence, past existence (reincarnation) is as valid a concept as future immortality. Remember, this is a scientist speaking. Eleven, psychic research is on a par with other important courses of study; it should be included in academic curricula, and lead to degrees and doctorates. Twelve, a new age is dawning—the Psychic Age—on the heels of the Atomic Age and Space Age.

This is stated in a different language than what is usually done, but is essentially material that has been known in the nonscientific world, not only for centuries, but millennia, but in another terminology. It is in the field of religion in the deepest sense of the word, not religion as institution, but religion as immediate experience. This outlines the ultimate goal of man; few have attained it as yet, but it is in principle possible to all. I'm expressing here thought with which Jim Briggs heartedly agreed, and especially in his last years, he was devoted to the goal here at last presented in scientific terms by a scientist. In my opinion, his greatest years were his last years where he won the affection

¹ Stanley R. Dean, "Metapsychiatry: The Confluence of Psychiatry and Mysticism," *Fields Within Fields* 10 (winter 1973/74): 3-11.

and confidence of a number of students who were going the same way, and valued leadership that was strong and wise.