

Autobiographical Material: My Life with Gertrude (Part 1)

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This tape I shall call, "My Life with Gertrude." This will be a contribution to the biographical tapes of which two are to be found in the tape numbered Z₁.¹

I first met Gertrude on what I believe was the last lecture trip which Sherifa and I took to Chicago. The date of this trip has been lost from my memory, but I believe it must have been just before 1950, as in 1950 Sherifa was for the last time able to go to the camp in the Sierra Nevada where we had been building an *ashram*, and I doubt that she was able to take a trip to Chicago after that date.²

During the period from the latter part of 1950 up to 1956, Sherifa and I remained in San Fernando in the house that we had built there in the late 1920s and the early '30s. We gave some lectures there during the period between 1950 and 1956 at which time we had sold some of the property for subdivision and were in a position to make a move. Sherifa had long desired to live near the sea and we now had an opportunity to move to Santa Barbara, which we did on the 21st of June 1956. The period in Santa Barbara was brief. Sherifa's health deteriorated. She was able to enjoy the life there only to a limited extent. She was able to ride in the car to a degree, but I had to carry certain medical preparations at all times when taking a trip with her. Sometime in 1958, she had deteriorated so far as to be bed bound and ultimately passed in on the 23rd day of February 1959.

Sometime during this period, while Sherifa was still able to travel in the car, Gertrude and a friend of hers by the name of Florence had come out to Santa Barbara to see us, and this was the second time I had a contact with her. I liked her, but was in no respect strongly drawn to her; and at least of all did I foresee that I should ultimately marry her. Only within the last year or so did I learn that Sherifa was much more clairvoyant than I was, for one of the students told me that Sherifa had said to her that I would ultimately marry Gertrude after the passing of Sherifa herself.

During the last six years of living in San Fernando, we became acquainted with a hypnotherapist by the name of Herman Graves. He was far from an ordinary individual, for he had clairvoyant capacity. He gave a series of treatments to Sherifa, and he ultimately became a friend of the family. He will come into the picture later.

Now, during the later months of Sherifa's illness, she was continuously on oxygen. At one time she tried to withdraw the oxygen from her because at that time it was one of those devices that covered the mouth considerably. Later we had a better means, but she tended to pull it off, and I was insisting upon her keeping it on. This had been seen by Herman Graves clairvoyantly, and he accused me of keeping her alive when she wanted to go in. And in point of fact, I was doing everything I could to maintain her

¹ Wolff is referring here to the autobiographical recordings dated July 6, 1978.

² The last series of lectures given in Chicago was in October and November 1951.

life. The situation was this way. We had one practical nurse who came in the morning to the late middle afternoon who took over her care, during which time I could attend to such business as I had on the local property itself or in connection with the care of two apartment houses which had been acquired in order to increase income sufficiently to meet the costs of Sherifa's care.

A Mary Miller from Chicago had come out to help and she handled the necessary cooking, general preparation of meals, and the care of the house, and she also filled in in the care of Sherifa after the nurse left at the close of her period. I slept in the same room as Sherifa and assumed the care during the night as far as possible. I did try to sustain Sherifa in every possible way that I could, including the use of personal energy. And I spoke to her about it and said that we would do everything to keep her alive as long as she wished to live. It seems that in some way I was using energy of a personal sort which apparently did have a sustaining capacity as the sequel may show.

On the 21st of February 1959, the nurse found certain dark spots on one of the limbs of Sherifa which she suspected were gangrene. This was verified by the doctor who came later. I accompanied him to the door as he left and asked, "This is impossible, is it not?" And his answer was, "We have had many impossibilities in this case." I knew that gangrene called for amputation and that this would be an impossible thing in connection with Sherifa; so I withdrew, deliberately, the support I gave her, and on the 23rd of February 1959, she passed in. I had arranged to keep her in a state of lying for twenty-four hours to which both the mortuary officials and the doctor had agreed. At the end of that time her body was taken by the mortuary people and put into refrigeration. The fact that she passed in within twenty-four hours after I withdrew support tends to confirm that I was, in fact, supplying an energy that was keeping her alive. Within a couple of days we had the funeral service. I officiated at it and also at graveside. Her relatives had come and they remained a day or two and then left; and I felt then, for the first time, the full impact of this tragic development.

The first feature that I noted was a wish to die myself. I spoke of this to the doctor and suggested that it might tend to make me accident prone in driving the car. He agreed with me. I also conferred with Herman Graves, as I remember, and he suggested, also as I remember, that I should take a woman with me if I drove any distance. The purpose of this was that the having present a woman would tend to make me protective with respect to her safety and thus overcome the tendency to accident; and so it proved. I did not take a trip of any distance thereafter, except once, without a woman along with me. The one exception was a trip I took with my sister who lived at Santa Barbara and wanted to visit some friends in Carmel. I took her up there and returned alone. At one point in the return trip I found myself speeding, which is not at all characteristic of my driving. I also noted through the rearview mirror that there was a police officer a substantial distance in the rear. This led me to slow down gradually so that by the time he caught up with me, I was driving within speed limits. At that time I had not been aware of the fact that there was a suicidal tendency that was in myself that was the result of something that had been done in past lives. It seems that, from what I have heard, that I have within myself, though the method is not known to this personality, the capacity to cut off life-force by the act of will. This has been detected by others who will appear later in this account.

The second feature that I noted was an enantiodromia. The word ‘enantiodromia’ is a psychological term meaning a transition in an individual from one type psychology to another. I was clearly a thinking type oriented to the introverted attitude, with intuition the auxiliary function. I saw myself shifting over from thinking to feeling. I had already learned enough of psychology to know that the wise thing to do was to cooperate with this shift, and I was able to divert it into an interest in music. The result was that I secured quite a number of records over time and played them very heavily. Particularly, I found that the operas of Wagner were especially effective, and the result was that we ultimately acquired all of them that were published in record form; and the program that we initiated involved the playing of virtually all of his operas in one week’s time and then repeating the operation later. By this means, I affected a control of the enantiodromia. I recovered the capacity and general orientation to thinking; though, as a general fact, music came to play a large part in our lives. Gertrude, with whom I became associated later, had been orientated to music and was even professional in the field, in that she had been a teacher; and we were fortunate enough to be oriented to the same type of music, namely, that which is generally called the classical—or rather true art music, for we did not exclude the romantic type of music such as that of Wagner’s operas.

The third feature was in the form of a precipitation into a state of desolation. This happened a few times. The first time it happened, I had been at one of the apartment houses attending to some chores. And then when I got back into my car, the precipitation of desolation took place. Now, this is not an easy state to define. It has these characteristics: the sap of life has disappeared entirely, everything seems desolate, and even the memory is clouded. As I sat in that car, I didn’t know how to return to my home, although I had been over the course many times. I ultimately succeeded by being aware of the fact that I remembered the first part of the course to my home, and so I started driving along that way; and before I came to a point where I would normally turn, I remembered the turn, and so on until I finally managed to arrive home. There is a certain figure that suggests something of this state. On the return from our second trip to Alaska several years later, we passed through an area where a forest fire had raged a short time before. All the trees were black, and the ground was covered with ashes, and there wasn’t a living thing anywhere. And that placed me in a state that was similar to this one of desolation, though not so strong. And so I would use the figure of a recently burned forest to suggest, in physical terms, what this state is like. It is simply horrible.

The fourth feature was an experience that was very strange and seemed to be fraught with lethal possibilities. I found myself, after the passing of Sherifa, afflicted with a sense of bleeding. It was not a bleeding of ordinary blood, but a subtle kind of bleeding. The impression I had was that it was a flowing away of the life principle itself. How this should arise is a question for which I have not found, as yet, a completely satisfactory answer. I have thought of it as being related to my effort to keep her alive, but it may have other bearings. It seems to me to have been in some way connected with what is involved in bio-symbiosis. There are cases in the vegetable world where two plants that are quite unrelated are interdependent. I understand this is true of reindeer moss, that one part of the plant, one kind, may supply the roots, for instance, and the other, may supply a higher portion. One form of it is parasitism, as in the case of mistletoe growing on oak trees. In any case, these ideas are simply speculations. Perhaps something connected with the relationship between Sherifa and myself may throw some light upon it.

We were drawn together for the work when we were associated with a Theosophical group. There were certain symbols that were received by Sherifa at the time that implied that we were predestined, as it were, to associate ourselves for the work. And in point of fact, we married simply to render this association for the work more feasible, and not for biological reasons. She was eleven and a half years older than I was, and, although I was intellectually stronger than she was, yet in the general field of human relationships, in the field of social life and the like, she was definitely more mature than I was; and the result of this was that she automatically put a pressure upon me to mature more rapidly. Actually, in social relations and in general life relations, women tend to mature more rapidly than men, and when the woman is older than the man, this feature is amplified. It was not an easy situation for me. I felt myself under a certain pressure to develop, and only toward the end was I the one who was fully in command of the situation when she began to deteriorate. I have seen nothing in literature, and I have heard nothing from any individual, that would throw a light upon this phenomenon. But in any case, the impression I had was that the bleeding was a threat to life itself. And for a time, I studied as to whether I should let this develop and accept termination myself. I was already seventy-two years of age.

Now, there is another curious feature. I also found that when I was near to certain women, only a few out of the whole, the bleeding stopped. The nurse we had was one such. When I was near her, the bleeding stopped. On the other hand, when I was near to Mary Miller, there was no affect upon the bleeding. And here is where Herman Graves came into the picture. He seemed to have some appreciation of the problem and was aware of the fact that certain women had the effect of closing the bleeding, and that the implication was that I would have to become associated with some other woman who had the capacity, somehow, that by her presence alone, when physically near me, the bleeding stopped. Herman Graves accepted this as valid, and he even brought out one young woman as a candidate for such an association. She did have the effect of stopping the bleeding, but she already belonged to another quasi-religious group called the Fountain of the World. I did go over to her headquarters where this group lived and became acquainted with them. She apparently was willing to be associated with me, but she was also religiously committed and there was an incompatibility between her religious orientation and my own, and that rendered the relationship impractical. There was one or two married women who, when they were near to me, also stopped the bleeding, and this led to a formulation of a rule that a person whom I would select would have to be free and uncommitted, in other words, available. I never suggested to a married woman association with me, for obvious reasons. And, also, they had to be entirely willing. So I was seeking someone who would be a companion for me who qualified in three respects: they had to have the power to stop the bleeding when they were associated with me; she also had to be available, that is, uncommitted to something else, such as a husband, a different religious organization, or other than that; and third, had to be entirely willing to come with me. I found no one, of those that I knew in the West, who qualified in all three respects. I preferred that the one that would be selected should be one that was already associated with our work. We had at the time an active group in Chicago, and since I had had no success in finding a companion here in the West, in due course a trip was made to Chicago in the search for a possible companion.

In due course Mary Miller and I packed up the car and left for Chicago. The status of the estate was such that we could be away for a time. As I remember, we left in July and took the Lincoln Highway across southern Wyoming, and passing through Nebraska, arrived in Chicago; and I was a guest at the Miller home there. That evening Eugene Sedwick, who is an old and highly appreciated associate, brought out three women, who to my eye at the age of seventy-two seemed to be young women, although they probably were of middle age. He brought a Florence Hellsper; Francis, whose last name, I think, was Fulture; and Gertrude Adams. The impact of these three women was very strong. They evidently all had the power to stop the bleeding. The result was that I dealt with the problem individual by individual. Florence was married and had a family; therefore, she was automatically eliminated. Although curiously enough, she later said to me she could handle that problem. I took the matter up with Francis first at a lunch which we had. I suggested the association with me, but she said she was committed to another problem and was not, therefore, available. So finally, I went to Gertrude. She had only a job as a commitment and that she could resign from. She was willing, and she had the full capacity to stop the bleeding. So I suggested to her that she should come out with me to California and spend a month living with me to determine whether it was a satisfactory relationship. She didn't seem to think that she needed the month; but, in any case, I insisted upon it. So she resigned from her work, which was with the Park District and it was a very nice job, and came with Mary Miller and myself back to California.

We took a more northern route than usual, passing through southern South Dakota, and saw the artwork in some of the rocks where the features of Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson are exhibited. We passed through Wyoming at a most northern route, spent a night at Billings, Montana, entered the Yellowstone Park through the northeast entrance, which is the most spectacular of all since you rise to 11,000 feet on that entrance. We saw the bears, and Old Faithful, and ultimately arrived in Santa Barbara. Gertrude had a small Bell and Howell moving picture camera which she used on this trip, and this became a suggestion for a practice which we followed for many years. When we made other trips, we always took along the camera and have pictures of all of them. In fact we have something like thirty hours of travel pictures stored away. We returned to Santa Barbara and there we continued to live until the estate was closed and finally probated.

I forgot to mention that when we left Yellowstone and the Grand Teton Parks, we passed through southern Idaho, or the potato area of Idaho, and stopped at a small village where the former teacher of Gertrude during her childhood of the playing of the piano lived. They had a happy reunion for a few hours; then, after that, we returned to California by routes that have vanished from my memory.

This may be an appropriate time to say something upon the nature of the search upon which I had been engaged. I was not seeking a wife because I was in love with some woman. On the contrary, I was seeking a companion who would render it possible to continue the work upon which I had been engaged. Naturally, she had to be someone who was sufficiently interested in that work to make the contribution. I did not know who the woman might be when I entered upon the search. It was simply a matter of seeking until I found one who could, by her presence and association with me, stop the

bleeding, who had no obligations that prevented her from making that association, and was perfectly willing to do it.

I did not know who it might be when I started on the search, but ultimately, in the seeking I found Gertrude, and this proved to be a very fortunate relationship. It seemed that we saw eye-to-eye politically. We also had similar tastes in the field of the musical art in which she was more or less professional. Also, she was psychologically similar to myself, for she was introverted as I was. Her mind was active. She, unlike most women, might be called a thinking type or at least more of a thinking type than is the rule. She loved the mountains, which almost rise from our backyard here in the Lone Pine area where we live at 6,000 feet near the top of the alluvial fan—she loved them; and she did not seem to mind the relative solitude in which we lived. There are other associates on this ground at distances of up to a mile from us. They come to see us from time to time; but despite that, the larger portion of the life here is solitary and that did not seem to bother her. Some temperaments would find it too difficult to endure. She was devoted to the work and to myself. All of this is an improbable combination. It was a matter of the very finest good fortune that we came together. It led to a frictionless life in our association.

When I went to see her in July of 1959 to seek for her association with me, I found her living on the second floor, front, of an old McCormick mansion. She had two rooms, a kitchenette, and a bathroom, and the place was not far north of the Chicago loop. The presentation was, essentially, in rational terms. I was not in love with her. I liked her and approved of her, and, so far as I know, she was not in love with me. But I was the remaining head of the association to which she had become affiliated. She accepted what I suggested to her at once. Now, this was an arrangement that was handled essentially on rational terms. While love had not yet been born within me for her, it was not long before it did come to life and grew until the end of the association on May 28th of this year. After 19 years of utterly frictionless association, and she had become my best beloved disciple, my *shakti*, and one who had come to occupy a deep place in my heart.

The month of trial passed quickly in Santa Barbara. At the end of that month, Gertrude still wished to go with me. She was not only willing, but seemed to be glad to go with me. I then devised a symbolic service to constitute our real marriage. This was attended by all of the associated members who were anywheres near. But, I felt that we should also satisfy the requirements of Caesar, and planned to have a civil wedding. For this we went over to Ajo in Arizona. My stepson, James A. Briggs, was at the time general superintendent of a large mine owned by the Phelps Dodge Corporation that was located at Ajo. We were guests in the mine superintendent's house while we were there. We complied with the legal requirements preliminary to a marriage that are imposed by the state of Arizona. We duly secured the license for our marriage and were married by a justice of the peace in the home of James and Helen Briggs. We spent the first night there, then started on our return to Santa Barbara, spending the second night at Yuma in southwestern Arizona. During the night Gertrude uttered a scream. She had awakened from a dream in which she saw me leaning out of a window and falling. What this may mean, I do not know. We ultimately arrived at Santa Barbara.

Now, throughout our whole life, we have slept together every night except when one or the other of us was in the hospital. This was important. It had a great deal to do with the healing of the tendency to bleed in a subtle way; however, the relationship was never biological. It was a relationship for the work. Gertrude was twenty-four years younger than myself, and she never resisted my suggestions or my decisions. I would have willingly accepted a questioning of them, but she never seemed desirous of questioning them at all. The harmony was most unusual.

We lingered in Santa Barbara until the estate was finally probated and closed. Part of this was a period in which it took the authorities five months to determine that we owed to the state \$54.00. But in the end, the estate was indeed closed. It had been my plan to go to the ranch that was near to Lone Pine for the final period of life. This ranch had been secured during the time we had been working on the *ashram* as supplementary to it. It consisted of nearly 430 acres on the alluvial fan of the Sierra Nevada—not particularly good from an agricultural point of view or from the standpoint of the pasturage of stock, but it had some running water upon it which rendered it possible to raise some items of food such as fruits and vegetables. In any case, it seemed to me to be a delightful place to live. So when the estate at Santa Barbara was finally closed, we began packing up. I sold one of the apartment houses rather early and ultimately sold the other and the house in which we dwelt, but these transactions took place after we had moved away. We packed the books and other items and ultimately had one of the furniture movers transport them up to the ranch near Lone Pine. There was a small building there where we stored these items. We, ourselves, occupied what is known as the ranch house, the building in which the original owners had lived.

Before leaving Santa Barbara, I purchased a tractor with a bulldozer attachment at the neighboring town not far from Santa Barbara. This was duly delivered, and I employed this tractor to make a flat area. In the end it was on the order of 500 to 600 feet long, and this level was the place where we decided to build our ultimate home. The specific time of our move to the ranch is not now clear in my memory. But it must have been in 1960 in as much as the flat had been bulldozed out and the house, which ultimately became our permanent home, was started in 1961. Gertrude had been happy in Santa Barbara. We lived on a piece of ground that had avocado trees and she was fond of them. Since we could pick them when tree-ripe, it was an experience far better than is normally realized with avocados purchased in the market. We had varieties not found in the market which were superior. But she was also happy with the move to the ranch.

Perhaps this would be a good time to review the effect of the association with Gertrude upon the psychological conditions which were precipitated by the death of Sherifa. It will be remembered that these conditions were as follows: first, a death wish which led to my using certain precautions when driving the car any considerable distance, namely, the taking with me of some woman so that the protective sense would be aroused that would overcome a death wish that might have led to the condition of being accident prone; there was also the experience of desolation which struck a series of times; third, there was an enantiodromia which I handled by introducing a course of listening in large measure to musical performance upon the phonograph; and finally, there was the subtle bleeding. Of these different states, the effect of the association with Gertrude at once destroyed this condition of subtle bleeding. There has been no recurrence of it since, not

even after the passing of Gertrude. The desolation did not recur during the period of the association, and the death wish vanished completely during that period. The elimination of these factors was essential for the production of any further work. Ultimately, after a passing of the preliminary years of association, I became productive again and put out perhaps something on the order of half a million words on tape.

After the passing of Gertrude on last May 28th, the death wish recurred again in a stronger form and is the main problem with which I am dealing at the present time. There was a greater sense of desolation and a repeating of the enantiodromia. And this time it was so strong that to the present day I have not been able to recover the intellectual capacities with which I had been functioning prior to Gertrude's death. But the bleeding has not opened up again. It apparently was completely cured during the period of association with Gertrude.

These are items which I believe have a degree of psychological interest.