

The David Burns Manuscript

Introduction

For more than fifteen years an experiment has been carried out in London to show that people diagnosed psychotic who might otherwise be in mental hospital could live in household of varying types with students, medical student, therapists and various others. I lived in these communities for five years, from early 1970 until late 1975 and was in association with them until late 1977. This is a report on my time there, on the structure of communities, on the experience of living there, and on the philosophy that lay behind it.

A Note on Terminology

I do not use the term anti-psychiatry. I do not put the words schizophrenia or schizophrenic in quotes. The point has been made. I use the words stable and unstable which have less connotations and more relevance. When referring to the typical behavior of a member of the community I use the word he to avoid the awkwardness of he or she.

Households

Kingsley Hall was a massive structure in the East End of London, once a church hall, leased to our group for a shilling a year. This is where the experiment began in its major phase. I spent only two or three months there, as it was closing, and I will concentrate on the communities that succeeded it near Archway, Islington, in North London. I will, however, speak of Kingsley Hall and compare and contrast it with Archway when dealing with various issues.

The group living at Kingsley Hall toward the end had lost cohesiveness and the therapists known as the Philadelphia Association decided, after some hesitation, to continue the experiment with a new group. Only three of us, therefore, moved into the

new community. This consisted of two houses in a deteriorating neighborhood. Since these houses were scheduled for demolition we had to move to new homes of the same nature, again and again. This was difficult and painful but the advantages were that any damage done to the structures was relatively unimportant and that there was somewhat less than the usual necessity for residents to keep up normal standards of behavior on the streets.

At Archway we generally had two or three separate households, each with its own common room, kitchen, and garden. Each resident had his own bedroom, unless a couple chose to live together. We made an effort to provide dinner every night, which would bring most of us together at a different house. Having more than one house had a distinct value. Each household was small, four to six people, although the community was made up of ten to fifteen people. One could visit another house, a different place. If two residents did not get along one of them could move to another house and keep apart.

There were, however, problems. The tendency seemed inevitable that if there were two houses one of them would become the good, clean, happy healing house and the other the bad, dirty, unhappy mad house. This phenomenon occurred several times as we moved from house to house. At one time a model good house became one of the worst of the bad houses. This problem was partially rooted in the management of the communities, to which I will refer later.

One basic idea was that a balance could be created in the community between the numbers of relatively stable and relatively unstable individuals. We were not, however, at the time fully conscious of the importance of this. A bad house was one where all or most of the residents were noisy, disruptive, and disorganized. A good house was one where a

reasonable balance was struck. If we had all lived in a single household this problem could not have arisen in the same way.

Moving in and Moving Out

When we moved into Archway from Kingsley Hall, two of use, including myself, were among the first residents. Another young man left the Hall and arrive after a week at Archway against some resistance, as his behavior could be bizarre, intolerant, and arrogant. I, however, had come to like him very much. He became one of the very few who were actually forced to leave. He had repeatedly refused to pay rent and had claimed a common space as his own. We were undecided about what to do, but the police were called and he was gone before the officer arrived. Another of the few was an older man who spent three days at Kingsley Hall toward its beginning. He was forced to leave after he destroyed a good part of the interior of the building.

These are extreme examples but they indicate the difficulties that disturbed or disturbing persons faced on moving in and moving out. For a medical student the procedure could be much easier. He could write a letter saying he wished to visit the community for a week and be accepted. If he was interested he could later ask to return to stay for another, longer period of time, three to six months, and be accepted again. One would hope that he would help and learn and be responsible. He would be responsible and he might learn, but he was essentially being taught by the resident schizophrenics, or at least learning from them. Most of the helping, in the absence of a skilled psychotherapist such as Laing, was done by the schizophrenics for each other. Having shared similar experiences, living in a sympathetic environment as contrasted to a mental

hospital, they could create psychic and emotional space for others to explore their inner worlds.

If a person had support from a particular therapist in the group, he would ask us to accept the new resident, and we would generally agree. Otherwise, it could be very difficult to move in. If there was one applicant and one room there was not necessarily any problem. He could meet the residents, make friends with one or more of them and have a good chance of a space. He and we would both need to meet each other in order to know if we could live together, as I any household with a vacancy. If there were six applicants and one vacancy a very painful situation could develop, where a person wanting to live with us had to present himself both as relatively stable and as having serious problems to be most likely to be accepted, a difficult trick to accomplish. At Kingsley Hall it was worse. If one resident rejected an applicant he could not move in.

Our difficulties with choosing new residents were intimately related to our need to achieve a balance between people who were whole and strong and people who needed to go through changes that could involve bizarre behavior. If too many people were acting strangely, regressing, going through psychotic episodes, the community as a whole was threatened, and nobody could help anybody else. Nobody had the space, external or internal, within which to change. Thus the occasional apparent harshness of our procedures of entry.

The young man I mentioned above was forcibly evicted. Others left because it was time for them to go. Others were removed by relatives, Some, however, left for financial reasons—they could not pay the rent. I will deal with money problems later.

The community served the residents but also visitors, people who came to see what it was like, people who thought they might want to move in, people from other countries who had set up similar places or who wanted to learn how to do so. Living with us we had persons diagnosed schizophrenic, manic-depressive psychotic, undergraduates, medical students, and at various times a therapist from New York, a well-known novelist and a nun. The residents came from all over the world, Britain, the United States, Canada, South America, Norway, Denmark, Germany, etc. It was truly an international center.

In spite of the conflicts and chaos that were so frequent, we tried to create a warm and friendly atmosphere for visitors and residents alike. We kept coffee, tea, bread and cheese available at all times in the kitchen. We tried to welcome visitors and to entertain them. I myself felt that anyone who walked through the door was in some way special, either because of what he knew or because of what he might learn.

Community Norms and Values

The community was an unusual place; ordinary norms did not apply; bizarre short of extreme violence was accepted and extreme violence could usually be tolerated or controlled, as I will explain later. Yet if there were not rules as such, we had our own norms. Each resident had the right to his own room. We tried to keep the rest of the house as clean as possible, given the messiness and the occasional destruction that occurred and we painted and we patched. We tried to keep the kitchen functioning.

One important norm was the weekly meeting. The two therapists most directly involved in our lives would attend but residents were not required to be there. Most would usually gather and if we were discussing an issue involving someone a deputation would be sent to encourage that person to come along. An interesting development here

was what could be called the anti-meeting. The general meeting was in the common room and some residents might leave in boredom or in protest. But they would not go farther than the kitchen, where they would sit and talk. I sometimes found the discussion at the anti-meeting more interesting and relevant to current community issues than that at the general meeting.

We generally shared a value that life in the country was better than life in the city, more therapeutic, as it were. Repeated attempts were made to establish temporary or permanent centers in the English countryside. They tended to fail. In the inner suburbs of London, dirty and disorganized, our way of life was possible. In the countryside the local people were shocked and threatened, understandably perhaps. A group of us spent a week in Sussex at the home of a woman who like to use her space to give physically handicapped people some time in a noninstitutional setting. The maid arrived one morning and found the lights on and empty liquor bottles; this was no real disaster. Yet she spread the word around the village that a group of crazy people were living at the house and we became distinctly uncomfortable.

The worst experience occurred in Devonshire. We had found an ancient isolated farmhouse on the edge of the moor and a few miles from the sea and small groups of us made occasional excursions there of a few days or a few weeks. Then one of the therapists decided to spend the month of June there with as many of his patients and others who wanted to come. We stayed at the old farmhouse and at whatever other lodgings we could find. It was like London: we were students, patients, therapists, a variety of people. It was a glorious time at the beginning. The first trouble was almost comic. Rumors began to spread about naked dancing in the garden of one of the houses,

rumors based on fact. The next trouble was tragic. A woman was living in lodgings on an active farm with her husband and three children; she was one of the most obviously disturbed people I have ever seen, and had several times attempted suicide. Although she was closely watched, she crawled out of a bathroom window and set herself afire with gasoline. She died of burns in the hospital soon afterwards. This event effectively ended any possibility of an “official” community in that part of Devon. We could still visit as individuals, after some time had passed, but we had to guarantee that we were in no way bringing the community with us.

Her death struck a blow to our yearning, our need to live in a healthy rural environment. It was actually the worst thing that happened during my years in the community. But a similar thing could have happened in the city without the same devastating consequences. Also, residents were often naked in the streets of London; we cooperated with the police in dealing with such situations. Yet in the country dancing naked in one’s own garden at night was a scandal, impermissible.

Management

The Philadelphia Association is still in existence. As I knew it when I was in London it was a group of therapists, social workers and an accountant who put into practice the ideas developed by Laing and others. They met at regular intervals and decided who would concentrate on which task, which aspect of the overall program. Thus they would share responsibilities, working with the communities, giving seminars, fund raising, running the therapist training program, editing written and taped material into a book, and so forth. This was the central structure of the London experiment, of the network.

But the hardest job was for the person who lived in the community and managed the ongoing daily life. Ideally in each household lived a person called the administrator. He was paid and given board in exchange for collecting rent, and keeping the place clean and in repair. He also provided a center of stability; it was a house without a resident administrator that became a bad house. Yet this additional function, beyond actual administration, made his job exceedingly difficult. He was less free than others to change between the roles of giving and receiving help. He was frequently seen as a resident therapist, although his job was not defined as such. Collecting rent was hard enough, but he often felt called upon to deal with various crises as he tried to maintain order. In addition his room might be invaded, his property damaged, and his sleep disturbed, more than was the case for the average stable resident.

Most of the therapists in the network spent six months to a year living, perhaps with their wives, at Kingsley Hall. They wanted to share the experience of living in a community where diagnosed and non-diagnosed lived together and to find out what happened. None stayed longer than a year. The demand on their time and the drain on their emotions were too great.

Problems About Money

Theretically there was no difference between persons in the network, that extended group that included members of the community and many others living elsewhere in London, therapists, visiting student who attended seminars, etc. This was generally true in practice. An individual resident would at times act as patient, needing and receiving help from others, and at other times act as therapist, providing that help for others. The therapists and administrators helped each other at times of stress and were

strengthened and supported by the humor and spirituality of the diagnosed members of the community. Ex-mental patient as well as therapist could be seen as wise, as a guru, or could show his pain and distress.

There were, however, necessary differences. Therapists tended to live in their own homes with their own families, although they lived in the communities for varying periods of time. Quite sensibly, and to the benefit of all, they chose to maintain their own strength and stability. Only thus could they most effectively aid those most unstable. Additionally, the major difference and the most difficult to overcome, some paid money and some received money, within the total group. Some were poor and some relatively rich. This was in all its aspects a critical problem for the network, as it is a critical problem in the world at large.

Therapists were paid for their fifty minutes and clients gave the money. The administrator of a house was paid and all other resident paid a weekly rate which covered his fee, rent, utilities, repairs and some food. The therapist who came to meetings, was on call for crises and generally supervised community life eventually insisted on being paid for his work. All this was essentially fair. But it created a division into two distinct groups and was in blatant contrast to the theory of equality.

Therapists and administrators received the money they lived on from within the community. The community received its money from outside. It was very difficult as a resident to hold an outside job, when one uses ones home as a place to rest from the tensions of work. The noise and turmoil had an opposite effect, increasing tension to an intolerable level. I knew of only one person who for a time held an outside job. Some received support from parents. Some, whether from Britain or the Common Market

countries, received welfare or disability payments. Our rent and expenses, although low, were unfortunately high enough that they were barely covered by welfare, leaving little money for anything else. Thus as I the outside world there was a vast and visible gap between the haves and the have-nots.

We were aware of this problem and it was sometimes an agony. Many attempts were made to alleviate this distress. Therapists charged on a sliding scale. Thus I 1970 as a visiting rich American I would have been charged nineteen pounds, or almost fifty dollars, for one consultation with Laing. On the other hand, he saw one client over a period of years without charging her a penny except when she insisted. My own therapist lowered my fee from ten pounds to eight pounds when I was worried about money. He also saw a client on welfare for many years without taking a penny. When I saw Laing for one session he charged me nothing.

In the community the poor felt oppressed; they were expected to pay a share in the fees of the visiting therapist and the administrator. If someone spent a welfare check on other things he wanted or needed and couldn't pay rent he felt oppressed by the administrator who asked him for money, particularly by the administrator who asked and had been asked repeatedly. People refused to pay rent for various reasons, for resentment, because they hated or did not believe in money, but sometimes because they could not manage to set up welfare arrangements, could not cope with the authorities. This was difficult enough for anyone humiliating, but for someone who felt frightened, threatened or confused it could be impossible. So the more stable residents would try to help make welfare arrangements. Sometimes this worked and sometimes it did not. In one case a long-term resident was helped to arrange to receive a book of welfare checks, whereas

normally one had to go to the office every week. In another case a resident refused to accept any help with welfare, could not pay rent, and borrowed money from her friends.

We decided to allow one woman, an American whose money had run out, to stay on at the community rent-free. But she felt resented; she found it painful and embarrassing to go into the kitchen and take a slice of bread. To be happy she needed to pay rent. Another attempt at solving the rent problem was unofficial and disorganized. I and six others, all women, were living in what I have earlier called a bad, dirty, unhappy, mad house. There was no administrator living there, and little attention was given to the noisy and chaotic conditions. The house was dirty and the kitchen was a mess, and whenever anyone from another house tried to clean up they did it in such an arrogant and peremptory way that some of us found it insufferable. No one in the house was paying rent, no one was trying to, largely for these reasons. We did not, unfortunately, gather together, organize and present a rent strike to a community meeting. We were isolated from each other and could not join in a protest. Neither we nor the rest of the community were aware of what was going on, of the mutual projection of goodness and badness between the houses and that this projection was a cause of our failure to pay rent.

The Philadelphia Association is a tax-free charity. It provided planning and organization of the communities plus an umbrella of support. Laing never charged for his visits, which were relatively frequent, perhaps once a month. No one was ever evicted for non-payment of rent with the one exception noted above, although persons sometimes left when they could not pay. At one time when we were discussing the question of raising rent Laing somewhat angrily expressed his hope and belief that somehow funding could be arranged. Money and its management were important aspects of community life

which we tried to deal with, sometimes unsuccessfully. The flow of money is an important thing. As Laing once put it cryptically, "Money is social oil."

Crises and their Containment

This, then, is the structure within which the experiment was carried out; this is the place where we dealt with the crises that occurred when residents under inner stress, undergoing the experience of being "mad," exhibited the behavior that can lead to a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Believing the experience might have value to the individual we tried to tolerate, or humanely control, bizarre activity. The limits of our acceptance were entirely different from those of the outside world. We were upset, of course, by disturbing behavior but we did not need to stop it by violent means, such as ECT or forced isolation or medication. When the Archway phase of the experiment had just begun a young Canadian girl was joining us. I was sitting in the kitchen with her, several residents, and two visiting therapists. She was trying to fill out a government form which asked where she had lived during the past ten years. She was unable to fill out the form; she had spent the last five years in institutions; she burst into deep agonizing sobbing that lasted for minutes on end. No one tried to comfort her; no one said, "don't cry," although we were all suffering with her. I was outraged at the seeming indifference of the therapists until I realized that they were showing a deeper compassion, feeling pain in order to let her fully feel her grief.

This is a relatively minor example of our willingness to endure and share the suffering of another. A more extreme example is our acceptance, time and time again, of smashing and trashing the kitchen. This seemed a standard response to and communication of extreme stress. Someone would come downstairs, enter the kitchen,

overturn the table, spilling everything on it, dump garbage and food all over the floor and then leave the room. We would clean up the mess, knowing that this person needed attention, hopeful that we could help, but also painfully aware that trashing the kitchen did not solve his problem.

Other classic bizarre behaviors were complete or partial nakedness, and defecating or urinating in community common space. An individual might take off his clothes, stop using the toilet or the bath, spend much time in his room, but sometimes come out, wrapped perhaps in a blanket, and always smelly. We would, as best we could, clean common and private space, and give baths. Yet it was not impossible for a house to have the pervasive odor of human excrement.

More difficult to accept were behaviors we could not, in effect, clean up. Constant screaming, twenty-four hours a day until the voice gave out, made it impossible to sleep at night and hard to function during the day for the rest of the community. Frantic, manic activity, writing on the walls, moving objects about and piling them on top of each other, running up and downstairs, made it difficult, for example, to cook dinner. Sometimes these behaviors were combined.

The greatest problem we faced was violence. Much of what I have just described constitutes emotional violence. This was endurable, if just barely. Physical violence, causing physical harm to oneself or another, was not tolerable; the threat of physical violence we barely endured. A resident might pick up a knife or a broken bottle and threaten another. No one was stabbed or cut, although two cats were killed, once with a knife and one with a hammer. Apparent suicide attempts occurred, although they were relatively uncommon. Entering the kitchen one might find a resident with his head in the

gas over, but the gas locally provided at the time was non-toxic. One might find a resident who had just tried to hang himself but with a string which had broken. I became convinced that these were not true intentions at suicide, although they had to be taken seriously as a suicidal gesture can indeed be successful. The only actual suicide that occurred during my years at the community is the one I described above. The woman who died was the most distressed and withdrawn person I met in the London communities, and the event took place in the countryside, away from the close, warming and strengthening environment of Archway.

We obviously had to find ways of coping with these extreme and distressing behaviors that did not contradict our philosophy of not interfering violently with what might be valuable inner experience. We learned the hard way, perhaps the only way. At Kingsley Hall, when a resident had screamed for forty-eight hours continually and we were trying to have dinner, someone briefly sat on him with his hand over his mouth. For a moment we had calm and silence but of course it could not last. He soon started screaming and running about again. This is not work.

Compassion, understanding, acceptance, all these were important and necessary. But they were not sufficient. Eventually we found a way to contain and lovingly control the behavior of a person under extreme stress. We needed to do this for the sake of our own peace of mind and also because of the problems that occurred when a person took their screaming or nakedness into the outside world, to which I will refer later. One resident at Archway, the Canadian girl I mentioned, behaved in such distressing ways that we had to give her total attention. She would fight, kick, scream, pick up a knife, urinate in the kitchen or walk out the door, down our street and into the street of shops

completely naked. She was nevertheless beloved by many of us. She was the first person to receive twenty-four-hour attention. To control her violence and keep her from going outside naked we had to keep her in the common space and make sure someone was always with her. We found this painful at first, but over the months the twenty-four-hour attention became an institution of its own, and a major way of restoring order to community life.

Here follows a brief theory of such a community-based therapy:

One must allow to develop a support group of interested persons, undergraduates, medical students, therapists, schizophrenics, neighbors and other who make themselves available on various levels, living in the household, visiting the household, or being on call for any emergencies that might occur. This support group should be as large as possible, particularly at the last level.

A certain degree of noise and disorder can be tolerated. This depends on the residents and on the neighbors. However, a real crisis demands immediate attention and there should be a call to members of the support group.

There are two types of crises. The more dramatic would include suicide attempts, apparent or real, acts or threats of violence to others, walking naked into the street, screaming in the street, and so forth.

Sometimes such a crisis can effectively be averted by members of the community, kindly and firmly. If not it may then be necessary to keep the person in crisis in some appropriate space, his own room, another's room or a common room. The door would never be locked and probably left open much of the time. This is twenty-four-hour attention, with someone always committed to be there. Usually a group will gather and

there will be something of a party or learning atmosphere. Change will occur not only in the person in crisis but in others who are there.

The person in crisis might at times have to be physically restrained. But this is not done mechanically or with medication. A wall of human flesh is the restraining force, ideally a force of loving attention. If one desires to prevent the person in crisis from harming himself or others or to keep the person from the attention of police and psychiatry such a practice can be necessary.

The second type of crisis is more subtle. A resident may wish to attempt some project, exploring his inner world, overcoming his loneliness, his fears or his sadness, or coming off medications, drugs and alcohol. If the support group is large and strong enough a resident may request similar twenty-four-hour attention; or he may be encouraged to accept twenty-four-hour care, for example to come off phenothiazines or other substances.

It should be made known that this type of attention is available on request, but it should not be forced on anyone except when absolutely necessary as during the first type of crisis described above.

Relations With The Outside World

A major concern of ours was our relations with our neighbors, with the police, and with the local psychiatric establishment. London is a city which tolerates eccentricity. One of our residents was frequently found walking down the street carrying a broken television set or radio, followed by a yelling, jeering group of children. He was very infrequently stopped by the police and then only when his manner appeared violent. He could stand on the street corner in front of his house lecturing the passers-by and remain

undisturbed. In addition, both Kingsley Hall and Archway were in run-down districts and the police did not need worry about the annoyance of the upper classes or of tourists.

At Kingsley Hall, when I was there at the end of its five years of existence, relations with the neighbors were terrible. The children, we felt, expressed the annoyance of the neighborhood that the former church hall had been taken away from them and turned into a madhouse. The children would break down the front door, leave feces in the front hall, and run by the building throwing stones at the windows and breaking them. Five years of bizarre behavior in the house and on the streets had proved too much for the East Enders.

Archway was a neighborhood in transition. People were moving out as their homes were condemned and others were moving in temporarily under the aegis of small independent housing associations. Shops were closing. Few had a vested interest in keeping up normal standards of behavior on the streets.

Nakedness or the apparent threat of violence, however, attracted the attention of the police. A resident would, according to legal procedure, be "taken to a place of safety," the local police station, and put in a cell, but usually not arrested. There he would be examined by a psychiatrist and committed to the local mental hospital for a period of time. It was then the task of one of our therapists to return him to the community. Sometimes, it appeared, the resident did not want to come back, feeling he had been ill-treated by us in some way, and would not return for perhaps thirty days. Usually he would be heavily sedated, and sometimes he would choose to return to the hospital for regular injections of prolixin or to take his prescribed daily dose of thorazine or

stellazine. As mentioned above, we did try to make it possible to stop taking such medications when he chose.

The police became aware of who we were and what we were doing and came to know our residents. The police accepted their behavior, knowing that they were living in a half-way house of sorts with responsible people. The police would sometimes say they would not intervene if we would keep the screaming off the streets. There was considerable good will.

This was not so much the case with the local psychiatric hospital. There much depended on the individual doctor. One might choose to release his patient to us while another might choose to keep him in custody. Much negotiation took place between our therapists and their psychiatrists. No one was taken away from us; one young man I mentioned earlier was evicted and ended up in mental hospital, and one was taken away by his family. We felt a loyalty to our members, and one of the most notorious screamers became, in effect, a permanent resident. He went through considerable change during his ten years with the community.

In fact, we were saving the state a good deal of money. Many of our residents, in the absence of our efforts, would have been in expensive long-term custodial care in hospitals. I believe that the police and the psychiatric establishment and perhaps higher levels of government were to varying degrees aware of this.

Ideas And Values

Within the community and within the larger extended network of therapists, students and friends we came to share a value-system or philosophy that was not made entirely explicit. This was picked up, at least in my case, as if by breathing. I was not

learning anything that was not intrinsic to my being; I was learning about myself, my own values. Of course, this philosophy came to me from others, from personal contact and from special books, but the education I received in London was a continuation of the intellectual and spiritual development that had only sometimes coincided with my earlier formal education. We gradually moderated our more extreme attitudes toward the family and toward psychiatry. In the beginning we tended to blame the parents for the suffering of a resident. As Laing has pointed out the behavior of families of schizophrenics can be quite bizarre and the behavior of the person diagnosed can make sense in the context of confusing, contradictory levels of communication. As a corollary of this idea, and as a result of the suffering many of our residents had endured at the hand of their families, we felt justified in our hatred of mothers and fathers. But then as various parents visited the community or even wanted to live there, we learned that they were not to blame, that they were suffering, victims of our shared humanity. It was easier to find a scapegoat than to do without one. From an initial aversion to any use of thiorazine and other anti-psychotic medications we moved to a feeling that their use should be voluntary and that we should try to make it possible to cease their regular use when one chose. Excess dosage of phenothiazines seemed invariably non-therapeutic. Residents who returned to us from hospital were frequently so sedated as to be unable to function. A minimal or reasonable dosage, whether by bi-weekly injection or daily oral self-medication is not necessarily harmful. Similarly with other drugs and alcohol, their use should be voluntary, with the exception of use by injection, which seemed a form of violence. There were drug addicts at Kingsley Hall, but several persons who injected drugs who had moved into Archway

finally had to leave. We should again try to make it possible to cease regular use, to withdraw.

There was a special psychic atmosphere within the communities; there was a hope and a promise; there was a feeling of the growth of consciousness, of evolution. The community, with its special norms and values, its unusual people, seemed almost a different world than the one outside. Anyone who walked in the front door, anyone who asked to live there seemed to be a special person. It was a spiritual refuge, a place where one could grow and change and learn in a way that was impossible outside, like a monastery or a cave in the mountains.

Much of this was due to the influence and personality of Laing himself; his was a spiritual presence. This is evident in his writings, but only as theory. Schizophrenics obviously suffer vastly; why then their glorification? Laing had spent twenty-five years seeing clients in formal psychotherapy and fifteen years in some degree of supervision of households such as I have tried to describe. He was aware of the pain and confusion of his clients and of community residents. But he had learned from his own experience of life and from his relationships with others that bound up with bizarre behavior and delusory experience is an openness to become aware of meaning.

He suffered himself. "That wild silent screech in the night. And what if I were to tear my hair and run naked and screaming through the suburban night. I would wake up a few tired people and get myself committed to a mental hospital. To what purpose?"

The entire "Bird of Paradise," from which these lines come, which he later somewhat regretted publishing, shows his own suffering. He once mentioned that he had experienced all the forms of mental illness, with the exception of obsessive-compulsive

neurosis, that he had avoided the latter, not wanting to get caught in such a maze. He has also said, “The contract I’ve made with my mind is that it is free to do anything it cares to do.” He is a man deeply aware of the potentialities of the psyche, as was Carl Jung.

Jung, however, had certain peculiar limitations. He did not entirely trust his own anima, his own unconscious. When an inner female voice told him he was a great artist he resisted, expecting that the inner woman would later betray him, turn on him, and say that he was a failure. He spoke of being forced to use certain yoga postures in order to control or stop his own inner experience. But most telling of all was his reaction to a patient, a doctor who had come to him for a training analysis, who appeared completely normal. This patient reported a dream in which he saw a small child in a vast train station smearing itself with feces, from which dream he awoke in a panic. Jung writes, “I knew all I need to know—here was a latent psychosis! I must say I sweated as I tried to lead him out of that dream. I had to represent it to him as something quite innocuous, and gloss over all the perilous details.”

Laing created his communities precisely in order to allow such regression, and as I have described, it certainly took place. Jung lacked, perhaps, the space within which such behavior could occur, or perhaps the times were not right for it to be allowed. Jung states that his patient was one the verge of a fatal panic, that is a panic leading to death; Laing had discovered that such death could lead to rebirth, to transformation in some cases.

Laing does not want to instruct people, to tell how it is. He wants people to see this “schizophrenic voyage” for themselves. He has said,

“It used to be a clinical adage in Scotland, where I was brought up in psychiatry, that maybe thirty percent of people diagnosed as schizophrenic remit, if left to themselves to go through whatever it is they are going through. Such people might lie huddled up, completely regressed—thump the wall in a padded cell where they would piss and shit where they lay. There were some cells in most hospitals where people could do that, and some people would come in every few years, some only once, and go through this sort of thing. After three months or so, they would be out again and functioning in society at large. Some people were seen as having recurrent numbers like this, and the ‘good’ clinician could recognize them. The modern clinician can’t recognize these people, because he’s never allowed to see them. He never sees the natural history of the condition or conditions all this controversy is about because it is frozen by the ‘tranquilizers,’ ECT, or whatnot, even in research places. There must be very few (if any) places in the whole of the United States where people are ‘allowed’ to go through numbers like this. If only as pure science, just to see the natural history.”

Laing’s visits to the community were marked by his special manner, his intentionality, his consciousness. He would subtly seek out more unstable new residents and, without probing or forcing himself on him, let it be known that he was there. He would visit with an old-timer that he knew and commune or dance with him. A withdrawn, isolated, perhaps neglected resident might come down when he knew that “Ronnie is here.” Laing might come to a community gathering and sit in complete silence for half an hour and then deliver a monologue for half an hour, reminiscent of Carlos Castaneda’s description of Juan Matus. But when asked about the use of psychic powers he answered, “Magic is not my forte.”

I saw Laing once in therapy, when my regular therapist was on holiday. The event was not remarkable, except for my nervousness beforehand, and for the fact that I could hear Laing haranguing the client before me in a humorous, melodious way. This was reminiscent of my visits to the room of a very quiet, almost mute young man in the community, when I would be the only speaker. What was memorable about my one therapeutic session with Laing was that he never charged me, whereas it would have cost me fifty dollars for a consultation when I first came. I felt that not charging me a fee was a way for him to say that I was a friend; this was intensely meaningful to me.

Later, however, when I was myself unstable, going through inner experience which was turbulent and full of potential meaning, yet which I was able to control to a sufficient degree that my behavior did not become bizarre, I called Laing on the phone. After some difficulty getting through to him I told him what was happening to me. I immediately received his full attention. He told me that what I was experiencing could be labelled schizophrenic and warned me to be careful to whom I described what was happening. He made several suggestions. Find yourself a private space, he said, where you can sit, lie down, stand or pace, and keep a supply of foods that do not need to be cooked. Avoid such things as coffee, tea and sugar. I followed his advice, to great advantage.

During the three years of my therapy with Leon Redler, who was also most directly responsible for the communities, I absorbed or realized much of the value-system that was prevalent in the network. In the beginning we could choose couch at first and then in a few minutes lay down. Leon pointed out to me the postures I habitually assumed. Even when I was thinking I was quite relaxed, I would lie stiffly with my hands

clasped on my chest and my legs crossed at the ankles. Sometimes I would bend my right leg over the left knee. I was always wrapped up and locked in. I was always clutching myself. Once he suggested that I relax, loosen up, and lie with my feet apart and my hands at my sides. I told him that I could not do it. I do not know now what I meant when I said this or how I knew it but I told him that I understood this relaxing or meditation he was asking me to try and that it was impossible for me. And I was right. When I unclenched myself and relaxed I had to sit up in panic after a couple of seconds. I had had a fantasy of being machined-gunned from the sky by jet airplanes or of the building collapsing on top of me. But this experience interested me and I was annoyed that it was impossible for me to try to relax without panicking. The posture I found so difficult is the basic resting pose in hatha yoga, the corpse posture. This session with Leon was perhaps my first yoga lesson; in any case I was moved to begin to take formal classes. I had scoffed at yoga and meditation in the past. I had laughed at one therapist when he practices in the game room at Kingsley Hall. I had refused to join the twenty-minute meditation session that Leon tried to institute before community meetings. But I think the intensity of my reaction was an indication of my curiosity and growing involvement.

During a later period of my therapy, when Leon was becoming involved in zen, we usually sat on cushions on the floor. During this time I felt a greater freedom. Sitting on the floor was like having a rest after a walk in the woods. I could sit close to him and facing him; I could sit further away and avoid his gaze; or I could move around the room. Leon had developed a quiet non-violent manner. One day he was visited by a young man with black hair and a shaggy beard, a tall husky fellow with a dangerous reputation. He had wrecked his parents' home and the offices of three therapists. It was his passion. And

it seemed that his intention was to do the same again. He barged in and confronted Leon, swaggering and threatening, all set to do his number. But Leon, deceptively slight in build, sat down quietly on the floor and refused to respond aggressively. He all but ignored the stranger's physical threat. The man blustered and tried to provoke Leon but he did not respond as the man expected. Instead of destroying the apartment all he did was spit at Leon and miss. At some point Leon told his secretary to call the police and inform the intruder that they were on their way. The man chose to leave before they arrived.

The apartment was quite large. It was originally shared by three therapists. Later it was used for Leon's therapy and for the Philadelphia Association seminars. One room was for therapy. One room was a kitchen, one room housed the Philadelphia Association library, and one room, originally used for seminars, was eventually used for zen sitting. As his interest in zen grew deeper Leon invited zen masters to stay in the apartment and to sit in the meditation room. In keeping with the zen tradition of simplicity Leon did not speak of meditating or doing zazen but of sitting. We sat in the therapy room or we sat in the meditation room; the distinction between therapy and meditation began to fade.

I remember the zen masters. There were several who came and stayed at Leon's apartment, each for a period of several weeks. One complimented me on my posture and then, typically, added that it did not mean a thing. Another loved to play a Japanese game on a board, and played with the greatest amusement and humor, like a happy child. One said that the world was his temple, that he meditated in the bathroom as well as anywhere else. Another, when asked if he had smoked hashish, replied with a grin, "Opium I know. Hashish I have not tested yet."

The sitting was not unduly severe but it was difficult. One sat for half an hour, then walked slowly for five minutes, and repeated this three more times. I could never stay for the entire two hours; one was free to leave between sittings. The group met every morning and evening for two hours. Leon was invariably present and sometimes lived in the apartment with the zen master. When a master was not there Leon would lead the sittings. He enjoyed this. He would seat himself slowly and with dignity and humor light a stick of incense. Ten to signal the beginning of the meditation he would hit a gong, perhaps several times. If he felt so inclined he could make a sudden startling noise by knocking loudly with a clapper on a block of wood. If one was calmly sitting this would not disturb; it would keep one alert. Leon had fun acting as zen master.

After our therapy terminated I realized how much I had learned, how deeply I had been influenced by my relationship with Leon. He was quiet and accepting for the most part; I particularly reacted to the times he was disturbed by something I said, to the few occasions he seemed to get angry with me. Once when I was accusing myself of laziness Leon became disgusted. He told me that he rejected the concept of laziness as a useful way of understanding behavior, that he thought it served to justify a self-loathing and self-hatred. This did not make it easier to act but led to paralysis. Calling oneself lazy was an excuse for avoiding self-examination. There was always a reason for inactivity; indeed inactivity could be a good thing in itself. Leon became quite heated on this subject.

Another time he seemed to get angry was when we were looking at some of my writing; he also served as my editor. As we went through the papers I discarded some material that was intense, cryptic and actually quite well written on the grounds that I had been taking amphetamines when I wrote it. Leon would not accept this. To him writing

was writing and if it had meaning it was valuable, no matter what the conditions under which it had been produced. His attitude helped me resolve a split in myself, let me integrate my personality as a whole from its dissociated parts.

Sometimes I would practice my asanas during a session. Once Leon got upset because I was holding a cigarette while attempting a forward bend. He insisted that one could not practice yoga while holding a cigarette in one hand and, of course, he was quite right. Later still he commented that I was doing the asanas in order to avoid encountering him I therapy, to avoid conversation, in effect wasting time.

Leon did not believe in acting out but he believed I feeling. He told me to feel my grief and my rage, and I have learned that whether or not I express myself I anger or tears there is a great release of inner energy when the inner barriers are relaxed when I feel my grief or feel my rage. They are part of me. Feeling them is a relaxation of tension, an inner opening, a healing.

I had learned that depression is the fusing and destruction of anger and sadness. As I had put it, "Depression comes when anger and sadness clutch each other and drown." Now I slowly came to realize that the emotions were more intense than I had described them, that they deserved more respect. I noticed that a feeling of rage was often immediately followed by a feeling of grief and vice versa. I realized that the release of these emotions could be a healing for despair. These emotions could be important as a source of hope.

In my encounter with Leon is evident a movement toward specific techniques for relieving stress or exploring one's inner world. Zen meditation was one. Hatha yoga was another; classes were given at the community and elsewhere, and many residents

practiced regularly. I myself have been taking classes and practicing ever since I overcame my initial intense resistance. It has become very important to me. Other techniques include Aikido and ta-kwon-do, oriental martial arts without the aggressive factor. Zen walking, moving through hatha yoga postures and Aikido are all forms of dance. Massage became an important part of community life at different times; one of our residents set up as a practicing giver of massage.

In fact we gradually realized that much of what is called “mental illness” is actually physical suffering, whether it be skin rashes, insomnia, vomiting, constipation, or general anxiety-tension. The schizophrenic experience is endurable and can be meaningful in a context of minimal physical stress. Thus zen and yoga have traditionally been means toward physical health and inner illumination. The therapists of the Philadelphia Association experimented with these techniques and then began to pass them on. Visiting zen masters gave zazen, B.K.S. Iyengar and his students taught hatha yoga and various herbalists and acupuncturists applied their techniques. We realized the importance of the body, of the body-mind continuum. To think of mental illness outside of its physical context seemed absurd. Thus much of the cooking at the community was vegetarian; there I received my introduction to the virtues of rice, beans, and vegetables.

We had become aware of dance, of the movement of the body; we also became aware of music. This took longer. Music was always important to us, whether listening to records, playing the flute or chanting the Heart Sutra. Laing is an accomplished pianist and clavichordist. He would come visit us and play the piano, or organize a group beating of drums. At one of the last households I knew, however, the consciousness of music became intense. This was a musical household, notable for its common room containing a

piano, guitars, flutes, recorders, gongs and drums, and for the number of musicians who were residents.

I remember Ronnie the day I met him, the day I moved into Kingsley Hall, Good Friday, 1970. I had been invited to a special Good Friday dinner by a girl I had met there several weeks earlier. I was in the kitchen, drinking wine and slicing vegetables when persons of obvious importance began to appear. I was expecting to meet my future therapist and others of significance that evening, so I examined each new arrival carefully, looking up from my carrots whenever someone slipped into the kitchen.

Then I recognized him—how I do not know—and called out with excitement: “Excuse me, are you Doctor Laing?” But I had made a serious error of protocol, and Laing was displeased. Outside, on the streets, in the offices, in the psychological meetings he might be Dr. Laing; but within the confines of the Hall, in the sanctuary, inside the asylum, he was always Ronnie.

“Doch torr Leh eeng...” he replied with sarcasm and hostility, to the amusement of those assembled. “Who is Doch torr Leh eeng?” I was surprised, hurt and shocked into silence. During the meal which followed I got some satisfaction by using both his names whenever I addressed him, always calling him ‘Ronnie Laing’. After the meal he lit a Gauloise and put the burnt-out match on my plate. I was annoyed; but I was startled, touched and pleased when he put on top of it, making a cross, an unused match. I did not understand this. Perhaps it loosened me up, because afterwards I was able to speak to him when I encountered him in the hallway. In fact I attacked him, grabbed him not ungently by the lapels and cursed him. “Ronnie Laing, you are a fucking ass hole.”

He laughed, seeming almost pleased by the physical contact, and asked, “What is a fucking ass hole?” I could only laugh too.

Roger

Roger was musical, he was unusual and he liked to wear green. I met him on my first visit to Kingsley Hall. I should say that I encountered him, because we only caught a glimpse of each other that first day. He was a striking figure, gaunt, unkempt, unearthly, with long dark hair hanging straight, a beard that came to a point, and burning prophetic eyes. He lived in a small room with a door and a window that opened onto the neglected roof garden at the very top of the Hall, with a dried-up fountain, an empty pool and the headless statue of an unknown goddess.

He was a distant figure, remote from the world, a disturbing personality. He was loved but disliked; he could not be ignored. He had rebuilt or resurrected an old record player and he played his music very loud indeed and in the middle of the night. At last William appointed himself representative of the decent citizens, walked to Ridger’s room with his axe and tried to chop the record player to bits.

William was unsuccessful. Rodger brought the remains of his machine to my room where there was another broken-down machine for music and we managed somehow to marry them, to create out of the two dying record players one that was alive. Union or rebirth, a new source of music. I remember that we played Procol Harum, “A whiter Shade of Pale”, and the beauty of this music was like the phoenix out of the ashes. This unexpected rebirth, this healing, this music where there had not been the possibility of music was a constant theme of my time in London.

George

George would shout all day and all night; he would scream at the top of his voice; he would shriek and wail, giving voice to several persons in a semblance of conversation until he was hoarse. What was happening inside him that was so overwhelming in its power that it manifested probably only a fraction of its experienced intensity in such a frenzy? Where he got his energy no one knew; how he survived his early years of suffering so great that it was almost unendurable to live with him no one knew. He was the central figure of the community for at least five years; he posed the most difficult question to the existential philosophy of madness. Can this extraordinary person, chronic schizophrenic, manic-depressive psychotic, whatever he is, continue to exist? Can we accept him? Can we allow him to work out his destiny in his own extraordinary way?

George had been a computer specialist, had lived in a Marxist Catholic commune and had found he could no longer do work that was used in military applications. He had ended up in a mental hospital, and then became an early resident of Kingsley Hall. He lived in a manic frenzy, racing through the building screaming up one set of stairs and down the other. The day I met him he was sitting in the upstairs kitchen at the Hall with a bucket to one side and in front of him a table with a box of three by five cards. He was in an intense state of creativity, absorbed in the work of writing a sort of poetry in printed capitals on the cards and arranging them in the filing box. He was disturbed in this concentrated effort of creation by a nausea so severe that every few minutes he vomited into the bucket at his side. The experience of meeting someone in this state was one of the wonders of my first days at Kingsley Hall.

I paid a minimum of attention to George that day; he was self-absorbed. But several days later, the day I formally moved into the house, the day I met Laing and the others, Good Friday of 1970, I could not ignore him. George was unusually excited that day presumably because it was a special occasion and there were visitors. During dinner it became necessary for one or another of us to take turns sitting on George or to put a hand over his mouth in order to stop the endless and intolerable flow of yelling. George did not mind this restraint by his dinner companions; in fact it was done with a remarkable degree of humor. He was pleased because Ronnie, whom he loved very much was there. Ronnie danced with him.

But I was upset to see George being manhandled; I felt that if he wanted to talk someone should be willing to listen. I did not like to see him gagged. So I impetuously invited George to come with me to another part of the house. I would prefer to forgo the party in order to listen to what he might have to say. But what a surprising experience I had. George and I proceeded to another room at the top of the house, where I hoped a conversation between us would come about. As we reached the room we achieved a closer contact, a greater intimacy that I had expected. He abruptly and gently attached himself with his teeth to my cheek and remained attached to me for some seconds. He did not bite me; he caused me little pain; but he greeted, welcomed, and acknowledged me in a way that took me completely by surprise and emptied my mind of any thought save the consciousness of being for some seconds irremovably attached to another person. Then with a decisiveness equal to that with which he had sunk his teeth into my cheek, he let go. He left me bewildered and almost enlightened, with a bleeding nose and broken glasses and he ran away from me down the stairs along the hallway back to the group

from which I had thought it better to remove him. And he was calling and calling:

“Ronnie...Ronnie...Ronnie...”

Alan

Alan was the only person I know who was not allowed to stay in Kingsley Hall; he was too crazy, and in the context of the existential philosophy of madness that means too violent. He was remembered for having lifted a massive safe in one of his manic rages and thrown it through a heavy double door. He was also remembered for ordering a jet airliner by telephone. So persuasive was his manner that he succeeded in making the order until he asked that a swimming pool be built into the fuselage. Then the hoax was apparent. He was also once arrested in a phone booth when his manner of making long distance credit card calls to various parts of the world convinced the operator that something was not as it should be.

I spent a day with Alan during the period of the break-up of Kingsley Hall. He had been kind and helpful to me during the difficult time before I moved to Archway and I had agreed to an interview he claimed to have arranged. He wanted me to meet with a representative of the Sunday Times; there was a curiosity about the last days of the Hall and the possibility of a short article in the Atticus column, then written by David Blundy. So Alan persuaded me to meet him in the offices of the Times on Fleet Street.

I arrived and made inquiries at the desk. Alan was actually in Blundy's office; he came down and took me across the street to the Red Lion pub looking for Blundy. At last we spied him on the pavement, and inconspicuous figure with a slight limp. Robin swept us together and with a flourish announced: “Atticus, this is Kingsley Hall.” The humor and the absurdity of the situation were immediately apparent. And I realized I had

nothing to present in the way of news, neither propaganda nor an expose. My feelings about the communities and the work of the Philadelphia Association were too mixed.

The Dairy

We were renting short-life properties from a housing association. The local authority in Islington would decide a new housing project, modern blocks of apartment that would replace the decaying buildings in North London. During the period after families had left their homes and been re-housed and before demolition these old structures could not be disregarded; there was a housing shortage and associations were set up to look after this temporary housing and to provide living space. This was an unsatisfactory arrangement in many ways. During my time in the Archway Community we moved from one house to another again and again, from a house we had just repaired and painted and made our home to another which had just been abandoned by a family who had left behind perhaps a garden they had tended for many years. At one time we had a series of gardens in the back of our houses and of the empty houses on either side, about an acre of land with roses running wild, old outbuildings, blackberry bushes and grassy open space. For a while this was ours.

But then inevitably we would be forced to move and we would watch the demolition crews dismember, crushed and burned to the ground our homes and bulldozers destroyed our gardens. I remember the burning of four separate houses that we had made our home and had come to love. It gave me nightmares.

But there was one exception to this pattern. When we were told to leave one of our earliest homes, one that I had lived in myself, there were two who refused. They squatted the property, claiming legal possession of empty structure according to British

law, paying no rent, while maintaining an informal relation with the community. Liz and Roger lived alone in the old semi-detached building with an old dairy on the ground floor, empty rooms, random painting and old memories above, and the leaky rood. The two of them lived separately and privately within this large space and at the same time lived together as a couple. Each was a dreamer and sometimes each dreamed alone. But sometimes they dreamed together. I know little of their lives during this time as they valued their privacy at the old dairy but I knew each of them very well as individuals. All that the community officially knew of these two was that a visit by our hard-worked administrator never produced any rent. They were certainly, however, glad of the attention he gave them and the continuing assurance that we still considered them part of our group. Some of us who knew them had an idea what were the experiences they endured, how they struggled.

Rodger made two remarks about life at the dairy; one was an obscure statement about dead bodies in the building. The other was more distinct. "There were dragons in the house," he said. "And they were really there." I believed him. I knew him well enough to know when he meant what he said. But I myself have never seen a dragon, only skeletons of dinosaurs.

Liz was a painter, a good one, a sensitive woman who carried on a private battle that many of us respected. I remember what she once said to me about self-hatred and self-loathing; I was surprised that someone of such integrity and compassion would be haunted by such devastating and damaging feelings. They were the enemies in her battle.

Liz and Rodger lived together yet separately in the old dairy. Their life was not an easy one; their private struggles and the love-hatred of their relationship did not make it

so. I will never forget the day they visited my house when I was in the kitchen. The tension between them was hardly apparent until Liz took a chair and made what seemed a determined effort to batter Rodger to death with it; only the light fixture hanging in the way which took the force of the blow saved him from harm.

George

George and I were the only two residents of Kingsley Hall who moved directly to the new community at Archway. We lived in different households about a mile apart so I was not too deeply involved in his suffering at first. But George did not have in his house the space he was accustomed to. He was a person who needed to express himself and to move around. So the activity which had taken place within the large structure of the Hall now took place partly on the streets of Islington and partly within the confines of the smaller houses which made up the new community. This was a misfortune. George's energy could barely be endured by the other residents; there was not enough room for it. And when he took his frenzy outside he presented an extraordinary spectacle to the neighbors and was in frequent danger of being arrested.

I can see and hear him now, walking rapidly carrying a collection of electronic bits, string, wood, or sometimes the derelict remains of a television set, a man who looked both emaciated and physically powerful. At the same time wearing blue jeans tied with a cord, a tee-shirt or an old coat and shoes without socks or laces. He was always active; if he was not pacing the streets he was picking things up or putting things down or putting one thing on top of another. He was never silent; whether he was inside the house or outside walking he surrounded himself with or trailed behind himself a flow of speech. He seemed a focal center of sound more than a man, shouting not to the skies but

from the skies as he hurried through Islington, sometimes followed by children who were irresistibly attracted to him, and who shouted back. A conversation between sky and earth.

He was arrested several times and taken to mental hospital; it seemed to us that this was usually by his own choice. He could have avoided trouble with the police if he really wanted to. But on the other hand his arrests tended to occur when the tension between himself and other residents was at its greatest, when we had expressed our difficulty with his behavior. I remember one such event with particular vividness because I was centrally involved. The people at his house had finally decided that they could stand him no longer, that if he stayed a number of the other residents would leave and that household would not be able to continue as it had. There was a major crisis; the existence of the community as a whole was threatened. We finally decided that George could move from the one household into the other, into the one where I lived. He was to take the room next to mine. I remember that in the process of his moving his assorted gear the oscilloscope blew-up and started emitting a white smoke with a curious odor.

George had been upset before; he was upset by his rejection and the forced move; and when he finally tried to settle into his new home it was impossible. He was moving into and out of the house through the front door, sometimes carrying bits of his possessions, in a very angry and disturbing state. He had an altercation with a building worker on the street. No blows were then exchanged but when I went out to persuade him back into the house he began to hit me, again and again and always on the same place on the solar plexus. I could not control him: it was suggested to me later that I could have stopped him by holding his wrists but this did not occur to me.

Eventually the police arrived. Our relations with them were surprisingly good; perhaps they appreciated the service we were providing of community-based care as an alternative to hospitalization. The police knew George well indeed and knew that he was a resident of one of our households but the neighbors were disturbed by his violent appearance. One of the officers therefore told me that if I could keep George in the house and off of the streets there was no problem. But I was alone and I was unsuccessful. He went back outdoors and let the police take him. In his rage and pain and despair he made it clear to us that we had failed him, that if we did not want him he did not want us and that he preferred the relative acceptance of the official psychiatric institution.

So George was taken to the local bin, the Friern Barnet, a large mental hospital where he was given injections of a powerful tranquilizing drug in order to control his behavior. This happened several times and each time he was asking us whether we would make the effort to get him back. And each time we made the effort, agreeing amongst ourselves that we would try once more to live with him if he would try to live with us. So after varying lengths of time George would return from the hospital calmer from the medication and fatter from the hospital food. I think he knew that we would take him back, although he seemed perfectly willing to remain in the hospital if that should be the way things turned out. In fact some of us wondered whether he found life there preferable to life with the nervousness and tension at the community. We wondered whether it was only because his wants were taken care of and he was given a certain degree of security in the institution. For we realized over time that he found the supposedly saner residents at the community to be difficult, objectionable, and self-righteous in their behavior. Perhaps he sometimes felt we just were not worth bothering with.

But he always came back to us. He became our secret source of strength. Others stayed for a while and then left, following their paths that led elsewhere. The fate of others was to come and stay and then to go. The fate of George, his chosen destiny, was to remain as the pivot or axis around which the whole life of the community revolved. Where he was there was the center. I remember visiting George one day at the house in the community where he lived. Kingsley Hall had been one unit, a solid monolith, a block of space within which people lived with limited space to move around, to meet and to separate. At Archway there was a difference. Not from design but because of the housing situation in Islington we invariably had between two and four smaller homes each of which developed a character of its own. This had the advantage that a resident could more easily be private or meet in a small group, that individuals who did not get along could be kept apart, and that people could visit.

I was feeling nervous that day and went over to the other house. I walked into the kitchen and found George standing there. So slowly did he raise his head and give me his gentle gaze that my anxiety was gone and I was prepared for the humor in his eyes when he looked up at me. I sat down, others arrived and George went upstairs.

When he came back down someone looked at him and said in a tone of shock, "But George, your hands are shaking." And they were. He looked slowly down at his trembling hands, as if noticing them for the first time in his life and then as if they were pleased at the attention they quit their unseemly vibration and became still. George looked at them for a second or two longer and then back up at us, a grin on his face. George would spend hours or days in his room, his famous room filled with an unimaginable clutter or array of his collected stuff and possessions. Books, pamphlets,

papers, 3x5 cards written on in his cryptic printed handwriting. He wrote on the covers of books, front and back, on blank spaces inside the books; if he did not like what he had written he had a special white paste to paint over his words and obliterate them. He wrote on the posters and papers he had stuck to the walls. He wrote on the walls themselves. It was a room filled with words, a dense interweave, the large print of the epigrams on the walls would catch one's eye first, then the writing on the papers and the books, and finally one might discover hidden in a book a 3x5 card covered with a list of logical fortran propositions or of references to the ancient gods. George was given the job of naming the household cats and like to name them after divinities. One he called Ishtar for the forgotten Sumerian goddess from the Gilgamesh epic. One he similarly called Marouk.

Under and around the books and papers was another level of George's collections or creations, this one electronic. He had a reputation as a repairman for electrical machines, which I thought for years derived only from the mass of broken down televisions and radios and the scatter of electronic parts in his room and from the fact that he had been a computer specialist in early years. I thought the reputation was undeserved. For he did not appear to do any repairs to the objects that were brought to his room. But one day it occurred to me to offer to pay him to fix the transformer and wiring form my tape recorder, a difficult electrical and mechanical task, and he did an excellent job. He was capable.

Then George would descend the stairs, sometimes calmly, sometimes in a frenzy of talk and activity. He wrote on the walls of the kitchen or the common room, his face strained and red, his hair flying and his beard afluss, dressed sometimes only in his

underwear with a towel wrapped around his waist. Sometimes he would be dreadfully upset, shouting or muttering to himself, jumping onto a chair to write on the wall near the ceiling, running through the rooms or up and down the stairs, unable to sit down, unable to eat or drink.

One day when I was visiting I decided to give George a yoga lesson, to persuade him to relax his body and calm his breathing. I could have served him better perhaps by giving him a massage or a hug. But I thought to teach him some yoga. I wanted him to stand and breathe, to sit and breathe or to lie down and breathe. But he would not stop talking, much though I insisted. And while I was demonstrating a forward bend and he continued to talk something astonishing happened. I was sitting on the floor bending my upper body forward, trying to show him the pose, when he sat on my back on exactly the right place to allow me to breathe and stretch further and further. He who I thought knew next to nothing about yoga was showing himself the perfect yoga teacher, doing exactly as my teacher would do in one of the classes I had found so useful. I changed my attitude entirely. No longer did I tell him to stop talking; no longer did I try to demonstrate the poses so that he could imitate me. Now as I realized that he knew enough to help me to stretch I felt that I should imitate and learn from him.

Danny was the second son of the second son of a Scottish landowner or gentleman farmer. His uncle and his father managed the land together, but his uncle was senior. Danny was seventeen; he had been a difficult child, apparently, and had spent some time in mental hospitals before coming to the community.

Danny was still difficult. He was intrusive and annoying, but really not abnormally so for his age. He would spill tea in the kitchen on purpose. He would invade

the private room of our administrator and steal small items. He would poke dry sticks of spaghetti into the butter so that it was quite unusable. He would come to visit me and call me a 'cabbage'.

But he was extremely creative in his way. The spaghetti and the butt are examples; I tried it myself. I found an immense sensuality in the resistance and slight pop as the stick went through the paper wrapper and in the smooth glide into the butter itself. In our back gardens Danny made a number of discoveries which he shared with me. Once he lured me to a pile of rocks where there was a large spider's web. He had captured a fly and as he put it in the web he tricked me into moving my head very close indeed. I was horrified when an enormous spider appeared and made a sudden charge toward the trapped insect. I believe I let out a shriek and then Danny and I laughed together.

Another of his discoveries was unforgettable. He picked a dandelion and broke off the flower, leaving a translucent green tube. Then he captured an ant and gently induced it to make its way into this miniature tunnel. As I held the end of the dandelion stalk to my eye I could see the ant crawling vigorously upwards through a sunlit green pathway to freedom. Danny fed the ant into its tube again and again and in watching this found an exhilarating amusement.

But Danny burned the whiskers of the cat. He was not all gems and creativity. He told me of a castle where there was a child hidden away, a child with such a hideous defect of birth that he was forever locked in a room, never to be seen. This was the monster of Glencoe, an appalling ugliness. Danny told me this story several times, always in the same intense testing manner and I became convinced that he was speaking of himself. He was, in any case, unendurable to his family. Perhaps his uncle wanted to keep

him from inheriting the land. So Danny became the family monster, hidden from the light of day. He had gone away to school, been hospitalized then sent to the community. He finally left us and went to a progressive hospital in Scotland. What became of him in the end I do not know.

DON

Don was from California and New Mexico, where his father had legally deeded a piece of land to God. After a brief early involvement with the Manson family in Los Angeles, Don had lived with his wife on the land that was God's and had finally come alone but by prior arrangement to live in the community. I owe him a great deal.

During one period he was living in the same house as I; he was going through considerable difficulty and trying to work it out in a variety of ways. One entire night he spent sitting in the bathtub, having put a lot of shillings into the meter for the hot water. He believed that he could breath in the water through his pores. One day he set himself the goal of doing one thousand sit-ups and succeeded. Once he offered to clean the rooms of members of the community as a service, as an offering of himself, as an atonement. I was disappointed that he was discouraged in this by Leon, his therapist and also mine, who said that Don would never carry out the project. I though it was worth a try.

Once Don suggested that he and I walk north from Islington through suburban wastes of outer London until we reach the countryside, sleeping each night by the wayside. This seemed a bit extraverted to me. But Don was determined to give the idea a try and he was arrested twice on the outskirts of London for him unusual behavior on the streets.

Don was using a room on the ground floor of the same house where I had a room on the top floor. His plan was to sound-proof the room. For some reason he needed extreme quiet. At that time I was going through a difficult period of change, having strange and unpleasant experiences that I might have attributed to the fact that I had stopped drinking and that I could have explained away as a sort of delirium. But I received a few hints that my experience could not be so easily dismissed as that. I suspected from their behavior that some of the other residents of the community were having similar difficulties and that their inner lives were equally in turmoil. But I could not be sure as it was characteristic that they would act very strangely and say nothing about it at all.

But Don had done a bit of writing, lucidly describing his sufferings, scrawled on the side of a cardboard box that was discarded and that I only noticed when I saw it full of books when I was helping someone else move out of the house. I sat down on the stairs and read the writing on the side of the box and knew what I had dimly suspected, that my experience was no delirium, that it was the same as Don's and probably the same as that of others I had known. I knew then that I was free to join those such as Don who had gone through this agony of stretching; I was no longer compelled to forget.

BROADMOOR

I was sitting in the kitchen when we had a visitor, a young man with a shy manner and sunglasses. He and I shared a cup of tea and went out into the garden. As we sat there talking he explained that he needed somewhere to live and that he was just discharged from Broadmoor, the notorious psychiatric prison or hospital from the criminally insane. He had stepped out into the street one day and shot someone in the legs with a shotgun. I

asked him about this and he told me that the man was a complete stranger that he had no idea why he had done it.

I was amazed by the contrast between his gentle manner and his history of violence. I noticed his sensitivity and vulnerability when he eventually removed his sunglasses and looked at me; it was as if he had taken a great risk and opened himself up to me by giving up this defense, his shield for his eyes.

I had to explain that I could not guarantee him a place in the community. There were others who had already asked for rooms and in any case he would have to get to know other residents than myself before he could move in. He was hurt at this apparent refusal of what he was asking for, although I had spoken with him in my usual friendly manner for visitors needing a space. I was surprised at his feeling for two reasons, because it was reasonable that he meet others before either he or we could make any decision and because his presentation of himself did not encourage immediate acceptance. But he told me that he felt he was being rejected. I examined my own feelings and felt that it was only fair to say that he was right. It was true that he was being rejected. It pained me to speak this way but it was for the best. Perhaps we even shook hands before he put on his sunglasses and quietly left the house, never to return.

OLIVER

I found Oliver when I went upstairs looking for coffee, and I asked him whether I could have a cup. "I don't know anything about coffee," he said; "I only know about tea." I did not understand what he meant and feeling slightly annoyed made myself a cup of coffee and went downstairs.

But he had something that he wanted to explain to me. And I wondered what he meant when he said that he knew about tea. Some days later when some of us were sitting around a freshly made pot of tea he came in and asked for a cup. Someone said “Surely,” and he went quietly downstairs and forgot all about it.

Another time we were sitting around a fresh pot of tea and he came into the kitchen; with care and without a word he poured himself a cup and took it downstairs.

He had said that he knew about tea and I had been wondering what he meant. I had noticed his calmness and presence of mind and had sense a certain intentionality in his actions. What he knew was very simple and I was no longer confused. He knew that tea was there.

KEVIN

Kevin and his mother came to visit us one evening and asked whether they or he could move into a room in one of our houses. I say “they or he” as it was a question, a confusion, an ambiguity which really preceded the issue of whether there was a room available. They or he? We did not know what was being asked. I have an image in my mind of Kevin, tall and hunched, with blond hair and downcast eyes and a hidden smile sitting on his mother’s lap; he was shy and remained silent while his mother did the talking for the two of them. That evening and for more than a year afterward during which he lived with us almost his only conversation was to answer a direct question with ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘I don’t know’.

Possibly due to the prevailing anti-parent philosophy, possibly due to Kevin’s own decision, he moved in by himself. He took a room in the house where I was living and he lived for a time very quietly. I was interested in him: he seemed gentle and deeply

private, and somehow tolerant of others. And I was intrigued by his mysterious smile. He stayed in his room much of the day and moved about the house slowly and cautiously. To conceal his height and strength he shambled and slouched. He walked and sat with his shoulders bent and his head tucked into his chest. Thus also one could not usually see his face; he needed to keep to himself the humor in eyes and mouth.

I fell into the habit of visiting him. He was a good listener and I felt that he enjoyed the occasional visit from a friend. He was kind to me, offering me a chair and a cigarette and a space in which I could think quietly or talk as I chose. And always in his room that humor like a scent or spice. But one did not know what suffering he privately and uncomplainingly underwent. He was lonely and distressed, but he rarely betrayed such feelings in the beginning. During his first quiet months with us the only way he gave us any hint that he was suffering was by the fourth thing he said, in addition to 'yes', 'no', or 'I don't know'. And this was when he asked someone, late at night, "Do you have a sleeping pill?" Until he finally began to speak it was the longest phrase he had.

But Kevin would talk with his mother in private and must have had a command of language. Someone in the house would occasionally be surprised to overhear him speaking to her loudly and clearly in his room or on the telephone. Since I was a friend of his and since I had tried to help him in some ways I came to know his mother slightly, enough to understand the intensity of his relation with her and the apparent absence of his relation with others. One day she and I were sitting peacefully and privately in the kitchen of the house drinking tea. Perhaps because she valued my friendship with her son, perhaps because I was feeling happy and open that day she shared something with me that I will never forget. Our eyes happened to meet during a pause in the conversation

and what I saw in her eyes, what she showed me, was a warm sunny day with a slight breeze passing gently and constantly through the long green grasses of an endless plain. An ecstasy of peace, a certainty of eternal bliss, a glimpse, perhaps, of the world she shared with Kevin, a view of a place that was not this planet.

Kevin was in a dilemma; he had been given birth yet he was unborn. He was a big fellow in his middle twenties, with a height and a strength he could barely conceal. Yet he was still inside his mother (unless she was inside him) living on that other world they shared. He was a giant fetus, a paradox, a grotesque impossibility. No wonder he had nothing much to say to anybody else.

I knew Kevin and his family well during his quiet period, so well that when I said I was leaving the community his mother exclaimed, "But you canna leave. You're David Burns." I had not realized that Kevin or his mother or both had appreciated my presence or needed me until that moment. I was touched but it was time for me to move away. After so many years living in the communities I had learned and experience there as much as I ever would and I could no longer bear the strain.

Some time later during a period when I was visiting the house or occasionally getting bits of news from people in the network Kevin began to change. He moved into my old room on the top floor with a view of the back garden and began to stretch himself out full size. He stretched in all directions: he became more of a man and more of a child. He began to follow the path of development that a number of those resident in the communities had followed and that had been thoroughly studied by Mary Barnes.

Kevin stopped wearing clothes and using the toilet or the bath. He would sit and shit in his room, on the floor or on the mattress, although he was provided with a potty

and gently encouraged to use it. He quite stank up the house. He would sit or lie on his bed covered with a stained blanket and then descend the stairs with it draped around him in search of his chosen meal of Mars bars or muesli and milk. He became of course the focal point of concern of the household, of the community and of the larger network. People tried to keep him fed, making sure that he could find what he wanted to eat, and cleaned up after him again and again until it became necessary to put linoleum on the floor of his room so that cleaning was easier.

But he was a giant baby and very strong. As was not uncommon in the community he smashed up the kitchen several times, and one time when I was in his room he unexpectedly hurled a piece of furniture at me, missing me by a fraction of an inch. But he was more frightening than dangerous. I do not believe he ever hurt anybody, although he scared everybody. Once he was with his therapist, a woman, and suddenly raised his arm in a violent threatening gesture, saying with a formidable Scottish burr and in the finest Calvinist tradition of severity, “‘Tis the back of me hand ye’ll be getting me lass.”

Yes! He had decided to speak. This was a great encouragement to the people who fed him and cleaned up after him and were sometimes frightened by him. I remember visiting the house and finding several people in the kitchen and Kevin on the stairs in his blanket. He was talking slowly with humor and a quiet intensity to the people around him and I was struck by his extraordinary charm. He still shambled when he walked; he needed to control the strength that could result in a severity that threatened others. But he had lifted up his face and let the brightness flow forth. He had a radiant smile and joy in his eyes as he stood on the stairs that day. It was a pleasure for me to see him there,

transformed from friendly withdrawn passive fellow I had visited in his room the previous year.

I REMEMBER RONNIE LAING

I remember Ronnie tiptoeing timidly through the front door of a house in the community; laughing raucously, almost braying, a parody of laughter: but good breathing; enetering the room, carefully folding his jacket to sit on, in order to avoid giving pain by refusing the offer of cushions silent for ten minutes and then a gushing flow of monologue; sometimes drunk and seeming insensitive, especially when finances had to be discussed; telling tales of enchantment of the yogis and healers he had met in India; arguing violently about the availability of cotton turtleneck shirts in Oxford Street.

Once when my therapist was going on a month's holiday, he told me he had arranged that I have a session with Ronnie. So when Ronnie was next visiting the community I found him and abruptly asked him for a meeting. He was startled and as he tried to respond to my request he began to stammer. But I remember that he looked me in the eye and stammered so calmly and carefully that neither of us was made anxious. My own stammering has never been the same sense.

When I went to visit Ronnie for my hour, I was so nervous that I was early and sat on a bench in the park, breathing deeply with my eyes closed, trying to calm myself. As I sat with him in a room in his home, I remember that for almost our entire time together he was massaging and cleansing the insides of his nostrils with his finger. Before going to see him I had decided to open my wallet and let him take whatever he wished, but by the end of our meeting I had forgotten this plan. But we were discussing money anyway, for

some reason; I was telling him that in spite of my anxieties I did have enough money for whatever I decided to do.

When I left his home he had asked for no fee, although I had been told when I first arrived in England that he charged eighteen guineas for a consultation with an American. I soon realized that he would send me no bill, that the consultation was free, a meeting between equals. This gave me such joy that it was some weeks before I could tell anyone about our meeting without bursting into a great release of tears. This I will never forget.

During our time together I spoke at length, explaining, confiding, confessing. Due to my need to talk there was little silence between us; I wanted to tell him about myself, I wanted him to know about me, but I gave him little chance to respond. Yet I was attentive to him and he was attentive to me. I did later somewhat regret my compulsive conversation.

I felt, however, that he knew and liked me and I came to trust him. Several months later I was going through a critical change in my life. I had stopped drinking and started to practice hatha yoga and was experiencing great tension and turmoil. I tried to reach him on the phone and was told by his secretary to ring back in half an hour. I did so and Ronnie himself told me to ring again in half an hour. I persisted in spite of my tension and frustration and finally was able to speak with him.

I told him about the strange experiences I was having and asked him what to do. I knew he would understand and was prepared to listen to what he might say. I remember what he told me and this is what he said. Avoid such things as coffee, tea and sugar. Find yourself a space large enough to sit and to stand and to pace about and to lie down. Have

in the room a supply of foods that do not have to be cooked. He told me that I should be careful who I talked to, as the experience I was having might be labeled schizophrenic. He was warm and sympathetic and eager to help me.

I remember Ronnie visiting the community one day; we gathered and sat with him in the room of Linda, the poetess. I was sitting next to him at one point, and I picked up a piece of paper and wrote on it, "all therapy is harshan." He glanced at my words, turned the paper over and read what was written on the other side, the first draft of a poem by Linda. It began "the wind was in my head." Ronnie looked up and said "wait until the wind is in your bones."

Linda was annoyed as well because she knew that the poem Ronnie saw was not one of her best. She would never have shown it to him. She had taught me about poetry: that a good poem present a feeling or feelings purely and clearly while a bad poem is muddy and confused. So I was not offended by her annoyance.

Ronnie also said that he was planning a trip to America, for lectures and the Johnnie Carson show. I was afraid for his safety; I did not think he would return alive; I imagined he would be killed or mutilated by my own countrymen. I told him that I had experienced a sudden fantasy of plucking out his eyeballs with my thumbs. I remember how quietly he laughed.

DEVON

My great-aunt who hanged herself just before the War was a painter of landscapes and portraits in pastel colors. The money from the sale of some of her work came into my hands enabling me to set up a small fund named after her. This money allowed some

members of the Archway Experimental Community to travel to Devon and rent an old farmhouse on the edge of the moor near the sea.

The water drained from the moor and the pastures on its borders, from marsh into rivulets into two streams that flowed through two valleys they had created. Between these streams, overlooking them, just below a finger of high dry grazing land that extended out from the moor stood a solid two-story farmhouse, three hundred years old that a friend had discovered and lived in for the winter season a few years before. The house stood isolated on a small space between the moor and the pasture lands that ran along the two valleys; it could only with difficulty be reached by road: either one parked on the moor and walked or else drove up and down steep hills, fording the river between them.

But we loved the house in spite of its remoteness. We were a hundred yards from the moor with its miles of bloom and heather and the vision of the low mountains all around. We were suspended over the river which we could always hear singing below us; we had the peace, the quiet and the solitude of the deserted wilderness and the lushness and the beauty of a marshy delta land.

We took the house for two weeks, renting it from the strange anchorite lady who lived in the remodeled barn behind it. She was eighty years old, originally from London and lived entirely to herself, being very shy. She was the subject of gossip as she did not mingle with the local people. It was sometimes reported that she had been seen walking at night in the depths of the moor although she never went into the moor, not even during the day.

We took several trips out to the house in Devon. One summer a large group of us, therapists, their clients, students, spent the month of June in the area, some of us in the

old farmhouse, some of us in other houses and cottages. This was one of the passionate attempts at a movement toward living in the countryside; for many years people in the network had been trying to set up centers outside of London. This summer it was Leon, my therapist who took the initiative and planned for that month to be living and meeting with people in the area we had discovered. So North Devon was invaded by a number of us.

I remember mainly the long solitary walks I took up into the moor, purple and brown and green, meeting a cow, a sheep, a wild pony, followed for a moment by a skylark seeming to sing from heaven. I walked very far over heather to the top of a ridge or along one of the two rivers to its source. I walked until I was very sweaty and then I bathed naked in a rock pool between two waterfalls. I practiced my asanas or sat and tried to meditate. And I gloried in the space and the solitude and the sunshine. I was on top of the world; I could see the mountains and the sea and the clouds.

But there was another of Leon's patients whose husband had rented space in a nearby farmhouse for a family of four, the parents and two children. The mother had previously visited the communities and she had been in therapy with Leon for some time. I had met her once or twice, or rather seen her: she seemed remote, emotionally isolated. Of course these were times when she was in a group and perhaps felt uncomfortable. I do not know what she was like in intimate surroundings except from hearsay. The times I did see her was hovering over the doorway or standing next to the fireplace examining the stonework intently and almost with horror.

In London she had been given continual attention by members of the network who had gone out to the house in the suburbs where she lived with her family. She had

tried several times to throw herself out the window and needed protection as an alternative to be locked up. Leon had hoped that a holiday in the sun and space of Devon would do her good and it did, for a time. For she eventually crawled out a window in the middle of the night, siphoned some gasoline out of the car, poured it over herself, and set herself alight like a Vietnamese monk. She suffered very severe burns and was taken to the hospital where she lived for several months without skin. One of those who went to visit her during her last days reported that she seemed to glow in colors, transparently, so far had she transcended the flesh, so close was she to death.

This was the death that touched me most closely during my years in the London communities. Contrary to the expectations of many that the experiment of Kingsley Hall would be unsuccessful and would lead to suicides and pregnancies no one died there; and that a pregnancy could be a comparable misfortune I do not understand. The woman who burned herself alive had not lived in the same household with me but I had met her and her dramatic and horrifying death disturbed our experience of the country and destroyed the local people's confidence in us. For a long time afterwards the community had a very bad reputation in this part of Devon. This was partly because some of us had been seen dancing naked in the moonlight outside a rented cottage near the village; at least this was the reason given in later years that people from the network were not wanted in the area. But I believed that this death was the major factor. Several years later a local farmer was discussing it with one of us and he was weeping and weeping.

JOHN

After his experience John began using the term metanoia. That was the first time I heard it myself. I knew he had been through a personal transformation; he had spent time

in the common space with the continuous attention of members of the network. He had of course been close to speechless during this time of change so I knew there was meaning in the comments he made afterward.

He spoke indirectly, making reference to something Francis Huxley had said during a seminar. Metanoia is the step beyond paranoia; it is not a conspiracy against a conspiracy for. John said the two experiences were not really opposites; in a sense they were the same or subtly different from each other. One commonly hears people called paranoid. John spoke of people being metanoid. The term caught my fancy. It drew attention to itself, provided curiosity. It had an interesting sound, like metallic, or like android, or like metaphysic. Metanoid man, something new.

My impression from John's words was that he had become aware of a possible movement from paranoia to metanoia. He had come to the community as a student. He had not been a mental patient and had not been diagnosed schizophrenic. He had not acted particularly strangely during his time with us before he moved into the common space. He was unusual but not really out of the ordinary.

Then he had moved into the center: he had moved into his emotional center and he had moved into the space in the common room and accepted the attention and the care of guardians who sat with him day and night. He had taken off his clothes. He had shaved his head. He had listened into himself. He had become silent and private, undergoing the inner journey as had the others. Here was a demonstration of the usefulness of the institution we had developed. It was more than a response to a noisy violent demand for attention from a severely disturbed person. It was a tool.

Under the attention of those who gathered John experienced a change. To be paranoid means that one feels hostile or malicious feelings directed at one. It means that one feels translucent or even entirely transparent to the gaze of others. It means that one feels at the center of attention even of those who are not physically present. One feels totally exposed, though totally vulnerable. But it is a different matter to be in a room with a group who are gathered with the expressed purpose of letting one be at the center and to accept their mindfulness. No longer is one imagining that one is the subject of others' thought: those others are actually physically present. The trembling and insecurity of one's consciousness need not be so intense. One need not fear the unknown other; they are real others present and one can feel for them.

John found that he need not fear them, that he could trust them, that he could use them for his own purposes of growth. Perhaps it was here that he learned that if there is a conspiracy of the group it is a conspiracy in for the individual. Perhaps it was here that he learned that if people were laughing at him it was a laughter in which he could join.

John remained a student but applied his happy new awareness to the way he went about it. He remained in London studying Japanese with intention of translating ancient Zen manuscripts.

ELEN

Ellen killed the cat because God told her to. This was how she put it. She had been in the back yard with two cats, the white one and the black-and-white one. She killed the latter with a kitchen knife, stabbing it several times. The white cat walked up to her as she was standing there with the bloody knife in her hand and escaped death by its apparent willingness to die.

God told Ellen to kill the black-and-white cat and to spare the white cat. This was her experience. Of course this did not make me feel better when I was shown the dead body of the animal I had so much loved. I could neither understand nor forgive. I was aware that she was tortured. I knew that she found life exceedingly difficult; and I was familiar with her occasional bizarre behavior. She had more than once taken off her clothes in the house and strolled out toward the local shops before she was taken to a “place of safety”, as the legal phrase had it, by the police. But it was common for a member of the community to be found naked on the streets; it was not common for one of us to murder a cat.

Several months later, while I was preparing a meal, I found a large evil-looking but inside a head of cauliflower. I was so disgusted that I decided to break my usual rule of not harming even the lowliest of creatures and kill this bug. It was a mistake. I well knew that I was in a tricky, sensitive, vulnerable state in which I needed to be mindful but I had not realized the importance of my rule of non-violence. So I went out into the garden with the intention of squashing it, only to discover that a lust for murder had overtaken me. I decided to let the bug live; but I would not be let off the hook so easily. When I put the insect gently on the ground and looked up I saw a rabbit. I knew that the violence I had released within myself was out of control. If I did not kill the bug I would have to kill the rabbit, I felt, as if a divine voice were giving the command. So I killed the bug.

But I was not Isaac being reprieved of the need to sacrifice Jacob by sacrificing a goat. When I killed the bug and looked up I saw the cat... Here was a ruthless progression of violence, an ecstasy of death, a mindlessness of murder. I was shaken and wished to

my depths that I had not killed that one unimportant insect. And I was so grateful that I had not been compelled to destroy a rabbit, a cat or a man before I learned to avoid the terrible frenzy of death.

I valued this experience of the power and amorality of the divine, the superhuman. I was fascinated and in awe; I had been helpless in the hands of a power greater than myself. I understood and forgave Ellen who had been commanded to kill one cat and to spare the other. I respected her for she might have been living further into the depths when she sacrificed a cat than when I merely squashed a bug.

Ellen used to accuse me of stealing her eggs. She used to insist that I owed her a pound note. None of this was true. I was bewildered then by what she was saying; now I think I understand her somewhat better. She was trying to ensure, to guarantee, to create a relationship with me by putting something between us, an egg, a pound note: it did not matter what. One time this became more explicit but I still did not figure out what was going on. She had insisted that she owed me a pound; perhaps I had given her one on a previous occasion when she insisted I owed one to her. Ellen knocked on my door, came in and gave me the money, a small paper rectangle ornately designed but with unfathomable significance. I said thank you and she left the room. But I was somehow dissatisfied, tense; I would not allow her to put something between us that bound us together in a mystifying way. What I thought was that she did not owe me the pound and that therefore I could not accept it.

There was a small hallway on the landing to which led the doors my room and to Ellen's room on the top floor of the house. We met in that space, each of us in confusion, and I tried to return the piece of paper she had just given me. But it was impossible.

When she accepted it back it was then necessary for her to feel that she once again owed it to me. So we were back at the beginning. I wish I had understood her better and had been better able to accept the existence of this object which belonged, it appeared, to both and to neither of us but could not be claimed one or given to the other. What were we to do with it?

I do not remember what happened to that particular printed document. But there was always something holding us together. I tend to say that she was responsible for creating these situations but perhaps I am being unfair. She was genuinely confused: I cannot blame her for my confusion. It was exasperating, however, to be continually drawn into these states of mind and feeling toward her by the ridiculous demands and accusations.

Ellen had a well-earned reputation for bizarre behavior and violence. She might walk into the kitchen and suddenly urinate on the floor. She might explode into a rage or burst into tears. She was prone to believe that God was telling her to do things or that gods and devils were using her for a battleground. We experienced this battle perhaps at second hand but we felt its effects. One day she might pick up a knife and hold it and scream: it was sometimes necessary to hide all the knives in the house or at least to get them out of the kitchen. She walked into my room one day holding a large bread knife but I was not in a playful mood. I got up from my chair, went over to her and took the weapon out of her limp hand; it was surprisingly easy. But she frightened people and she seemed terribly disturbed and unhappy. And she was in some danger of being arrested if she went outside or if the neighbors should find her noise intolerable and call the police.

It was because of the problems Ellen posed that we developed a practice that served us well for a long time, that created an atmosphere, a feeling in the community that was very important in drawing us together. It became necessary at a certain point to give Ellen twenty-four hour attention and we discovered that we had the resources to do so. Ellen was the first, and this way of dealing with people in crisis proved useful later with others in differing situations. At the beginning our response to her continuing tension and threat of violence was informal: she demanded attention. If there was no one with her she would scream, pick up a knife, or else drop her clothes in her room and wander out the door and down the street, letting the world marvel at her beautiful breasts until, inevitably, she was taken by the police.

So Ellen received the attention she required. Her room was on the top floor but during this time she would usually be found in the common room with a group of us gathered around her drawn by her intensity and the need to protect her. Eventually we put up a list for all the hours of the day, so that people from the community or the larger network could put down their names and promise to spend some time with her. This formality was a guarantee that there would be at least one person with Ellen at all hours of the day and night. Usually there were more; in fact the common room where she was protected became the emotional center of the house and the community. Our endeavor to attend to her gave focus and meaning to our living.

She was a strong, passionate woman; she was struggling through her private inner battle in a very physical outward way. She would hit and kick and curse and weep, fighting, apparently, to escape from confinement. But there were no locks, not even closed doors caring her from the world outside her common room. Only a wall of flesh.

She was held, embraced, sat on. She was listened to and talked to. She would try to break loose and be wrestled to the floor, biting and kicking. But she was the center of attention and if she was ambivalent about the restraint imposed on her then she felt on balance happier to be restrained than to be ignored.

This was shown one day when a police officer visited the house. He was in the kitchen speaking with someone while Ellen sat unclothed in the next room with her circle of attendant friend around her. We could not imagine what he would think or do if he were to enter and see this unusual scene; we could not expect that he would understand what was going on. So we were concerned that Ellen would struggle and scream or even call out to be rescued. She had not openly indicated that she valued the form our caring took and had appeared to resist her confinement. But she was unusually quiet while the policeman was in the house; we could therefore assure that she appreciated the attention we were giving her.

One evening I experienced something of what she might have been feeling. A nun who was resident at the community arranged an informal but fully ceremonial mass to be given in the room where we were gathered about Ellen, who had a Catholic background. I was very drunk and getting drunker; I believe I drank a full bottle of whiskey that evening. But I sat quietly and attentively during the mass and took communion as I believe did Ellen who remained stark naked during the proceedings. After the priest left I found myself very upset and began to make violent gestures and to declaim loudly. But I was in a special place, in the common room where the energy and mindfulness of the community were focused, not only on Ellen but on whoever needed love and attention. And I was with two special people who were ostensibly there to take care of her but were

willing to share themselves with whoever was present. Ellen had thus let us create a central space where any one of us could demand attention just as she could.

So as I began to bring my distress out into the open these two people were with me. And what they did was extraordinary. They did not of course try to persuade me to take my clothes off as Ellen had done but one of them suggested that I remove my watch and then my glasses and somehow this calmed me down. There was a humor in his asking me to do this: he did not try to take away the whiskey as might be the usual reaction to someone who was very drunk but instead allowed me to give up the glasses and the watch which I was very willing to do. In some unexpected way this amused me and calmed me down; my incipient violence was dissipated.

Eventually the person in the common room asking for or demanding help and receiving it became a sort of institution. In addition to community many members there were therapists in training, seminar students and others in the network who would rally to the news that someone was in distress, going through changes, freaking out. The person who was being helped provided a vital service to the group by giving us a central focus. Sometimes it seemed that we took turns freaking out, regressing, coming out of the closet and that the health and happiness of the community required that one of us accept this role. This was not a scapegoating; this was perhaps a scapegoating in reverse. No one suffered through the process, although sometimes I felt sorry for the person in the center who had to endure the patronizing ignorance and the foolishness of some of the helpers. I was amused by some of those who had come in order to care for someone severely regressed and who began partially to regress themselves, becoming childish as opposed

to childlike, talking baby talk and acting silly, discarding their usual serious and sophisticated social manner.

But some of us had a consciousness of the warmth and intentionality that was generated by the gathering. Some of us made an effort to allow this institution to grow and develop, whether by taking the role of helper or helped. It was not always possible to distinguish these; one who came to observe and learn might find himself benefited by his experience; and the best helped was one who had gone through a time of being in the center changing, growing, flowering and bearing fruit.

CARL

A number of residents seemed to go through a similar experience in its outward form and I learned that they shared to some degree an inner experience. I came to know Carl best of those who found their way to the center through the tension, violence and turmoil they expressed and the terrible pain and fear they felt. Carl told me his story.

During the time when it was possible to put oneself at the actual physical and emotional center of the community by utilizing the institution originally formed to answer Ellen's needs Carl went through his inner change without moving into the common room and calling on the total resources of the network. He was content with the knowledge that he could do this if he wished and he was aware that the ambiance of the household where he lived allowed him to go through changes in private as well as in public.

Sitting in his room Carl began to feel that he had become transparent, that the barrier between his self and the outside world had faded. He felt that his thoughts were being perceived by others and he heard voices responding to what he was thinking as

though he were speaking aloud in a dialogue with another. But this other was the whole outside world; the voice of children and the cries of animals would appear to be answering his thoughts as if he were giving a lecture and getting a reaction, sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes critical. Carl felt he was the center of the universe, that he was the focus of loving energy. But it was necessary to accept this peculiar state of consciousness, to affirm it, to move into this other and alien dimension without reservation. He found it unbearable to exist on the borderlands of this unexplored territory; if he could no longer ignore this space into which he felt drawn then it was better to move into it by an act of will than to feel condemned to an unwanted and undesirable experience. This was the difference between heaven and hell.

During the day with other people Carl needed to maintain his normal persona; he wanted to act sane. For he knew that from an external point of view he was withdrawn, estranged, deluded. During the day he lived out strange intense fantasies that were more real and important for him than the reality we agree to share. One day he was in the garden waiting for his therapist. Carl felt that a wise old man from China had decided many years ago to be reborn as himself and to live his life with all its ignorance and follow. He felt that this ancient had wanted to come back as Carl, that there was a humor and a meaning to his life, that the old man had known who Carl was and why he must live. And Carl felt that he was remembering his identity with this old Chinaman and that he was on the edge of understanding the purpose his life must have if someone so wise would be happy to choose it. Carl also was convinced that the two other people in the garden with him had also been reborn in this way, that they had made an agreement to die and to return at this moment and to remember who they were and why.

And this was where Carl had to be careful; this was where delusion and folly set in. He found himself believing that the ten-month old child in the next garden was God. Then who was his therapist who was on his way? His therapist was Jesus Christ. His therapist would die, would be crucified. And this was where Carl's basic common sense made all the difference. This was where the nights he had spent sorting through his strange ideas and senseless but overwhelming convictions gave him strength and understanding. For in the midst of these extraordinary experiences he knew that he was deluded, mistaken in fact; but most important he knew that there was a core of significant truth in what he was living through and that there was life-enhancing value in the midst of his delirium. So he did his best not to overreact to this outpouring of fantasies and not to stifle them.

His therapist arrived but was not, of course, able to share his inner experience. In fact, Carl told me, he felt that the therapist was dragging him deeper into the experience, was communicating to him by blinks and nods. Carl felt that he had a tragic choice facing him. Everyone in the world except him had decided to take on animal form while retaining human consciousness. This was an eminently sensible decision as they would have beauty and resilience and freedom from the oppressions of human culture. They would be clothed in their natural fur, would be unmechanical and would communicate non-verbally. But Carl was being told that he must join the others in taking on fur and feathers or else remain the lone naked human, an eccentricity, an outcast, and outsider.

This was a great adventure, a great challenge for Carl; he knew it was really a fantasy but he was fascinated by the truth of this inner experience. Here was a seeming evolution in reverse, back to the animal, yet a movement forward at the same time. A

shedding of the obscure violence of our civilization. But Carl was unwilling; he must remain a human being in human form. It seemed a tragic situation that it was not possible for him to join the others. The tragedy situation that it was not possible for him to join the others. The tragedy of an Adam without an Eve.

Carl had had moments of revelation earlier in his life and had been sustained over the years by their memory. He had had glimpses of peace and glory. But now he found that he could inhabit these spaces he had passed through. Especially during the nights when he could let go his defenses and drop his everyday persona he was swimming in a sea of meaning and breathing an air that was more than a mixture of gases.

Carl kept rabbits in the back of the garden of the house. They were brother and sister, one called Silver, the other called Gold, after the colors of their fur. He became very close to them during his time of hardship; their necessary daily feeding and care was an important duty. And they were his faithful silent companions. One evening he stood by their cage with the open door and in their presence he let himself feel his grief. He felt that he and the rabbits were flooding the world with a purity and power of feeling. He felt barriers give way; he felt them open. In the silence and stillness of the evening he stood without moving, without sobbing or weeping although he breathed with the deepness of strong emotion. The distraction and disturbance of noisy tears did not interfere with the intensity of his feeling. Grief filled his consciousness. His mind was washed clear and beautiful by a flow of inner tears.

Being at the center could be a glorious exalted feeling but it could also be horrible. One afternoon Carl came downstairs in a cheerful mood wanting to touch everyone he saw, feeling sociable and affectionate. He went into the kitchen and sat on a

stool in the middle of the room; suddenly he was stuck. He had abruptly lost his freedom to move. He had lost the strength to get up. So he sat. At last he had the freedom to stay where he was on the chair: from one point of view an infinite freedom. His happiness was muted not but was able to accept the state he was in. He still felt exalted; he had not lost consciousness of the great meaning he could dredge up during the night.

Eventually he was unstuck from the chair and was able to stand, but feeling some anxiety. As he moved into the common room where there were people gathered the horror struck, his anxiety mounted. And his consciousness twisted and warped until the power and meaning he knew so well became evil and terrifying. And then at the perfect moment an airplane began its long slow shattering droning down the musical scale as it descended overhead toward a landing. But Carl felt that the airplane was thinking his control and that he was willing it to crash. As the rumbling decreased in pitch his horror grew and his obsessive belief became more overwhelming. Carl was lost in a dread delusion, convinced that he was willing the destruction of airplanes if not all over the globe then within a radius of many miles. He imagined air traffic controllers and pilots desperately trying to understand this mysterious series of disasters. The cause of it all, he believed for quite a while, was his own evil power of rage. Carl recovered from this experience but he was shaken. He had been living in a world of controlled delusion with some success. He had allowed himself to be irrational without losing himself. This time the strength of his unfelt rage had been such that he had totally succumbed to an experience of terror.

At night Carl would retire to his room and stop his attempt at controlling his behavior and his experience. When it was quite late and he was alone he would smoke

some hash that had been given to him by his therapist. This allowed him to slip into the inner world, the other dimension; the intoxication gave him an explanation for the alien experience; smoking the hash was a symbolic act which allowed him to affirm a movement into himself. He finally understood, he told me, what it meant to call a drug a sacrament.

First he began to feel afraid, terrified as he accepted his place at the center of the world, at the focal point of consciousness. But once he had passed through this barrier of fear he entered a space of terrible pain that was not physical or mental but pure emotion. Then he was at the center at the place where all feeling is born. He began to let his imagination run at the place where all feeling is born. He began to let his imagination run free, reaching out into mythopoetic reality. He experienced consciousness not as something that he had but as something that had him. Consciousness was like a sea in which he was floating, a great calm buoyant salt sea in which he was warm and safe. He was free to imagine, to hallucinate, to be deluded. He examined with care what was going on in his head from he knew that there was a pearl of great price to be found; there was knowledge; there were values. He worked on his consciousness; he taught himself how to swim; and he learned how to play.

Carl felt that he was not alone, that he was sharing consciousness with other who were old and wise and kind. He felt he was being led along a pathway toward a goal. These others were the ten just men who hold together the world; they were the wise men from the east of the theosophists. He almost felt their physical presence.

Then came the change. From the heights of the exaltation he had experienced he was abruptly dropped into hell. Later he thought of it as a bad case of the dry-cleaners.

But that was much later when he could laugh about it and think about it objectively. At the time it was hell on earth. He had lived through similar changes of mood before; he had been in a state of grace and had there lost it; he had lived on memories of a glimpse of heaven. This time, however he had been living in heaven, breathing its rarified air, hearing its music and to fall into the depths of unmeaning that was almost unbearable. Life did not seem worth living. He did not think of suicide because he had more than fugitive memories to sustain him. He knew now that it was possible to live in that place he had only glimpsed previously. He had been able to inhabit a land of ecstasy and intense feeling where effort had value, where question of the meaning of life became irrelevant. This was a land to be explored, an adventure that held joys and terror and happiness.

But he had been cast out. Perhaps he was only living in the everyday world once more but it seemed worse than he had remembered it. It seemed a place of filth and degradation and trivia. A place of confusion and obsession. He did not think of himself as Jesus; he never had. But he remembered that Jesus too had explored the inferno, had descended to the depths and then returned. There was a literary precedent for Carl's experience. He was in good company.

If he had been "schizophrenic" before and had been able to learn from it and glory in it, then he was "obsessive-compulsive neurotic" now. Even if there was no transcendence, no lightness, no divine bliss nor divine terror in this new state then at least Carl determined that he would be able to learn something of value during this period. This hope alone kept him going. For he had to endure such unpleasant feelings that he had

never imagined were possible. Shame, self-disgust, self-hatred, feelings of personal uncleanness polluted the seas that had once supported him with such buoyancy.

He felt he was swimming in shit and he wanted to get out. But there was nowhere to go. His own body was the very pollution he could not bear; try though he might to wash himself he could not wash away the filth that he found his physical self to be. He became obsessive in keeping himself clean, bathing every day, washing his clothes and bedding, but was unsuccessful in clearing his mind of the thoughts that drove him to wash. Earlier he had enjoyed the discipline and the ritual of bathing before his morning practice of hatha yoga exercises but now there was no pleasure in it. His mind was filled with self-disgust and horror. Carl told me that he tried desperately to clean his body and his surrounding until he found the task impossible. He was like Hercules at the Augean stables. He vacuumed his carpet. Then he shampooed it. Then he shampooed it again carefully and laboriously. But this was not enough. Finally he got a new carpet only to discover that the whole process of cleaning it must start anew. After the wonders he had experienced the triviality and horror and meaninglessness of these preoccupations were humbling indeed. He could not understand what was happening to his mind. He was filled with dread.

But he survived and he told me that although he still did not understand why it had been necessary he had learned some invaluable lessons from the experience. He had come to understand the suffering a person could undergo, the terrible conditions under which a person could continue to survive. He began to learn to forgive. This came about because he had realized that he could never know what someone else might be going

through. He knew a depth of suffering that he had not known before. More important, he told me, he began to learn to forgive himself.

EMILY

One afternoon I was walking down the stairs from my top floor room when I noticed the open door and the visitor sitting in the room used by Edward, our “administrator”. As I passed my attention was drawn by this figure of a girl sitting motionless and Edward invited me to meet her, explaining that he had to do something. He left us alone together and I could not help being impressed by her extraordinary stillness. I decided not to intrude on whatever she was doing so I sat on the floor and watched her. I gradually became aware of the atmosphere of serenity and warth that surrounded her. I felt as I breathed the stillness of the air we shared. As I entered this calm space I noticed that her eyes were open and that she was staring fixedly at a spent match on the floor. I did not speak to her; I sat for those few minutes, then I rose and left her side when Edward returned to the room. He explained that she had traveled alone from Canada, having managed the mechanics of arranging the plane flight and getting from the airport to the house in spite of her apparent catatonia. She was presumably willing and able to talk well enough to relate to airport personnel and immigration officials.

She had read Laing and decided to come to London seeking therapy and a place to live in a community. So she visited the house, spoke with Edward, met some of the residents including myself and formed her decision. I never saw her again. I believe she found a home and a therapist in another part of the extended network of therapeutic associations in London. But I was deeply impressed by meeting her, by her determination

and by the strength of her personality that communicated itself without her making any sound not making any movement except to breathe.