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On my beloved Frank's last days and his crossing

By Mary Morgaine Thames

Posted on 08/31/2009

It is Monday, August 24th, 2009, and Frank has been gone from this world now for five days. I have received many questions regarding how and why Frank left this planet so suddenly. I offer these words to the larger circle of what I bore witness to, what I experienced and felt in the last few weeks of Frank's life and what I believe led to his crossing. The sun is bright in the summer sky, pausing neither for life nor death. The days keep unfolding without judgment as to who has come into this world and who has gone. Even in death, life spills forth to fill the moments with its own love for itself, a never-ending cycle of transformational existence. I am honored to be able to share my story within the Great Turning.

One of the last coherent conversations Frank and I had, 4 days before he crossed, was about 'Story'. He was firm in having me understand clearly that the telling of a story could only be, even in its best form, a fragment of the Whole, for there are so many perspectives and conditions that make up the reality from which the story unfolds that it could never be all conveyed simultaneously. With this understanding, I sing my heart song.

It was in Australia, winter 2007, that I first noted Frank feeling less than his vibrant self. He arrived with a cold and the entire time we spent together there he did not feel well. But he did not let that stop him from moving and learning and sharing, and he gained his strength back enough to continue on to New Zealand and then back up to the northern lands of Australia after we parted. While there, near Darwin, in the tropics of that beautiful country, he was bitten by hundreds of mosquitoes and from that he believed he acquired the Ross River Virus, a self-limiting virus said to be gone within a year, that causes inflammation of the joints, fever and fatigue.

Until his death, he continued to experience these symptoms on and off to different levels and degrees. Frank also had a history of

kidney stones that may have played a role in his declining health. I cannot help but also note it is my memory that a couple months before he went to Australia, he began the first of a series of mercury amalgam removals from his teeth that continued until three weeks before his death. Frank also had (and recovered from) malaria, acquired from his 2003 travels in Africa. When cat scans were taken once he was in the hospital, we learned of infarcts (dead tissue from lack of blood supply) on his brain that were several years old, maybe caused by malaria, maybe not.

Our human bodies are just that, human. We are both fragile and resistant beings at once, and for the eons of human existence our systems have slowly evolved and adapted to a localized ecosystem of water, air and earth. When we leave the place of our origin, it takes generations for our bodies to fully adapt to the new elements around us. Frank was a child and lover of Gaia and I am certain it was his intimate connection to the plants that kept him as vital and strong as he was for as many years as he spanned the globe. Yet all of us are subject to natural law, and Frank's choice to live all over the planet without taking time to slow down and let his body acclimate to the microorganisms that came to co-exist within him from those travels had a price.

There were so many factors, both known and unknown, that were a part of the picture of Frank's dying- that no one 'thing', one 'diagnosis', killed Frank Cook. Frank was at death's door many times in his life. He had a remarkably risky and incredibly 'stress-full on the body' lifestyle. That is how he did his amazing work, though. I believe his Higher self knew he would die at a young age and he was driven to reach as many people as he could with his message of compassion and daily connection to the earth and that slowing down was not high on his priority list. May no one be afraid of engaging deeply with nature because of what they may think killed Frank. That would contradict his very existence. To thine own heart be true and always keep the faith that your destiny is in the hands of Someone/Something far greater than you.

On Tuesday, August 4th, Frank awoke with a painfully sore throat and a bit of a fever. He had been commenting that his throat was sore for a while, but this day, it hurt him so much he could not swallow easily. He said it felt like ulcers had burst in his throat and asked me to look down it with a flashlight, but there was no visible sign of any sores to my eyes. He was scheduled to teach with Sandor Katz a 'Wild Foods and Fermentation' workshop for the next two days. He felt weak and his throat hurt, but he went ahead the next morning to Asheville Institute, in Asheville, NC, to teach with Sandor. He felt so lousy that day and rested when he was not teaching, and he had no desire for food since swallowing was so painful for him. He drank tea and juice and really from that day on I never saw him take in a 'normal' sized meal again.

Frank prepared Sandor that he may not be able to teach the next day. I drove us home, the full moon soon to be rising, and Frank rested and burned a fever while I brought him teas and compresses to ease the discomfort. The next morning he felt a good bit better, and was able to show up for teaching with Sandor. Again, he napped between teachings, and was grumpier than I could recall. Within the past year, Frank would often become easily grumped by this or that, especially to me when we were alone, so unlike the endearing sweetness he poured onto me in the beginnings of our relationship. But the grumpy-ness was not consistent, and it seemed to me to be unrelated to anything I was doing but rather to how he was feeling inside, so that most of the time I was able to not take it personally.

The next day was the Permaculture Gathering in Celo, NC and although Frank still did not feel very good, he had it in him to go. He was scheduled to give a plant walk that morning and what a stellar plant walk it was! He was so tuned in and inspiring! Later he went back to our tent, and napped, and burned fever, and then got it together again to be present for the large gathering. When he was with people, he shined through the pain and discomfort, but then would come back to the tent and sleep and express how tired he felt. A dull headache had begun at the base of his head and also a painful feeling in his left calf had started. He said his vision did not feel as sharp as usual either.

Frank did not believe in standing in lines (herd mentality he called it) and so at the gathering he would wait until everyone had eaten before he would get up and fix himself a plate. Because there were so many more people there than expected, there would hardly be any food left. He would not let me (the line-stander) fix him a plate and as a result he hardly ate all weekend. By Sunday evening when we were headed home from the gathering, he was very weak with hunger. We went to the Laughing Seed and before the food arrived he said he felt like he was going to pass out. I asked him what he wanted me to do if that happened and he said, "Just don't take me to the hospital." He didn't pass out but even in his hunger he ate less than half the proportion he would normally eat.

We had been planning on doing a cleanse starting the next day, on green drinks. We would harvest greens from the garden, yard and or woods, blend them with water and then strain it. But it was apparent that he just needed food at this point more than cleansing, so he decided to just do the green drink for Monday and then begin eating again. I opted to do the drink for five days until noon, then allowing light fruits and veggies until 8pm and elimination of my favorite thing- black tea with half and half. I am so grateful I did this cleanse for I think it carried me through what was coming with so much more strength and vitality.

We spent that entire Monday drinking plants and having long, deep conversations about things that were really important to us as we watched the cucumber vine grow up the screen door. It was such a special day of sharing and loving one another, regardless of what was to come, yet it turned out to be the last normal day that Frank ever lived.

On Tuesday morning, he did not want to get out of bed, and his head had begun to ache more and his calf was red, swollen and painful to even the slightest touch. His left arm was experiencing odd sensations, waves of tingling and numbness, that occurred every 10 minutes or so. I made him some oatmeal of which he ate half a bowl. We had an invitation to a birthday party for that afternoon and I encouraged him to just rest but he insisted we go. He was limping by now, the calf being too painful to put any pressure on it, so I supported him as he hobbled into the party. I think it was very important to him to be surrounded by chosen family, and that even though he had very little energy, the love of his friends was such good medicine he wanted to make the extra effort to be there.

He was scheduled to call in that night at 11:11pm for a radio talk show with our friend Jerry in Taos, New Mexico, and speak about emerging planetary medicine. I sat up with him, keeping him alert and ready for the call. He was so exhausted. He made it through the show with such grace but it was so much work for him. Within half an hour after that began his piercing headaches and little rest came for either of us. He sweated, tossed and turned all night, and began to have a smell to him that was not good. One of the things

about Frank was that he always smelled so good to me, like fresh air. This smell concerned me greatly. On Wednesday morning he had even less energy. I encouraged him to come lay in the sunshine for a bit, which he did, and made whatever food he requested but he would only eat the smallest portions of it. He was scheduled to teach male herbal health and the urinary tract that night at Appalachian School of Holistic Herbalism. He felt absolutely terrible but would not cancel. I asked him, "When do you say you cannot do it, Frank?" He answered, "When I cannot do it, Mary."

On the way home from this last teaching, a huge owl flew in front of us down in the mountain pass on the way into Madison county. In bed that night his heart was beating so rapidly all night long, his head ached and he burned fever, also he had a lot of upper GI tract gas. I tried to get him to take some aspirin but he would have nothing to do with it. I had harvested witch hazel and black birch and with a fresh turmeric root from a friend, I had made a strong decoction two days before and was applying that regularly to his calf and he would drink some of it. I also harvested willow bark, made a strong tea, and he would sip this and I would soak a rag in it and apply that to his forehead or the back of his neck. These things brought temporary relief, but the pain returned inevitably each time. I had him soak his feet in rosemary-willow tea and rubbed them with rosemary oil. He took many hot showers. I did lying on of hands, singing, praying, everything I knew how to do that had always brought relief in the past but nothing seemed to last for long in its help.

All that night I lie awake with him and his suffering and kept my hand on his heart praying for reprieve. We did not sleep. On Thursday morning he began screaming, "My arm, my arm!!!" and his left arm was outstretched and I just held it and rubbed it and breathed, toned with it and him for several minutes just holding him while the excruciating pain moved through his arm. Then it was gone and he felt so much relief, even enough that his head stopped aching for a bit and his spirits lifted and he said something about transforming from the old into the new and that he was getting better now and asked for some more oatmeal.

Yet when the oatmeal came, he just wanted fruit, very specifically peaches and melon, so I went to the store to get these. He was trying to eat during those last few days but it was such little portions he took in. I asked him to please let me call some of our healer friends to come and help and he was fierce when he told me absolutely not, that he was improving and he just wanted to rest here and we could handle it ourselves. The headaches returned later in the day, never to leave again.

He was so irritated and grumpy about everything and then he would become blissfully loving. He told me to keep up with my own schedule/life yet he would call on me for help or my presence every five minutes, I could not do anything I had planned. Plus, I did not want to. All I could think of was getting him better, how to soothe him and be there. In retrospect, on a deeper level, I knew he was dying and I believe he did, too. At one point I went into the other room and began sobbing, trying to not let him hear me, but he did. He asked, "Why are you crying, Mary?" and I told him that I was concerned he was leaving and he said so gruffly, "Well that is your trip, you do not need to worry about me." And it was true, it was my trip. He was at peace, in spite of the pain, with what was happening.

We slept very little Thursday or Friday night, and Frank lay in bed or on the sofa all day long. He would not even come outside for sunshine. I began begging to him to let me call for help. I wanted to call his mom so badly and just let her know what was going on

but he said I would be disrespecting him if I did that and that she would just tell him to rest which was what he was already doing. He finally agreed to my calling this one homeopath who lives in Spring Creek. Before I called her, I had a solid hunch she would be out of town. Sure enough, her message said she would be gone until August 19th, which was the day he passed. I went to tell him but he said first, "She is out of town until next week, isn't she?" We both asked what was the meaning of all this. I asked if I could take him to the acupuncture clinic. No way, he wouldn't hear of it. Finally he let me call our dear friend Turtle, although he made it clear to me that Turtle was coming over for me and he did not want to have anything to do with it.

Turtle came over Saturday night and I was so grateful for another perspective, a shoulder to cry on. He went home and shared with his beloved Julie, an acupuncturist healer and dear friend of ours, and she called at 2:48am that morning, I remember it clearly. I could not sleep and it did not even seem odd that the phone was ringing in the middle of the night. Turtle had told her what was going on and she was very concerned. They agreed to come over early the next morning. I did not let Frank know until they were almost here, and he was so pissed at me. He said it was unnecessary, why couldn't I just let him rest and get better here by ourselves? I told him I was sorry but I had to do this. Then Julie and I called in Juliet, our dear friend and herbalist healer, and I had to accept the anger he expressed at me for calling out to another person without his approval.

It was such an inner struggle for me, having so much respect for Frank and his wishes yet coming to the realization that if Frank died in my arms with no one around, the guilt I would carry with that would haunt me for the rest of my life. It was not up to us anymore to make decisions- the larger family must have a say.

Julie and Juliet did intakes with Frank and he cooperated for the most part. Juliet concluded that we must take him to the emergency room. I had a Plant Spirit Yoga workshop I was scheduled to teach that afternoon with Sierra Hollister and had called on our friend Lydijah to come and stay home with Frank while I would be teaching. Frank was adamant that I not miss teaching my workshop on account of him. But when Juliet said clearly we needed to go to the ER, I called Sierra at the last minute to cancel, and graciously she took over all those details. Frank agreed to go to the ER and Julie, Juliet, Turtle, Frank and I sat on the bed, smudged ourselves with sage and prayed for the Most High to guide our way before leaving the land.

When we got to the hospital, Frank at first would not get out and said he did not agree to come here. He had been having bouts of forgetting what had been said or had happened, and minor hallucinations. It took a few of us to get him out of the car, reminding him he had agreed to come.

We wanted to do a blood test mainly, so that we could understand what was going on and with that knowing, treat it with holistic medicine. The only thing Frank would consent to was an ultrasound on his calf. I held his hand while he received it, as he was in a semi-conscious state of bliss, and when it was over he did not even know it had happened. Yet then he would be so sharp. "You're on in 55 minutes, Mary," Frank said as I wheeled him into another room in the ER, referring to my workshop I was supposed to be teaching. "I cancelled the workshop, baby," I told him. "Now why did you do that?" Even in dire straits, Frank's attitude was that the work of the green path must go on.

As we waited for the results he kept saying it was time to go home, let's leave this place, we are done here, etc... I told him we needed to just get the results back first. The ultrasound showed a leg mass which could be a tumor or an abscess, and that an MRI would be needed to further diagnose. Frank insisted on discharging himself now and we honored that. What more could we do? His student and dear friend and Ayurvedic doctor Joseph and his wife Rose and their little girl had arrived earlier at the ER to offer support. They brought wonderfully balancing food and thankfully took the initiative to call Frank's mom and let her know what was going on. Joseph handed the phone to Frank, and strong-willed Frankie said to his mom he was alright and improving and he would call her from the landline when he got home.

We all decided that Frank should stay closer to the hospital, since I lived 40 minutes away. So I drove toward Julie's downtown house and Frank said, "This isn't the way home, where are we going?" I told him what we had decided. Again, I experienced the irritation Frank had at his will being set aside. He told me he was going home and I could stay in town if I wanted to. So I took him back out to the house, and remember the feeling of complete despair when we got there, like everything we had just done to try and help had been to no avail and now Frank felt dishonored and weakened even more by the whole experience. It was a horrible thing to sit with.

He immediately requested pesto pasta, with buckwheat noodles. I told him I only had wheat or rice noodles and he said, "I am not too fond of either," but that he would try wheat. My sweet beloved man, stubborn, detailed and clear on his needs and wants amid all the suffering. Word had gotten out now on Frank's condition and my phone was ringing off the hook. I could not keep up with it and give him the care he needed both at once, so many of the calls just went unanswered. I saw that his old friend and chosen brother Paul had called and was on his way to be with us. I felt so glad to know this strong ally would be arriving that night, and that his mom, Kaye, and brother, Kenny, were coming in the next day.

Frank only ate a few bites of the pasta. His head pain was just too overbearing for him to eat or sleep much at all. I sang and prayed with him for several hours and then exhaustion overtook me and I fell asleep about half an hour before Paul arrived around 1am. Frank tried to greet Paul as if everything were fine, but he did not have it in him.

When his family arrived the next day, Monday the 17th, they were able to get him to go to the hospital again. This time upon arrival to the ER, I think Frank had surrendered to us to guide him in what to do next. He accepted the tests as gently and appreciatively as he could, and I could see this great peace in him in being surrounded by so many people who loved him so much.

He had a cat scan which came back showing ring enhanced lesions all over his brain. This was the cause of his calf swelling, arm aching and horrible headaches. It was putting pressures on the left side of his vital organs and tissues that kept them from functioning properly. It was a serious matter but Frank seemed undaunted by it. "Alright, can we go home now?" How could we take him home at this point? We had entered into the world of western medicine and learned that what was happening to Frank was far bigger than we had any idea, that the situation was desperate. It seemed if we went home, he would surely die, and in great pain. If we stayed in the hospital, we thought there might be a chance of saving his life and relieving the pain. We loved him so much, valued his life so dearly, that we admitted him, with his consent, into a room in St. Joseph's Hospital, with prayers and hopes of healing, of

getting through this intense time before us all.

Frank was a solid, brave man, and he had very little fears. I think the fear of being subjected to Western Medicine was one of his few, and the greatest. Like the Buddha, Frank was born with webbed fingers, a condition called syndactyly. He had a series of operations from early childhood into adolescence to bring agility into his hands. In our last year together, we had many healing sessions with him going back to those surgeries and moving through the subconscious fears that being on the operation table had left him. I believe that the route taken in his death of surrendering to the hospital care enabled him to come to a significant clearing of this fear in his life, that it was divinely laid out and has sent him forth into the Heavens with far less karma than he would have taken with him otherwise.

The hospital staff could not have been more respectful and accommodating to Frank and his loved ones. We were so blessed. He knew his plants right up to the very end, and kept passing on his gifts, through words and gestures, until deep sleep came to him hours before his heart and breath pulsed no more. He flew away early morning of August 19th, 2009, to reunite with his Creator.

The synergy that brought together the 4-day gathering and beautiful memorial service affirmed Frank's eternal strength and grace, as I felt him orchestrating it with his angels from the heavenly realms. The radiant and beaming joy Frank would have felt in seeing us all circle Peace Eagle Pond, singing blessings for his journey and for those of us who remain on this beloved Gaia, was known and felt in all of us present. In Frank's crossing, all the seeds he was planting all over the world became potentized. He can now move through us all at once, and be a guardian angel into the prophesized times coming.

For me, I call upon that strength and grace to go on, to let go, to accept and have undying Faith in the Almighty. I am so humbled and so grateful for the gifts of love that Frank shared with me, and I will keep them alive through my works ahead.

Aho.



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Frank Cook: The Banyan Tree

By Tim Toben

Posted on 08/19/2009

Pearson Garden, Asheville NC, 7PM, August 19, 2009

Just hours after his passing, Frank's brother Ken spoke from circle of nearly 200 friends holding hands around the garden. "I think he saw us all as plant beings and he certainly was one himself." Muffled laughter mixed with tears. Frank Cook was the Banyan Tree.

If the name is not familiar, you'll remember the man. Frank stood 6'3" tall with piercing blue eyes and waist length dreadlocks. He wore simple clothes and sandals and carried a satchel over his shoulder. In Carrboro, his home was a loft bed at the residence of Beth Robinson and Alan Dehmer. He walked everywhere, once across the entire state of North Carolina, foraging for food along the way. Most of us in these modern times would die attempting such a trek. Frank feasted -- both physically and spiritually.

Someone once said that we are born with two beings - one that dies and one that lives forever. That is certainly true for Frank Cook. Frank will always be known around the world for his plant knowledge and his journey to "meet" the 5000+ genera of plants. At 46 years old, he was 70% of the way to his goal. He'd chucked a promising career in computer science 20 years earlier to follow his heartsong, traveling to Namibia to meet Omumborombonga, the ancestral tree of life, and to India to meet Buckuchurbu, used to treat stomach upset.

Those of us lucky enough to cross His path were reacquainted with the native plants we loved as children. Frank could hang with the best Linnaean taxonomist, but he "understood" plants more deeply -- their medicinal qualities, their nutritional values, and their unique role in the interdependent ecology of nature. And he clearly loved them.

Frank would lean down and shade his small subjects with large hands and begin telling their story. The breath from his deep baritone voice seemed to lift the plantain or pepsisiwa from its roots, as he brushed the leaves from around their base. "Choose me, choose me," you could imagine them saying. In those moments, we were children again, finding a long lost love. And he was an "indigenous" teacher.

The meals between walks were just as vibrant. Reminding us that most Americans eat just 25 species of plants a year, he'd make fresh bread and soup with at least 25 species gathered during his walk. The flavors and energy in his food were life giving. He'd make teas by day and meads at night, always sharing a batch from last year in a pass-around bottle. Frank's blueberry and sumac meads were my favorite. His gatherings built community and these are the friends we'd all want at our memorials.

His "business model" baffled most. He worked for donations. You paid what you could, and that was enough to fund Frank's travels to meet plants across the globe. He'd recently completed a Masters Degree at the Schumacher College in the UK and written a book on Planetary Ecology. His subject matter had expanded to include "transition cultures" - those preparing for, not a low-, but a no-carbon economy.

Frank had just returned from teaching engagements in the Southwest US, but before that in South America. What he thought was travel weariness was apparently a spreading parasitic infection, which spread rapidly this week and this morning claimed his sinewy body. Thousands around the world, and several hundred in Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Asheville weep quietly at the loss of their friend and teacher. We are ever so grateful for his many gifts, for the many seeds he planted. His spirit is alive and well.

If he'd ever have stayed in one place for more than a few months, I'm convinced that Frank's cascading dreadlocks would have taken root, like the Banyan Tree, and grown other Frank Cooks. If only that had happened, what a better world this would be.

Godspeed.

A Memorial Service for Frank Cook will be held at 6PM Sunday 8/23 at the Toben home, Pickards Mountain

www.pickardsmountain.org



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Frank Cook passed away this morning

By John Joseph Immel

Posted on 08/19/2009

The doctor tells us there are multiple lesions in the brain and a large cystic mass in the leg. Frank seems nervous by that but still he is strong, even taking care of us. Memory is lapsing in and out, Hallucinations. He talks about going down to the Piedmont tomorrow for a plant walk. He talks about Artemesia...

We've been here a few days already but last night I came to the hospital a little late. Friends have prepared loving biscuits and homemade honey. Matthew is holding a shamanic ceremony and showing Frank mushrooms and Yarrow. Morgaine, distraught and exhausted for days, is loving and protecting Frank while giving him her strength. Frank is cooperating with the doctors, but in and out.

I wake up again in the early morning when I hear Frank's spirit come in and greet me saying, 'Hey Bro!' I thank God for having already gone through the anger, frustration, disappointment, and heaviness. So it's good to finally see him, "Hi Frank!" I say. He laughs at me, "Joseph what are you doing hanging out with my body. You're supposed to be hanging out with my spirit." And then adds a final dig - "When are you going to get that!" I smile and agree and suddenly I'm just hanging out with his spirit:

...I see a dark black and green smudge and I'm like, "Frank that's not your spirit." Then suddenly, right behind it, I see a light-green light. It's so pure and generous, full of love and courage. Then he says, "See Joseph my spirit still loves the plants! But it's not dark in here..."

I smile and prepare him some breakfast and drive over to the hospital to nourish his real body. When I get to the room it's empty. Behind me the chaplain comes and says that his condition has destabilized. "Oh my gosh," I hear him say in my mind. Paul is downstairs but I can't find him. Morgaine calls like a fierce lioness ready to protect Frank's spirit and respect him but she's sobbing

and can hardly speak.

I'm totally numb, can't feel anything. I sit down, take my shoes off. Stand up. Shake it out. Make some gurgling noises. Can't believe this is happening. Okay Joseph, sit down again I tell myself. I'm in lotus pose. Ceara! I forgot to call Ceara. I call and Ceara comes.

A few minutes later his mother arrives - she is so bright, beautiful and strong but her eyes are droopy. His brother sad too but also ready to lift us all up and encourage us. His family is beautiful I think to myself. Finally, I get to go in the room and see Frank. I know already he's not breathing on his own anymore...There he is, lying like Jesus, completely unresponsive but his skin is warm. I touch his shoulder and repeat his words, "You are so good brother. Here we go -- on the journey! Lifting it up!"

I hold his hand. I realize I'm crying and there are large strands of mucous hanging from my nose. I can't speak and every time I try to, it chokes me. Suddenly we're in the southwest together again, driving up the mountains. In the background I hear Morgaine and everyone, with all their dignity and divinity, singing songs about angels. But Frank and I are in the mountains. 'Can't you feel it!' he says to me, 'we're going up! Here we go. In the mountains the whole reality changes. You know in those valleys you can find all kinds of food and medicines. We don't have to survive, we can THRIVE! Look Joseph, over there, the elders are right on the peaks. The fathers are watching over us. Yeeeeeeeeaaaauhhhhh!"

I put my hands on his head. The room is full of people again. People are crying and still singing with the angels and the mother earth. It's so graceful. There are birds singing and a sycamore tree. I'm kneeling down holding his dreadlocks and Morgaine is whispering in his ear, "Frank it's time to go." She's nurturing him, holding him, and cooing to him in such gentle words I see Frank as a little baby for the first time. I see his mother's labor pains and a wave comes over me - some tears and I breathe them out.

I leave the room. I stretch and shake my body up to the ceiling. Big stretch! "Om nama shivaya." I keep chanting to myself trying to lift the energy and let his spirit go. Don't hold on to any part of him Joseph. You have your own life to live. I keep trying to lift it, lift it, and suddenly I realize - "wait, letting go means letting it go down and up and the same time." My tears stop for a few moments. Frank's spirit comes and puts his hand on my kidneys, swiping his hand down my back to ground me saying, "Whooooosh..." I realize I'm dizzy, there are some stars in front of my eyes and I let my breathing go slow again.

The neurologist asks us back in the room. People are still singing. Grace is everywhere. Ken, his younger brother, puts his hand on Frank's heart. He's a robust man with strong hands, a shaved head, but I see him as little brother with a smile in his eyes looking at his big bro all gentle and emotional, crying and happy at the same time saying, "Frank, you are my Peter Pan! You brought me places I could have never reached on my own." His mother holds his big feet saying, "Look how strong you are. You're my son but you are also my mentor. You drove me crazy but you also pushed me beyond my own limitations and I grew."

The doctor comes in the room. He asks the mother if she is ready to let Frank go. To pull out the tubes. She looks at me. If you've ever looked into a mother's eyes like that... I nod my head feeling a peacefulness and she nods her head. Everyone nods their head. We're ready and he's ready. This is it, the moment... All the plant walks, the dreams of India, the potential, the knowledge. It's

slipping away. "Okay," I say to myself, "this is really going to happen."

The nurse, so gently, she comes up to Frank and says, "Sweetie, I'm sorry. This will take only a moment." She pulls the tube out quickly. It almost feels like she's whispering a little blessing to Frank as she does it. He lets out all of his breath. I feel his deep voice vibrating through my bones for the last time. We all exhale. We're rubbing and massaging his tissues. "Just relax brother. Just relax. It's okay to let go."

I look up to his face and I realize he's smiling. His spirit says, "You thought you knew what was going to happen, Joseph!" Then he says, "Just being in the flow here!" I realize he's still teaching me - and playing tricks too. "Here we go Frank!" I return the smile to encourage him. We're back in Nevada together. It's my first time and I feel so blessed he's initiating me. There are mountains and mountains for hundreds of miles across a vast expansive sky. "Joseph, the world is this big," he says as he opens his hands really wide.

Then I'm back in the room and his mother says, "You're my boy. I always knew this would happen to you. Look what's happened." Ceara is holding his hand. Juliet is kneeling at the bed. Paul and then Morgaine, and then me and then everyone comes to kiss his forehead. I step back from the body. The spirit is leaving. I feel as if it's not okay to touch him. His spirit is expanding and expanding. There is a wheel of blue and pink and it's spinning. "Frank, here we are buddy! Going up into the mountains - here we go!"

I step away. The lights are dim again. Everyone steps away except his mother who turns back to the body. She's hugging him with her big mother bear arms and talking to her baby with so much sympathy. I put my hands together in prayer. Namaste Frank...We love you.



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A Stirring Moment with Frank

By Alan Dehmer

I would have liked starting a little earlier but that was contingent upon my darkroom activities. No cooperation there. So it's just about 6 pm and I've got a bucket with three gallons of water sitting between my legs. Beside me is a bag of BD500, a biodynamic preparation I purchased through the Josephine Porter Institute in Virginia. I've also got a bag containing some of Frank's ashes given to me by the family last year at Kenny's house after the memorial held there in the Fall.

The 500 preparation is based on the original indications given by Rudolph Steiner. Take cow dung from a lactating cow that has been fed an equal quantity of dry and green fodder for at least three days before collecting it. The dung is then packed into a cow horn and buried 1.5 feet deep for 6 months with the tip of the horn pointing upward. What comes out of the cow horn 6 months later is odorless humus looking BD500.

A small quantity—maybe 20 grams or so is mixed into 3 gallons of fresh water for one hour, stirring vigorously with a long wooden spoon. The direction of stirring alternates rhythmically. As soon as a deep vortex appears in one direction the direction is abruptly reversed, the vortex destroyed and built up again in the opposite direction. The basic principle operating here is this: the BD500 preparation is an earthly life force. Through stirring, cosmic forces like light and warmth but also lunar and planetary rhythms are also drawn into the mixture, activating and combining with the life force gathered in the BD500. That spray is applied lightly – three gallons/acre—acting in much the same way that homeopathy works on the human body. A small dose goes a long way. Today, September 9, with the moon and Jupiter in alignment, was a particularly good day for root growth, which seemed appropriate for this occasion.

It was our mutual interest in Steiner and biodynamics and probably most of all our mutual interest in alchemy that brought Frank and I together years ago to stir up the first batch of 500 used on this land. A year before that, I had introduced the soil to biodynamic

practice by spreading compost that had been prepared for a year previous to that using a composting preparation also made by the Josephine Porter Institute. With that compost spread we could proceed with stirring up the first batch of 500. Where we sat that day is the very place I now sit with a fresh bucket of water before me.

I'm here now because of a wandering conversation Frank and I had a few years ago about what we would like done with our dead bodies. (I can't remember why we wandered there.) We both agreed that being buried had too many drawbacks and so being cremated was definitely the way to go. We strayed from there to what to do with the ash. That's when we came up with the idea of adding it to a 500 spray and applying it here at Woods Edge specifically. We both agreed we would do that for the other.

Being a decade older than Frank I was content in the assumption that Frank would be spraying my ashes some day in the future. So much for assumptions.

Both of us had made spagyrics in the past. Take the plant matter out of a tincture solution after tincturing is complete. Dry the plant matter then burn it in a vessel until it turns to black ash and then place the black ash in a 500-750 degree oven until the plant matter turns to a white ash, usually over night. That white ash is then reintroduced into the tincture and agitated once a day for a moon cycle. The reintroduction of plant matter into the plant essence/tincture is a way of potentizing tinctures, of reassembling body with spirit. It's in that context I suspect that we landed on this idea of blending our ash with the BD500. However we came about it, the idea of doing it made us laugh. And laugh some more. I'm remembering Frank's deep-throated laugh with a quiet smile.

So here then is an accounting of my stirring hour with Frank.

I put Ravi Shankar's *Chants of India* on inside the house loud enough that I could hear it on the porch where I'm set up to stir. I chose that music because it was a mutual favorite of ours but also, conveniently, because the CD runs 1 hour and three minutes. The CD would double as a stirring timer. I looked around before beginning and noticed a couple of butterflies eating away at one of the last pears remaining on a tree that I planted quite a few years ago. This is the first year we've gotten pears from it. They were deliciously sweet. I'm sad that Frank never got to eat one but right now it feels just about right that the butterflies are enjoying the bounty instead. I begin.

First I place the 500 in the water, followed by an equal amount of Frank's ashes. I begin to stir. The first observation is that the color of the slurry is quite different than previous stirrings. The 500 is brown matter that creates a light brown slurry when it's mixed with water. But Frank's mostly light grey ash made a big difference – not light brown but a light brownish grey. The next thing I noticed as I continued stirring was a rather putrid smell that was also different than previous experiences. Not pleasant and lasting longer than I wished.

But the dynamics of stirring are such that change is constant. Slowly, over the first 15 or 20 minutes, the color of the slurry matured

from the original light brownish grey to a darker blackish brown and in the process the putrid smell vanished and for a few brief moments, was replaced by the smell that was Frank's, a smell that his niece commented on light-heartedly at the Memorial last year.

With the change in color and smell, now mostly odorless, foam began to form in the center of the vortex, which is when I noticed that a certain stirring rhythm produced two vortexes covered in brownish white bubbles. It was that rate that I tried to maintain from that time on. I was reminded of chanting with Frank in the steam room. Two voices becoming one. One becoming three (or more) as we built on the harmonics of our mutual voices cast into the dark of a tile lined steam room. Cherished moments.

Stirring the two vortexes into one and back to two again had a meditative, even hypnotic effect on me and the next thing I knew, Ravi Shankar was finished. Not sure how long it was over before I reentered but when I did I looked up to see those two butterflies I'd noticed at the beginning of the stir one hour earlier still eating the same pear. I smiled at that and then laid back on the deck with my head facing west and feet to the east to rest for a few minutes. The sky was a cloudless deep blue we only get at this time of year in NC. It was nice to empty myself into it. But then a curious cloud formation moving from west to east came into my view, a single strand of cloud in an otherwise cloudless sky. Just a single thin strand of cloud maybe a half mile long moving slowly over me and the land I'm about to spray. The curious cloud departs leaving the cloudless blue sky in its wake.

With that, I got up, poured the mix into my sprayer, and began by going to all the gardens Frank had had a hand in establishing over the years – the golden seal, may apple and cohosh beds in the woods, a double dug garden outside my darkroom that has in recent years become a beautiful rose garden and again in bloom now that this summer has begun to remove its tight grip on us. There were other places of note in our time spent together on this land where I applied the spray, and finally a generic treatment of the rest of the gardens around the house. Along the way the sprayer clogged up and I switched to putting the mixture in a small vessel and applying droplets with my hands throughout. I was happy for the clogging, as the hand application was far more intimate than spraying.

The sun was setting by the time I finished distributing the three gallons of preparation. The day is done. My promise fulfilled. Time to hit the steam room.

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Frank Cook's Education and Teaching Career

1985: Bachelor of Science Degrees with honors in Zoology and Computer Science from Duke University, Durham, NC.

1988–1992: Creative writing teacher at Durham Technical College and a manager at the Durham Food Co-op, NC.