

## WITNESS TO THE ANCIENT ONES: AN “INTERVIEW” WITH PATRICIA REIS

ROBERT S. HENDERSON

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**Robert S. Henderson (RH):** How did you come to know about Jung?

**Patricia Reis (PR):** I first came upon Jung's work while I was working on a Master's in Fine Arts degree at UCLA in 1978. I was in my late thirties at the time and had just gone through a difficult divorce. The Master's degree was my way of "reinventing" myself. Little did I know how profound that process would be. I describe it now as a complete de-structuring and re-structuring of who I was—or thought I was. This transformation was accomplished through the art-making creative process.

UCLA is not exactly a warm, nurturing environment for one undergoing such an ordeal. But I persevered. The things that carried me through were living by the ocean, connecting with the Neolithic archaeologist, Marija Gimbutas, and the writings of Jung. The first book of Jung's I read was *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. This is a wonderful work for anybody undergoing a large prompt from the Self—very inspiring and encouraging. Through Jung's work, I was able to name what I was going through. Later, my understanding of feminism made me take a more discerning and critical view of his work. But in the beginning, Jung's writing and thinking were very influential.

**(RH):** How have you come to understand the masculine and feminine in yourself?

**(PR):** I try not to think in these terms. I find most thinking on this terminology to be quite confused and confusing, at best, and derivative and disabling for women, at worst. Short of giving a whole treatise on the matter, I can say a few words about how I think about these things—and, believe me, I have thought a lot about this subject!

Basically I make a distinction between sex and gender. Sex—female and male—is a biological given, a physical reality with all its attendant sexual ramifications. (Of course, now with transgender entering the conversation, the subject gets even more interesting, more provocative, less rigid, more fluid.) On the other hand, gender—feminine and masculine—is not a given. These terms describe gender constructions that are socially and culturally determined. And this is where the water gets murky.

I have done a pretty thorough analysis of these notions in my first book, *Through the Goddess: A Woman's Way of Healing*. Suffice it to say, I do not ascribe to the idea of contra sexuality or the integration of the "masculine" as the *sine qua non* of women's individuation. What really irks me is when I hear women ascribe to their "masculine" side qualities that are seen as strong, decisive, intelligent, directed, brave, robust. To me, this sounds too much like giving one's power away, and not owning and claiming those qualities as potentially female.

It is too easy in our culture, which is still weighted toward privileging men's experience, for women to let men carry these very powerful aspects for us, or to ascribe them to the "masculine" side of ourselves without giving it a second thought. We have all grown up with socially constructed notions of gender—and it is no small work to deconstruct these ideas and behaviors in ourselves. The notion I find most helpful is one found in female initiations where a woman's power becomes "magnified" through the initiatory ordeal to include previously unexplored, unimagined, or even unacceptable attributes of strength and power.

**(RH):** For those who have been brought up understanding people as having a masculine and feminine side, your ideas sound very interesting. Speaking to both men and women, what are some of the important implications of your notion?

**(PR):** Well, first of all, the Jungian concepts of masculine/feminine are considered to be universal or ahistorical. They are not. These ideas grew out of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century family structure which reflected the gender stereotypes of the day (for white Western culture). Secondly, any of these ideas must be grounded in lived bodily experience, otherwise we continue to support a body/mind duality. Then, notions of masculine and feminine are not simply ways of speaking about the psyche, or even of the body/mind. The real implications are about power.

In the last twenty years, there has been an enormous body of work produced under the title of Gender Studies. Simply speaking, this body of work does for the idea (and experience) of gender what the feminist movement did for women and the civil rights movement did for people of color. It examines the power dynamic inherent in the dominant ideas of gender in our culture and then deconstructs them. In the case of

gender, we have to realize that heterosexuality has hegemony and, in the past, has been compulsory.

With the outing and empowering of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual people we can no longer cling to tidy little categories grown out of our own gender insecurities. We have to expand our notions out to include the embodied and psychological experience of, say, a female-to-male transsexual person. When we start to apply the traditional masculine/feminine categories to that person, the whole idea starts to fall apart. Basically, I believe we are being asked to become more differentiated in our knowledge. It is a matter of having our ideas cohere to the multiplicity and diversity of human sexual experience.

(RH): Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? And what does that mean to you?

(PR): I do consider myself to be a deeply spiritual person. That said, I want to distinguish my spirituality from any particular religious tradition. My spirituality has evolved over time. As a child, I was raised as a Catholic. In my twenties, I converted to Judaism.

It was an effort on my part to “go back,” to go more deeply into the source of religion as I understood it at the time. Then, for a while, I had no interest in things religious or spiritual. However, in my late thirties as I was studying art at UCLA, I began to learn about the neolithic goddess-worshipping cultures of Old Europe (2500-6000 BC). This coincided with my meeting and studying with the internationally known archaeologist, Marija Gimbutas, who pioneered the research on these cultures. As a woman and an artist, I was interested in making the connection between art-making, spirituality, and female imagery. I pushed my study further back in time and went to the paleolithic caves in the Dordogne Valley in France, looking for the “first” images made by humans (20,000 BC). They turned out to be female images, engraved on walls and carved in coal, stone, and bone! This was electrifying for me and laid a groundwork for the experience of female spirituality.

Because I am an introvert, I never joined any of the goddess-worshipping groups, although there were many in California where I lived at the time. And I wasn’t interested necessarily in finding a particular form of worship. But these cultures did give me a felt sense of ancient lineage. During those years, I was also doing wilderness

vision quests in the Sierras, and I was powerfully grounded in those experiences where synchronicity abounds and dreams and visions occur. So all these experiences are layered in to form my own personal spiritual repertoire. I have an instinctive resistance to “organized religion,” although I have sampled Hindu spirituality as well as Buddhist meditation. I would say now that the teachings that support me the most in my personal life and in my psychotherapy practice are the Buddhist teachings on suffering.

(RH): What have you learned about suffering?

(PR): Well, this is an enormous topic, and one worthy of many, many long conversations. I have had to really feel my way into the kind of answer that would be both spacious and specific.

The Buddhists teach us that life is really all about suffering and the alleviation of suffering. This teaching is not necessarily palatable to our “feel-good” culture. Nor does this notion represent what might be called a “depressive” position, i.e., focusing on the negative. In fact, I find the Buddhist teachings on suffering to be extremely liberating. More oppressive to me is the idea that we should not suffer (if we are on the right path, if god loves us, if we are really good, if we eat the right food, think the right thoughts, *ad absurdum*, etc).

The Buddhists also give us guidance on how to deal with suffering in our lives, and I find much wisdom to be gained from their perspective: for instance, the idea of the “poisons” or afflictions which infect us, i.e., attachment, hatred, ignorance, pride, and jealousy. Meditation practice offers ways of clearing these poisons from our minds and lets us see that we have a self that is capable of living without these afflictions. There is also a response to suffering which calls out for justice.

In my own privileged, white, western, educated, middle-class life it would appear that I have not suffered. But there are certain sufferings which are not readily apparent from the above descriptors. For instance, I was born a female into a culture whose institutions (religious, medical, governmental) denied women control over their own bodies in subtle and not so subtle ways. My personal experience with this was an illegal abortion (pre-*Roe v. Wade*) while in my early twenties in which I was badly abused.

I have subsequently worked for women's rights in every way that I can. In this country, I have worked with the suffering incurred by rape, incest, physical abuse, and other forms of domination. I have also made several trips to Bosnia and been present to the profound and unbearable suffering of the Muslim women during their recent war. From that experience, I found that the role of witness, being able to bear the intolerable, to breathe with it and into it, was a practice that was helpful and even potentially healing for myself and others.

Finally, from years of attending to my own dreams and listening to the dreams of others, I have developed a firm belief in what I call "transgenerational haunting," a term coined in the 1950s by two Freudian analysts, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok. This is suffering that operates at the collective level.

I was born in 1940, right about the time that Hitler was beginning his rampage. I believe that I, along with others born during those years, carry a psychic haunting of what happened during that time.

I was born in America. And I have a deep feeling (in my DNA?) for the genocide of Native people that happened on our soil. I have worked with people whose ancestors were slaves and others whose ancestors were slaveholders. I do not believe we can escape this heritage of suffering. We can only work for justice, for understanding our human implication in these tragedies. The Buddhists believe that no one is free until everyone is free.

(RH): I can remember when we first met. It was in Santa Barbara at a conference to honor your mentor, Marija Gimbutas. You made an incredible presentation and showed many pictures of your art and sculpture. I could tell then that you are a deep artist. Do you feel your spirituality and creativity are connected?

(PR): Yes, I remember that event very well. I had presented a slide show of the evolution of my art work, which was really an evolution of myself as an artist, which was really an evolution of my self as a woman on a psychological and spiritual quest. So, indeed, those two streams, creativity and spirituality, flow deeply together.

As I mentioned before, Gimbutas's work fired my own imagination and was an important and grounding influence on my creative life. In those days, I had a burning desire to understand how image-making, spirituality, and female consciousness could be deeply and authentically

expressed. That work culminated in a large installation of nine sculptures I called the Ancient Ones. I also wrote a poem that expresses who those Ancient Ones are:

We say the time of waiting is over.  
 We say the silence has been broken.  
 We say there can be no forgetting now.  
 We say  
 LISTEN  
 We are the bones  
 of your grandmother's grandmothers.  
 We have returned now.  
 We say you cannot forget us now  
 We say we are with you  
 And you are us.

The poem has apparently had a wide circulation—and seems to speak to many people. It has most recently been published in Jane Ely's book, *Remembering the Ancestral Soul*, where I think it has found a good home. The sculptures themselves I let disintegrate back into the earth. They only exist now as a photographic image.

The process of making those sculptures and writing that poem was my first real experience of what I would call "co-creating with spirit." It stands as a benchmark for me, a point of reference by which I measure all my work.

(RH): Can you talk more about "co-creating with spirit?"

(PR): Well, this is something that happens when I get deeply involved in a project. It doesn't matter what the medium—art, writing, or even teaching. It is the experience of feeling that there is another energy beyond my own personal energy that is actively interested and participating in the work. Maybe it is energy that wants to take a form, or be given a form.

It requires a certain amount of ego-surrender, but not completely, so it is not like channeling, but more a move toward putting my ego in service of something. I have to move away from working from my will towards working in a state of open willingness; willingness to be influenced, guided, inspired, even directed. I don't really know "where" this energy is coming from—if it is actually some part of me or outside

of me; sometimes, it is in the materials I am using if I am doing art, sometimes it is in the story I am telling if I am writing. I believe this also can happen in the consulting room, and then it comes as an energy field that is co-created by the two people. However it happens, it is precious when it does.

(RH): On a personal level, what has it meant to you to have an older woman, like Marija Gimbutas, be your mentor? What do you feel happens to a woman who does not have a mentor?

(PR): To answer this question I have to say that I have had three very important older women in my life—each one reflecting a different yet significant aspect of my life. I call them my Other Mothers. My own mother was a “good woman.” She was a housewife, mother of six children, stable, hard-working, and devoted. But she did not ignite my imagination. So I was always on the look-out for these “Other Mothers.”

The first one was my aunt Ruth, my mother’s sister. She was a nun, a maverick, a deep mystic, and a free spirit. She lived her whole life as a nun from age 13. And yet she was one of the most liberated women I have ever known. I first learned of Teilhard de Chardin from her. In her later years, she was a Sandinista in Nicaragua. She practiced Liberation Theology and lived her life in service to social justice. We were very close, and I felt very held spiritually in her wide embrace. I am currently writing a fictionalized version of her life.

Then, when I was forty, I met two other older women. One was June Yuer. She was my Tai Chi teacher. But she was also an artist and sculptor. She lived in Los Angeles and had done 10 years of Jungian analysis and painted her dreams during that time. We became very good friends and remain so to this day, although she is now nearly 90 and we live far away from each other. She built herself an art studio when she was 75!

I met Marija Gimbutas while I was at UCLA in 1980. I became her archaeological illustrator, and I was also in her seminar for a number of years. I traveled with her as well. And, most importantly, she introduced me to James Harrod, my partner of twenty-two years. Marija was one of those “big” people who, just by being herself, had a tremendous influence on my life. She was a profound intellectual and deeply generous, a true scholar who was devoted to her life’s

work. Donna Read, the Canadian filmmaker, made a film about her life, *Signs Out of Time*. Jim and I are both in it.

I feel very fortunate to have known these women. Even though my own life path was different from theirs, I was able to expand into my own possibilities knowing there were other women, women I knew and loved, who had followed their heart, mind, and soul. Women who did not follow a prescribed pattern for their life.

Because of my experience, I am very conscious of how important it is for women to have at least one Other Mother. In some respects, it takes the pressure off the personal mother to be and provide all things for us—which they never can be or do. I am also aware, now that I am in my mid-sixties, of my position as an Other Mother for younger women. It is something I cherish. I don’t think of it as “role model,” which sounds rather dull. But more as being an example of someone who has tried to live her own life with as much integrity and passion as I can muster, regardless of the rather peripatetic twists and turns it has taken.

(RH): Fellini, the late Italian film producer, once said, in talking about his inspiration and creativity: “when I see a beautiful, sensual woman, I feel religious.” As a spiritual and creative woman, have you had a similar experience, in the presence of a man?

(PR): It probably should not be surprising to me that such a brilliant man could make such a conventional and rather banal statement like that. I assume he is talking about a kind of muse, about what moves his creative energy, or in Jungian terms, his anima.

I think, for many women, it is more complicated. I wrote about the experience of the Muse for women in my book *Daughters of Saturn*. There I quote from the poet Adrienne Rich, who says, “a woman’s poetry about her relationship to her daemon—her own active, creative power—has in patriarchal culture used the language of heterosexual love or patriarchal theology.” In the last part of the book, I explore other possibilities, for instance, the goddess-muse and how she operates in women’s creative expressions.

Again, I think the essence of this is about differentiating the many complex ways in which we can be inspired, both creatively and spiritually. I find that I am most deeply moved or inspired wherever and whenever I feel eros. This may happen while I am walking by the

ocean and see the sunlight sparkling on the water or when I am snowshoeing on a frozen stream in winter. It can happen in the counseling room, in the energetic field between two people. It can occur while I am sitting with a purring cat on my lap. It can happen while making love, or making a fabulous dinner for friends. I understand that it is my responsibility to keep myself open for any and all possibilities for experiencing this divine, creative, and spiritual energy.

(RH): What have you found often keeps people from remaining open for any and all possibilities for these experiences?

(PR): The simple answer is the millions of ways we can distract ourselves. Beginning with myself, I find that I can most distract myself by those things that I think require my immediate attention—phone calls, emails, letters, my relationships, and all preoccupations about things in the future. These things often do need my attention, but most of the time not immediately. I tend to stay away from television and newspapers.

I prefer to get my information through several select magazines. I am deeply affected by events in the world. Fortunately, I am not one of those people who can lose hours on the Internet. Staying present is the primary practice for keeping the channel open both creatively and spiritually. Everybody finds their own way of doing it. Being conscious is a full time job! Most of us don't like to work full time. I need quiet, solitude, and preferably some contact with nature. I journal in the mornings and am attentive to my dreams. Walking is my best access point, especially if I am near water or the woods.

Basically, I think it is terrifying to be alive and awake for most of us. I think the poets, like Rilke, write about that. I am not exactly sure why this is so—maybe it has to do with death.

(RH): What do you suspect it is about death that makes being alive and awake so terrifying?

(PR): As you can see by the delay in my response, I had to really think about this question! I don't know if I can even approximate an answer—even though it is an important question, maybe even one of the most important questions. It is easier for me while I am sitting up here in Nova Scotia looking out on the great tidal basin with its red

sands and deep blue incoming and outgoing tides—the highest in world they say—to begin to even think about this.

So here is what I have come up with so far. I think the death I am talking about is very specific, i.e., my death ( or our very specific individual deaths.) When I contemplate that death of mine, the one that belongs to me alone, it feels very closely related to the creative process—in the sense that it is about my very specific relationship to life and the creative work that I do. This, of course, goes not just for me, but for everyone, but it is very precise, this particular life. And for my creative work to have any depth or meaning, for it to be based in reality, it needs to be unambiguous, at least as far as I can make it so. So the requirements for creativity are stringent, and I can't say I am always up to it! This is the great blessing of distractions!

I also think that age is a factor. It is not so easy to think you have forever to do your creative work when you are 67 years old! This is actually a help, in the sense that it sharpens the point.

(RH): Often we hear about “writer's block,” and perhaps we could also say “artist's block.” The creative process usually involves a lot of inner wrestling before something emerges. What have you found going on inside as you try to create?

(PR): I am put in mind, often, of the Martha Graham quote: “There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.” This quote implies that there are two things at work: a “creative block” which is something a person can do as a kind of resistance, i.e., “if you block it.” It also applies another force, an “it” that is pushing for expression.

From this, I imagine there must be at least two kinds of block. One that comes from the ego and says things like, “Who am I to take up this project? It has all been done before. There are a million books (artworks, objects, etc.) in the world already, what could I possibly have to offer? People will think I am crazy,” etc. etc. This kind of mental talk comes from a damaged aspect of the ego, a kind of wounded narcissism that can really stop somebody in their tracks. I, myself, am familiar with this kind of block, but fortunately do not suffer too much from it, though many people do. The prolific writer, Margaret

Atwood says, “Inertia is my constant companion, procrastination my household pet. If I am not eager and keen and resolved and strenuously bent, I find it very difficult to write at all.” I resonate with that.

Then there is the kind of block that is actually more interesting to me. The block that is put up by the work itself. I experience this as another kind of resistance, not in myself, but in the actual thing I am trying to express. The energy stops flowing for some reason. Things dry up. Why? The stubborn muteness and silence of a work at this time can be eloquent! Pursuing the usual ego refrains is not fruitful. I have to interrogate the work itself. What is it wanting? How can I better get at it? Deepen it? What risks do I have to take in order to make the work come alive? Sometimes the work requires a rest, sometimes a dream appears that gives a clue as to its desired direction, sometimes I just have to throw it out and start over or begin working on something else. But it is all in the context of relationship—between me and the work, the work and me.

(RH): In your wonderful article, “Mnemosyne’s Well of Remembrance” in Spring Journal’s *Muses* issue (2005), you write that it is the work of the artist to restore memory. As an artist concerned with memory, how do you understand Alzheimer’s and brain damage where the memory has been impacted?

(PR): I do not have a lot of direct personal experience with these conditions, although I have worked with people who have gone through this condition with partners and parents, and I was an adviser to a Pacifica student who wrote a wonderful master’s thesis about living with her father through the various progressions of Alzheimer’s disease. It is certainly an awesome experience since it challenges our cherished notions of personhood. Are we still who we were even when we can’t remember ourselves?

My interest in memory is less concrete, maybe more poetic, or even literary—at least it has more to do with the levels of psyche that appear in creative work, in dreams, or even mysterious behaviors. I am most interested in what Abraham and Torok, two Freudian analysts writing in the 50’s that I mentioned earlier, termed transgenerational haunting. This is memory that appears unbidden, returns as ghosts, as a kind of haunting. One of the best examples in literature is Toni Morrison’s book, *Beloved*. But I have also seen it operating in clients who seem to be

haunted by events that occurred in past generations, things they have no conscious memory of, except as lingering fears, terrors, or dream scenarios. Memory and its role in the human psyche is very deep and enigmatic. A great source for those of us who love to probe the mystery.

(RH): My brother has brain damage from a car accident, and his memory is considerably impaired. I have wondered a lot as to what, if anything, I can do to be of help to him. A good friend of mine suggested something which felt poetic. He said that my brother was “caught in a moment in time.” Does that make sense to you, as you consider your interest in memory?

(PR): This feels a bit outside the interview process to me. But I want to respond on a personal level and say how deeply sorry I am for you and your family that this has happened to your brother.

Outside of the fact that the brain is one of the most amazing things and that people can recover all sorts of functioning, the issue of memory loss is one of the more poignant aspects of these injuries. Because our relationships are held together by a kind of consensus reality, it is very troubling when one person goes into another “reality” whether from brain damage or any other kind of dysfunction. We feel like our own grip on reality gets loosened. I imagine what we would want, if the situation were reversed, is that someone does the work of memory for us—re-members us, keeps an image of our wholeness in their minds, while still accepting that we cannot. This feels like heart-breaking work, but it is something that feels necessary. Memory does have to do with time. And, I suppose, there are realities that are not time-bound. So then we are in the Mystery.

(RH): In your own life, what are some of the ways you have found to stay in touch with the Shadow, or have you found the shadow stays in touch with you?

(PR): Short of dragging us into a discussion of the Jungian ideas around shadow, I would like to talk about something that arises in my work with women, individually and in groups. Christine Downing has written an excellent book, *Psyche’s Sisters*, on the subject of the shadow of sisterhood. It occurs in women’s relationships with each other where jealousy, envy, gossip, competition, and all of those other distortions of women’s power drive emerge.

In some sense, you could say it occurs in the larger context of the shadow of patriarchy, because that is where women's power becomes suppressed. But I am talking about how women internalize that suppression by the things that we do to our own and often to our best: like cutting powerful women off at the knees, through poisonous language and perceptions, c.f. Hillary Clinton or Nancy Pelosi. Or, by "matronizing" each other by expressing concern and caretaking, all the while thinking and acting in disrespectful ways. Women know what I am talking about. Women with frustrated, suppressed, or distorted power drives are often more vicious and dangerous to each other than any threat that comes at us from men. I understand this from my own life when I thought I was powerless and acted accordingly.

My own personal power was infinitely more treacherous because I thought and acted as if I had none. This is not uncommon for women, especially of my generation. Often women hide their power, even from themselves, because the culture has deemed it unacceptable. I once had a dream that I owned a rather large snake that I kept in a briefcase! It has taken a lot of experience with self-expression to get into a better relationship with that snake by allowing it to freely and naturally move in its own way, unobstructed.

Another aspect that comes to mind is the way the collective shadow comes to women so often in dreams. Bag ladies, women in burquas, and prostitutes are representatives of how the collective shadow appears for women. But it can also happen that we as women cast into the shadow our most sacred and wise potential—our healers and high priestesses, our oracles, prophetesses, and visionaries. This seems to me a most critical work—to own and claim our potential, which is so needed in the world.

(RH): Last August (2006), you and eight other women had an incredible trip to the Arctic that included rafting down the Sheenjek River and encountering grizzly bears, bald and golden eagles, and even a musk ox. I remember after you returned you said that you did not want to come home. What is it about such an experience that captures you?

(PR): I am easily captivated by wild nature for a number of reasons, but this Arctic landscape did something beyond the usual. I will try to name some of the aspects that moved me so much. For one thing,

this is one of the few places left on earth where a person may safely drink directly from a wild stream of water. And in this rare, pristine, and barely accessible landscape, there is no human imprint, only the tracks of grizzly bear, gray wolf, musk-ox, moose, and in late summer many thousands of caribou.

The work of bearing witness to creatures who do not converse in our tongue, to a landscape that speaks in the language of elementals, is wonderfully challenging. Then, there is the silence. The very absence of sound in a place like this is so profound that it becomes a presence, original and archetypal. Words cannot hold its vast innermost and outermost dimensions. What I thought was: "Here is the geography of hope."

Because I could see that there was a coherence to this place, an intelligibility, uncluttered and unimpaired. A larger order prevails—the sky, mountains, river valley, and the river—each element appearing with its own wisdom nature, its own life story that stands in relationship, in deep harmonious relationship, to every other element. Humilitas is a virtue one finds in oneself in this kind of place.

Human arrogance is laughable here. Vulnerability, respect, and patience are necessarily cultivated. It was surprising to find that the land is actually not formidable. It could contain us, even nurture us. By its very beingness, its evolutionary persistence, this place inspired hope. Immediately one is placed within the larger order of things; the land is simply and awesomely there, and we are in it. Over days, I found that the dignity of an unbroken land can be restorative, even healing. But seeking intimacy with a landscape such as this requires engagement, attention, presence—body, mind, spirit. And most importantly, it means ordering one's disarrayed interior to match the integrity of the land. There is a cleansing, purifying consolation to be had here.

All that said, you can imagine what it felt like to arrive back in our so-called civilization—so many cars, so much pollution, scented soap in the bathrooms! What are we thinking? Are we thinking at all? To experience a primal place undominated by human mind and hands, unbounded by human culture or custom, is a rare privilege because it gives such a profound perspective. It is also painful, in that our disconnection and manic flight away from the natural world is so extreme and allows all sorts of decisions to be made that only make

the disjuncture more permanent. I must admit that I had an overwhelming feeling of misanthropy as I sat in the airport on my return. This, of course, abates over time. But the experience of the Arctic Refuge remains forever deeply embedded in my psyche.

(RH): In college when I worked at the Outward Bound School in Minnesota, Sigurd Olson, the late philosopher of that area, once told us as we were about to embark on a 21-day wilderness venture that once our souls relaxed, we would feel the old rhythm of the ancestors whose home was amongst the sun, moon, wind, and stars. Did you find something of that rhythm on your excursion?

(PR): Yes, that definitely does describe an aspect of it. I wonder about the expression “once our souls relax.” Really, I think our souls are just longing for these kinds of experiences where we are placed within the larger order of things, where the human mind with its relentless pursuits cannot dominate. It feels more like the mind, in the Buddhist sense of the word, has to let go, be emptied, in order to experience that ancient and true rhythm and feel at home on the earth.

That means not only opening our hearts, but also confronting the myriad of fears and anxieties that are generated by being in such a place. Who are we when we drop our cultural accoutrements, when we enter, what is for us, now, the unknown territory called the “wilderness?” We still have a bit of the “conquering” mentality which arises out of fear. And most of us, unless we have been specifically trained, are completely unequipped to fend for ourselves in the wild. Even with the security of food and gear, there is still something to contend with—and I believe that it has something to do with the realization of how “small” our little spark of humanity is in the scheme of things—no more, no less, than the bears and the musk-ox, no more precious.

(RH): It has been great doing this “enterview” with you, Patricia. You are a most interesting and creative woman.

(PR): I have enjoyed the process immensely, Rob. The dialogue, as you have mastered it, is a great relational format that feels very free and spacious. Your questions and direction have given me a chance to think deeply about things, and the process has given me the space and time to work things out in what I hope are articulate and understandable responses. Thanks!