

John Graham

Funeral Service

Saturday, May 28, 2011

Minister's Introduction

We are here to celebrate the life of our beloved friend John Graham, and to express our gratitude for the privilege of having shared our lives with him.

His family joins us, Pat his sister, her husband Jack, and their daughter Marianne, John's niece and we welcome them.

Every student shapes the School through their presence and through their being. John's play was pivotal to our School; he was a cornerstone, a recognizable influence for all of us. Whether you had known him for years, or had just met him, you knew that he was someone to love; because his devotion never faltered, to Higher Forces, to our beloved Teacher, and to fellow students.

Let us stand and honor John with our silent presence.

(Silence)

Thank-you.

At his death, we can see much of John's life as a whole, his accomplishments, his connections, the things his hands touched. But ultimately, his life is not measured by external things. At death, the quiet internal efforts of a life –the accumulated moments of presence– become manifest.

The Teacher said, "When C Influence enters our lives, we are given the task to live forever." The particulars of our days; the efforts we take upon ourselves; the people we touch and who touch us; these fade from what we truly are. Our plays are written so that we may become immortal. John played his part to perfection, so that he can say; *'I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.'*

As John returns to the divine source, let us remember we follow the same path. Death is not the end of life. At death, life begins in another phase, the phase of the soul.

Reading: Robert Taylor

John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (God speaking):

Man shall not quite be lost, but saved who will,

Yet not of will in him, but grace in me

Freely vouchsafed; once more I will renew

His lapsed powers.

Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand

On even ground against his mortal foe,

By me upheld, that he may know how frail

His fallen condition is, and to me owe

All his deliverance, and to none but me.

And I will place within him as a guide

My umpire Conscience, whom if he will hear,

Light after light well used he shall attain,

And to the end persisting, safe arrive.

Music: Elizabeth Kent

Schubert's *Du bist die Ruh* (You are my peace).

Eulogy: Guinevere Mueller

In the Fellowship our friendships can be compared to a golden chain where each link is fashioned by moments we are present to each other. The rest has vanished - "vanished into thin air." The length of the chain is not important; the links are created out of time. I wish to share with you a few of such moments that John and I experienced. Our chain of friendship spans half a century. We first met in 1961.

The era of the 1960's and 70's was a *kairos* time, an energy burst upon this planet that shattered the sedate and orderly way of life of the 1950's and ushered in an era no one had expected or experienced before: The music of Elvis Presley, the Beatles, Bob Dylan, LSD, marijuana, Haight Street, Woodstock, "Free Love," Student demonstrations to end the war in Viet Nam and segregation in the South, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

C Influence was preparing the soil for B Influence and the development of magnetic centers. Esalen, near Big Sur was the Mecca with Fritz Perl one of its founders. Dance was greatly influenced by these events and one of the most successful and internationally renowned dance companies was led by Anna Halprin. Ms. Halprin's career spans more than 50 years as choreographer, performer, teacher, and as visionary. John enjoyed a successful career as lead dancer in her company. He could easily have continued to gain prominence in the world of B Influence, but his path ultimately lead to C Influence.

In the early 1960's, at San Francisco State University, John and I both taught in the Women's Department of Physical Education and Dance. Our magnetic centers were drawn to each other. We studied Gestalt Therapy and read Fritz Perl's popular B Influence book. We had not yet heard of Ouspensky or Gurdjieff. After the student rebellion, in the late 1960s, at both U.C. Berkeley and San Francisco State University, our paths separated.

In December of 1970 I met the School through Jan Allen and joined in January, 1971. In April Robert announced, that he would lead a prospective student meeting at the Cafe Cantata on Union Street in San Francisco. I found John's telephone No. and decided to invite him. John came to the meeting, and afterwards turned to me and simply said, "Let me know where and when you have the second meeting." John joined after the third meeting, and simply, directly, carved his own relationship to the School. He recognized C Influence, and he dropped his magnetic center. As Robert commented, "John chose essence over personality."

For the last two decades of his life, John had contracted a rare illness that progressively weakened the muscles of the body to the point of non-function. Once he called to tell me he had found a way to get out of bed. The illness had progressed and attacked his leg muscles so he had no strength to move himself to the edge of the bed. "I just start bouncing on my bottom and when I have a momentum going, I bounce toward the edge of the bed and pivot my legs over the edge," he told me with pride, like a boy who had finally figured out how to kick the ball.

John helped to open and support some of the first centers in the School. San Diego opened after Los Angeles and he was willing to move there. At the time, I was in Los Angeles directing the

centre and we saw each other only occasionally. In 1979 he moved into the teaching house after the Munich centre opened. In 1981 the Frankfurt centre became his home base. During this time, John had built a new career in movement development, dance and therapy. He became an expert in the Alexander technique and the Feldenkreis method. He taught mainly in Switzerland, Munich and Frankfurt and in the United States, before finally returning to Apollo. Later as his illness progressed he would apply these techniques, using physics instead of muscles to keep himself erect and on his feet. He tried to delay as long as possible the falls - which resulted on two different occasions in breaking his hand and his leg - and finally, the inevitable confinement to the wheelchair.

Most artists don't fare well in the School. They stay long enough till the teaching has helped them bridge an interval in their chosen field and then they leave, dedicating their soul to the arts, unlike Bach, who dedicated his music to the greater glory of God. John would not escape this test of valuation, but he never wavered in his commitment to his evolution.

John became an integral part of the Arts at Apollo, especially the theater and poetry. He favored Shakespeare and Walt Whitman. Whatever role he played he was committed to being present to it, whether it was a full scale production of a Shakespeare play, or going to the vineyard to read poetry to the students on their harvest break. His most memorable role was that of Walt Whitman, a play written by Judith Grace and directed by Mari Reeves. Even though his body was a denying force, and he was forced to play the part seated in a chair, this did not detract from the quality of his performance.

Who was John Graham?

Walt Whitman offers the best description:

"Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes."

He could be cantankerous as an old coot; as light and free as a dew drop on a leaf of grass in the early morning mist. He had the openness and curiosity of a child; obstinate and stubborn if pushed to do something he did not want to do. He was a private person, but enjoyed people of all ages and backgrounds. He loved animals and children, and enjoyed hearing the children laughing and playing in the house. His cat Cleo was a constant companion. Yes, he was large, he contained multitudes. One of his friends said, "John had an inner freshness and constant curiosity about what was current in the teaching. He did not look back." As his outer world shrank, his inner world ascended and expanded. Everything that he enjoyed in the queen of spades, his center of gravity, was taken from him. In its place, the emotional center found new expression.

A pivotal event occurred 4 years ago. John was in the hospital - weak and undernourished. Everyone expected him to die. He requested his furniture to be sold and his clothes given away. Then he was given the choice of going to a hospice for his final days, or to receive a feeding tube and be discharged to the Fountains, a convalescent hospital. He made a courageous choice by going to the Fountains. He was given a second chance at life and he knew it.

He stayed there a year. Through the feeding tube his body, received the nourishment it needed, and he began to recover. He appreciated the professional care. Many students visited him. Some of our musicians gave recitals at the Fountains which made John rather popular with the other patients.

In March 2009 John came home to Apollo. He chose Apollo over the instinctive security and the professional care he had received at the Fountains. The organization, Circle of Friends, led by Mary Hinrichs, took responsibility for his care. More than 50 students would work with John over the next 3 years. Every day he struggled with the lower self; every day he used the opportunity to practice acceptance, patience, humility and gratitude, the lessons of his second chance. He knew that Presence, love - became a necessity, not an option.

On one visit I observed that something had shifted. I mentioned to John that his perception of his care was different. It was no longer his body that people were working on, over which he had little control; it was that he and the person helping were working on the body together. He nodded and smiled.

Then John made the decision to stop using the feeding tube. He had accepted and was prepared for his death. "Let's get this done," he said to a friend. The day before he died he mentioned to another friend that he would like a sign on the front door saying "I am going Home." He sent a message to Robert and told him of his decision and expressed the wish to see him.

Robert came with a large bouquet of Parrot tulips, John's favorite tulip.

A student recalls some of the precious words that Robert shared with John. Robert mentioned that at the time of death C Influence will take his soul and send it to the Celestial City of Paradise. "They will capture your soul (he placed his gathered fingers on John's third eye) and put it into a vacuum and send it over there (extending his arm), waiting for your next role to pick it up. Moments of presence is collected in the third eye and transferred to your next role," he continued.

He told John that death was an illusion.

Robert said, "Death is Good Night not Good Bye and in your case it is good Knight - with a capital K - a Good Knight.

The last time I saw John I observed that he was moving back and forth between two worlds. Gernot had dropped me off to visit with John. When he returned later to pick me up John would not look at him and he had tears in his eyes as he looked at me not wishing me to leave. Suddenly his face changed; his lips formed a most angelic smile. He turned to look at Gernot, "Thank you for bringing me that beautiful melody," he said as he was listening to something from another place. He began to hum. "It is so beautiful!" he kept repeating.

I bent over him and kissed my friend for the last time.

Robert's last words to John were "We will be reunited in some Divine Eternity."

John replied, "I thought that."

Music: Marla Volovna and Zoila Munoz

Offenbach's Barcarolle.

Reading: Mari Reeves

Rumi, *To Take a Step Without Feet*:

This is love: to fly toward a secret sky,
To cause a hundred veils to fall each moment.
First, to let go of life.
In the end, to take a step without feet.
To regard this world as invisible,
And to disregard what appears to the Self.
Heart, I say, what a gift it has been
To enter this circle of lovers.

Minister's Conclusion:

The death of the body allows us to enter into a higher world, into which nothing mortal may pass. John made that payment, for himself and for all of us. The events of one's life end and the purpose of one's life –the purpose for which we were born– comes into being: silently, an immortal soul ascends.

So let us say, "I can no other answer give but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks."

John, we thank thee.

Minister signals David Wood to pick up the urn and show it to the assembly.

Minister blows out candle.

At the Cemetery: Minister's Introduction

Here on this poignant day, we release John to his home, and return his ashes to the earth.

Michael Rolfer: Walt Whitman

So Long:

Dear friend whoever you are take this kiss,
I give it especially to you;
I feel like one who has done work for the day to retire awhile;
An unknown sphere
more real than I dream'd, more direct,
darts awakening rays about me;
So long!
I love you, I depart from materials,
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead.

Music: Corale

Folk song.

Minister's Conclusion

The earth returns to the earth and a divine spark returns to its divine source. "Love comes from eternity, and returns into eternity". The circle of life is complete.

Prytaneion: Toast to John, Sydney Russell

Walt Whitman, Clear Midnight:

'This is thy hour O Soul,
thy free flight into the wordless'.