

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

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I was four years old I think (I was born in 1941) when I asked my Mother to show me how to do magic, which she promised to do when I was a little older. When I reminded her a year or two later she started showing me how to do conjuring tricks. I immediately reacted by saying that what was not what I meant! At that early age I was somehow well aware of the difference between magic and conjuring.

When I was nine I thought much about immortality, and I remember feeling more than daunted by the idea of existing "for ever and ever and ever". However I was convinced it had to be faced as it was inconceivable to me that my thinking-centre would vanish at death.

In my late teens I became interested in occult matters through the novels of Denis Wheatley. In particular the book *Strange Conflict* rang loud bells in me, for the descriptions of astral travelling and related matters seemed to be much more than mere fiction. I started reading everything I could in the library on psychic research and then Theosophy. This revived my earlier request to my Mother about magic, and I became intent on performing levitation and "geared myself up" to learn its secret in a dream. I did indeed wake up in the middle of the night with the solution, which was so obvious that I did not bother to write it down on the carefully placed piece of paper available for the purpose. Alas, in the morning it was beyond the reach of my memory! When I was in the Sixth Form I embarked upon a study of Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* which I had to read in the public library in York (where we were living at the time) as it was not for lending out. I diligently made a dictionary of the Sanskrit words she used (which I still have), but about a third of the way through I found the conflict with Christianity too great. I had become deeply attached to Christ (not in a Church sense), especially at boarding school where the *Gospels* were my main comfort and solace. So I abandoned the *Secret Doctrine*, but with a lingering conviction that there was something in it even so. I then saw in a bookshop a copy of the *Grimoire of Solomon* containing many magical formulae and spells. I wrestled with my Christian conscience over this book for weeks, and even copied out and tried one of the formulae in the process, but finally I decided not to buy it. Within a few days I found *Knowledge of Higher Worlds and its Attainment* in the public library. Somehow I had ignored this book for ages, and later when I tried to recollect why, I think I assumed that it would only be a list of books. This was typical of me: I didn't want someone else's list! Anyway, no sooner had I finally opened it than I rushed home with it, hid it from my parents, and avidly started reading. I only got one third of the way through (again!). But the reason was quite different this time: there was so much to do practising the early meditations, and clearly some of the later ones were obviously beyond me, that it was a long time before I ventured further. Of course I decided to buy the book, and I remember going in my school uniform to collect it at the bookshop where I had

ordered it, and being told by the assistant that it was not Christian. I remonstrated hotly and left. For me it combined Christianity and all that I had lingering respect for in Blavatsky, even though no direct mention is made of Christ.

Two years later, by which time I was undergoing an engineering training in the RAF, my Mother gave me as a present the little book *Flying Saucers: Physical and Spiritual Aspects* by Georg Unger. She knew my interest in this subject at that time. The importance for me lay not in the content but in the list of books by Steiner on the flyleaf! I sent away for these as fast as I could read them and soon built up quite a library. I have often wondered what the RAF sergeant who daily inspected the cleanliness of my room made of such titles as *The Spiritual Beings in the Heavenly Bodies*! Eventually when I had read a great deal it dawned on me that there must be a society of some kind where I could meet other people interested in these things, for I was very lonely spiritually. So I ventured down to London one Saturday in my second year at College (when we were allowed such a privilege), intent upon finding out what was going on in Bloomsbury Square (the address in my copy of *Knowledge of Higher Worlds and its Attainment*). Alas there was nothing there any more (this was 1960), so on another Saturday I thought it might be worth asking the publishers, and went to 35 Park Road. There to my amazement was none other than Rudolf Steiner House! I met Roma Browne who was then Secretary of the AS in GB, and who became a lifelong friend thereafter. I also met Lisa Palmer in the Library. By then I had decided to join the Roman Catholic Church, as after my brush with *The Secret Doctrine* I felt the church I belonged to was weak and shallow, and the sterner stuff of the Catholics was necessary as Christianity was important above all. In view of this I more or less had to bully Lisa into sponsoring me to join the Society, whereas Roma recognised where I was spiritually and readily agreed.

My becoming a Roman Catholic partly enabled my Mother to return to that faith, which she had left on marriage. The other factor was that my brother too became a Catholic. I suspect one reason why I joined was to free her to do so, as fairly soon after I refused confirmation because Anthroposophy waxed ever stronger in me, and eventually after a row with my Mother I left the RC Church. My experience of spiritual freedom on doing so was unexpectedly strong, for I retain a genuine respect for it to this day. In deciding to go against my Mother, which was not easy as we were always very close, I stood firmly on the ground given me by *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. This was a big crisis in my life, and that book was my mainstay.

I was very shocked at school when the colour of an object was explained as that part of the light which was reflected by it. For some reason I rejected this idea completely, and increasingly I felt a gulf between what I felt about things and the way they were explained scientifically. Often I was irritated by the fact that explanations were given and then later shown to be mere approximations, for example the idea of a perfectly smooth body was assumed and then later it was explained no

such 'beast' exists. More irritation when no perfectly black body could exist. I seemed to wish these idealisations to have their place in reality. Such experiences led me not to go along with all that was being taught as fast as I otherwise might (which extended all the way to my later engineering training), but on the other hand I was intensely interested in physics, and spent most of my (boring) French lessons trying to invent anti-gravity. As my Father was a doctor in the RAF we frequently moved, and the 'casualties' resulting from the disruption in schooling were French (which at one time I was passably good at), piano playing (the same) and maths. Latin never even came in sight! I tended to get 32% in maths, but in the middle of a geometry exam just two terms before O-level I suddenly saw what I was supposed to do. No-one had ever explained (or more likely I had never grasped) that theorems were supposed to be used to prove other things, and that a question expected the use of this procedure for its solution! Anyway, helped by this blinding revelation half way through that exam, I beavered away feverishly and got 50%. My maths master said in my subsequent report that my progress "amazed him". I then went on to take A-level exams, which previously had seemed quite beyond consideration. All this adds up to a feature of my whole biography: the constant feeling that difficult practical things as well as clever academic things were beyond me. Life kept showing me otherwise, often in the kindest way.

My decision to study electrical engineering sprang from an interest I had in logic and its application to computer circuits. I was not good enough for an academic career anyway, and my Father encouraged me to join the RAF and be trained there. It was an excellent training, and my typical slow and late academic waking-up process continued after that, so that by the time I left I was told I would be sent to university after a spell of duty 'in the field'. This never happened, but it illustrates this continuing thread through my life, and was later confirmed when I was one of the few to gain an A1 pass in postgraduate study at the RAF College. Engineering was just right for me as it was the polar opposite of my idealistic approach, constantly balancing it by hard necessities. Real systems are never perfect and much more time is spent in dealing with all the "imperfections" than on aesthetically pleasing general ideas and principles. Even so I constantly veered towards the latter, and even proposed a research project to produce an ideal control system. I learnt a great deal from finding out just why it would not work.

I had varied experiences in the RAF, working on aircraft maintenance, flight simulators, radar, computers and long-range communications (before satellites were in wide use). I endlessly asked to be posted to a research job, but was never granted that. I left the RAF in 1979 and had a 'sabbatical' following up the work of Lawrence Edwards, and I met and became a friend of John Wilkes, developing an interest in his flowforms and problems connected with water. After a few years I took a job with the Canadian company Northern Telecom (now Nortel) working on data communication. Then in 1975 I was asked to become General Secretary of the AS in GB.

My interest in physics and science remained throughout all this, and was further stimulated by my study of Steiner's ideas, and from my early twenties I sought for a satisfactory way of relating Steiner's research to mainstream discoveries and knowledge. Eventually I came to study projective geometry and, stimulated by a comment by Olive Whicher about the lemniscate, sought a genuinely projective construction for it. While in Turkey with plenty of time I finally thought I had found this along with other things, and Lawrence Edwards alone answered my letters about it in a most helpful way. This led me to a knowledge of the work of George Adams, and an interest in the idea of negative- or counter-space. All along my engineer's approach demanded a detailed way of understanding how the etheric body actually relates to the physical, and projective geometry seemed the best approach. What I meant then by this question was: what is different in the activity of the physical body due to the presence of the etheric body, and how does that work? Are subtle heat balances different from those we would expect physically, or is space curved in some strange way? Just what is different? This contrasts with general statements such as saying the body grows or takes in nourishment, all of which are obvious but do not explain anything about that connection.

The advent of chaos theory was to me of great interest in all this as it broke the tyranny of the mechanistic explanation of all things. It is genuinely possible to have well defined mechanical systems whose future behaviour cannot be predicted even in principle. It opened the way, to my mind, for complex systems such as living bodies to obey the laws of physics and chemistry and yet also obey other laws as well.

After 33 years pondering on these things in all sorts of ways I finally had an idea! If an object or entity is in both ordinary and counter space at the same time how will it behave as it tries to obey their very different laws simultaneously? This turned out to be a more far-reaching question than I expected, and the first fruit of it was a new explanation for gravitation. Encouraged by this I followed up the developing notion that there is a threefold situation involving space, counter space and the stress of the beings living in and relating these two. It led to new ways of thinking about liquids, gases, light, chemistry and life, in other words about the elements and ethers. I felt that a science serving Michael should not only be spiritual but also able to account for conventional findings, so that they may be re-thought and understood on a different basis. Also some of the more surprising findings of Steiner himself in relation to science could be understood. Once again, as often before, I found myself struggling at the limits of my ability to use the maths needed for some of it. The project is still "on the boil" and far from complete as it is a huge one. I was encouraged to write a book about it, but I did not know who to write it for! For specialists? But most of them would not read it. Who anyway would publish it? For general readers? But it seemed important first to establish the ideas as exactly as I was able before giving a more general account that would remain "woolly" without the existence of a more rigorous exposition. The encouragement of many

friends and that of the Science Section in Dornach finally spurred me on. Writing a book: something else that I had never really thought I would do!

One aspect of biography became clear to me through all this: I had in the course of my life followed up many interests and struggled with academic books well beyond my initial expertise. I fought to understand Einstein, quantum physics and the like, and waded through dense mathematical texts checking every (often poorly explained) step. The balance struck in such books between boring over-explanation and elegant economical exposition was not often "on my side". All these threads of interest converged in the work described above, and the reasons for these often seemingly disparate interests found their place. Thus the reasons for our varied interests can eventually become clear and find a context.

I have always needed the warm support of others. Indeed who does not? But some souls are more hardy in this respect than others. This has been given to me by many wonderful friends, and not least by my wife Heather. We met in 1969 in Dornach when we waved to each other thinking we were already acquainted. Later we met again in London at various members meetings, and were married in 1972 a few months before I was sent to Turkey for three years. She has been a dedicated Waldorf Class Teacher all her working life. She is a musician, eurythmist and teacher - not a scientist - but somehow she always recognised my strivings in a way that was both surprising and deeply supportive.

I cannot imagine life without Anthroposophy; without a Christian notion of reincarnation and karma; without other anthroposophists. Yet I have sensed on some occasions that there were other paths I could have followed in life as real possibilities, not just theoretical ones. Karma is not a "tramline" affair, but weaves together several if not many life paths as real possibilities, leaving it to our freedom to follow one or another. It seems to me more like a colourfully woven fabric of possibilities than a single thread. Surely our compassion must go out to so many in the world who through poverty or misfortune seem to be presented only with one grey thread.

I will make no attempt to interpret here what I have related, but leave it as intended: an example of a sketch of a biography.