

Houston's First Lady of Transformation

by Jerry Patchen, ITPI Board Member and Member of ITP Houston

The Early Days

In the summer of 1948, Lydia was 17, a demure college-bound Southern belle, confidently strolling on Carolina Beach in North Carolina. Al was 20, an enterprising college student operating his beach umbrella and accessory stand. He spotted Lydia and was transfixed by her golden hair, petite hour glass figure and delightful, if coquettish, smile. They danced that night to Al's jazz band at "Bop City." The following summer Al and Lydia eloped. One year later, they moved to Lydia's childhood city, Augusta, Georgia. Two sons, Patrick and Jimmy, soon followed.



Wildcatter

Gifted with a life-long unquenchable entrepreneurial spirit, Al moved the family to the booming oil town of Houston in 1953. Investing in penny stocks, gaining capital, applying Al's engineering education and self-taught geology, Al and Lydia bundled the boys in their Ford sedan and set out on the country roads of Texas looking for oil prospects. Al had a legendary intuitive genius for viewing topography and sensing oil. Lydia would know he was on to something when the ever-present twinkling gleam in his eye grew brighter. Al would explain the landscape structure and formations, and Lydia would nod her approval. Al secured investors, sold drilling programs and drilled wildcat wells. Lydia managed land leases and did the bookkeeping.

Near Death Experience

Lydia loved dancing. On a hot Georgia night, while dancing at her grade school graduation, she was stricken with severe heat stroke. Placed in bed, unconscious, Lydia recalls her breathing becoming soft, gentle and slow. She saw no need to breathe, stopped breathing and entered a spiral tunnel lined with shadowy welcoming figures. There she encountered a brilliant white light with a warm welcoming, loving glow—a divine presence. Her father, who was attending her bedside, revived her. This occurred 3 times. At this young age Lydia realized, "there was more going on than people were talking about." As a result, Lydia changed her life perspective, lost her fear of death and opened to new areas and ways of visioning.

Scientific Research

Adventurous world travelers, Lydia and Al purchased the island of Blackbird Caye from the Government of Belize in the late 60's, establishing The Dolphin Research Project. The Project focused on communication between and with dolphins. This involvement resulted in their collaboration on Biosphere 2, an Earth systems science research center in Tucson, AZ. As a prelude to space colonization, Biosphere 2 had the goal of creating a sustainable environment with a harmonious balance between humanity and ecology. Later, Lydia and Al met former Apollo astronaut Edgar Mitchell and became involved in the Houston Institute of Noetic Sciences' group, which to this day meets in Lydia's home. The very large living room doubles as an assembly hall for Houston's consciousness community with many noteworthy events and presentations throughout the year. It is a wonderful sharing of the Dugan home, a gathering place for communion and a deep connection with spirit. Many have experienced a life changing transformation upon crossing the threshold of their door.

Paths of Transformation

Lydia and Al's yoga practice led them to an interest in meditation with Muktananda, who established an ashram in Houston in the early 70's. They later studied with his successor, Brother Charles, who incorporated binaural audio into meditation. Traveling to India twice and also to Oregon, Lydia and Al met and studied with Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Lydia also practiced Tai Chi and remote healing. She began sponsoring meditation meetings in her home in the early 80's.

Esalen

Lydia and Al's interest in hot springs led them to Esalen in the 80's, where they met Dick Price, George Leonard and Michael Murphy. They were fascinated by Esalen's different mindset and enjoyed communicating with people in a new, different and open way. At Esalen, they found a home, a place of belonging. They attended many of George's classes on Leonard Energy Training (LET) and Michael's classes on meditation. While the 1992 Integral Transformative Practice (ITP) experimental group was forming and practicing, Lydia and Al were often at Esalen with George and Michael, following, encouraging and embodying these developing events, excited about bringing the essence of Esalen to Houston and other communities. The Dugan Foundation generously sponsored and underwrote Jeffrey Kripal's seminal book *Esalen: America and the Religion of no Religion*.

ITP Houston

In 1995 with the publication of George and Michael's book, *The Life We Are Given*, Lydia was ready to bring ITP to Houston. Synchronistically, Joe Hirsch, Lydia's friend from the 80's meditation group, read the book at the urgings of George's brother, Dr. Edward Leonard. Learning of Lydia and Joe's mutual interest, George brought them together. In the summer of 1995, Lydia and Joe established and continue to co-lead the ITP Houston group, the longest continuously active ITP group other than the original group.

Challenge and Change

After 62 years of marriage, Al passed away in 2011, following a 7 year heroic battle with cancer. His indomitable spirit was there to his last breath. Lydia's focused, loving attention, devotion and tender nurturing of Al through this arduous battle inspired awe. It was beautiful, marvelous. The love and caring was palpable. The peace, equanimity, pleasantness, and friendship they displayed throughout this process is a great teaching. Remarkably, Lydia, ever embracing and connected with the fullness of life, displayed amazing strength and purpose after Al's passing. She continues to teach, mentor, give, serve and share open-hearted friendship and wisdom with all around her. Thank you, Lydia.