

## Practice and the Ultimate Transition

By Jerry Patchen, ITPI Board Member and MIH Graduate

The Father of Greek tragedy, Aeschylus, proclaimed 3,000 years ago, "The Gods have declared a solemn decree, it is through suffering we come to wisdom." Viktor Frankl found meaning in the midst of extreme suffering in Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp. Jeffrey Kripal speaks of the trauma principle in which extreme traumatic experiences lead to expanded awareness. An extreme example is the near death experience. A mother's pain during childbirth is a life metaphor. We all experience existential angst and look for skillful means to manage the forces and energies that challenge our hearts, minds, bodies and souls.

Linda and I experienced important formative years in the cultural shifts of the 1960s. The exciting, glorious and joyful days of the 60s are celebrated. Yet, it was not all the Merry Pranksters and magic trips. There were the legendary bad trips and painfully agonizing experiences. I have chronicled in general language an adventurous odyssey that Linda and I enjoyed over four decades of attending Native American Church (NAC) Peyote meetings and experiencing unimaginable visions. It is true that sitting on the ground in a tipi all night for 12 to 15 hours, or even more, can be an arduous experience. Great focus, attention and concentration is required. Fierce lions guard the gates of deep self-examination and transcendence.



*Rutherford "White Star" Loneman*

The Native Americans' ability to encounter extreme pressure is instructive and interestingly parallels the life skill fostered by ITP. My first Indian teacher was a Southern Arapaho Indian, Rutherford Loneman, who adopted me as his son, Indian way. Linda and I had a deep, meaningful and loving relationship with Rutherford. He was the grandson of Old Man Loneman, who escaped the genocide of the Sand Creek massacre and was removed by the U.S. Cavalry to an Oklahoma Indian reservation. Old Man Loneman required Rutherford as an adolescent to stay with and follow a nesting pair of red tail hawks for three months. Rutherford learned to understand any cry from the hawk. The same was true with any turn of the hawk's head, movement, motion or direction of flight. Rutherford merged with the spirit of the red tail hawk and used it in NAC Peyote meetings for blessings and healing of others. Old Man Loneman taught Rutherford to sit erect, motionless and silent for hours. Linda and I spent many remarkable nights in the tipi with Rutherford, who was a Peyote Road Chief and led Peyote meetings. Rutherford was mesmerizing.

On the morning of August 8, 1988, I learned Rutherford Loneman had passed away. I was heartbroken and crying. Funeral arrangements were immediately undertaken for a burial of Rutherford on the Arapaho reservation at Concho, Oklahoma. Rutherford's wife, Wanada Loneman, a Sac and Fox Indian, planned a Peyote funeral meeting. I knew what that meant and felt

a sense of dread; although, I knew I must be there. I was aware the Sac and Fox bring the body of the deceased in the tipi and lay the body on the ground on inside the tipi throughout the night long NAC funeral meeting.

Linda and I traveled to Oklahoma for the funeral. Rutherford was laid out on the ground horizontal along the north side of the tipi with blankets around his body up to his shoulders. Wanada sat next to Rutherford. Linda sat next to Wanada with me sitting on Linda's right. I was grieving and having a difficult time throughout the beginning hours of the meeting. My Indian father, closest friend and mentor was laying deceased a few feet from me.

Suddenly, Rutherford appeared bigger than life. His physical body was laid out a few feet to my left, yet he simultaneously appeared in the center of the tipi above the fire before me. He had a big smile on his face. Rutherford said to me, "Son, don't be upset. Don't be sad. This is just another lesson that I am teaching you about life, this process of life." Then a ray of tremendously powerful energy about 8 inches in diameter streamed down from his chest into my chest. It was the most joyful and exhilarating moment of my life. I completely understood the process of life. This life wisdom was radiated into every dimension of my being. I experienced a sure knowing that we are all an interconnected, inseparable and eternal unity of all that is, was or ever will be. We are all part of an inseparable whole. I was elated. I was at the funeral of my dearest and closest friend, and I was experiencing ecstatic joy and appreciation for life. It was an unimaginable divine paradox.

When Linda and I discovered the ITP process 12 years ago, we were struck by the similarity of the ITP practice of purposefully stressing and tensing and relaxing our bodies, balancing and centering, opening our hearts, silently meditating, sensing life force, honoring sacred commitments and embracing community with the Indian processes used for transcendence such as the Peyote meeting, Sundance and Vision Quest. ITP has become an extraordinary beneficent life process teacher for us for which we have tremendous gratitude. To borrow an adjective from my mentor Michael Murphy, ITP is "stupendous".