

## The Crazy Wisdom Interview with U-M Professor Richard Mann

A Leading Transpersonal Psychologist Reflects on his Years of  
Political Activism, and on his own Spiritual Journey

Interview by Bill Zirinsky and Claire Crevey  
Edited by Claire Crevey  
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*Richard Mann is a Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Michigan, where he has taught for forty years about group process, psychology and religion, and spiritual development. He was the founder of Project Outreach, an ongoing experiential Psychology program at the University. In addition, he edits the SUNY Press series of books in Transpersonal and Humanistic Psychology, and he has written three books, Interpersonal Styles and Group Development, The College Classroom and The Light of Consciousness.*

*Bill Zirinsky and Claire Crevey interviewed Professor Mann on a warm spring day in April at his home in the Burns Park neighborhood, where he lives with his wife, Matruka. Flowers bloomed in the yard outside, and a couple of cats tiptoed and lounged on the sofa as the sun filtered through the curtains.*

*In the interview, Professor Mann speaks about his explorations in Psychology and his political activism as a professor at Harvard and the University of Michigan in the sixties and seventies. He also describes his interactions with the great Hindu teacher Muktananda, which ignited his ongoing commitment to the spiritual path of Siddha Yoga.*

*In addition to his roles as an educator, writer, and editor, Professor Mann has raised three sons, Larry, Ned and David. In the interview, he speaks about the gifts of fatherhood and family life and how the teachings of Siddha Yoga have influenced both his home life and career.*

*Generations of Ann Arbor students interested in self-exploration and consciousness have been drawn to the classes of Richard Mann. Bill and Claire represent two generations of those students, Bill having taken "Psychology and Religion" in the mid-1970's, and Claire having taken the "Psychology of Non-Ordinary Experience" in 1999.*

*This was a special interview for both Bill and Claire, as both regard Professor Mann as a catalyst on their spiritual paths. He is an inspiring teacher who has profoundly influenced the lives of many students by offering support, guidance, compassion, and insight in his singularly relaxed and gentle manner.*

**Bill Zirinsky:** Dick, it's a beautiful spring day, and things are in bloom in the Burns Park neighborhood. Right outside your door, there's the word "Anusara." What does that mean?

**Dick Mann:** It means flowing with grace. We just like the meaning of it, but it also is the name of a school of hatha yoga, founded by one of our teachers, John Friend.

**Bill Zirinsky:** It's really nice. Thank you for having us both here today to interview you... Where and when were you brought up?

**Dick Mann:** I was brought up in Boston in the thirties and forties. I went to private school outside of Boston for elementary school and prep school at St. Paul's in New Hampshire. So I wasn't in Boston a lot. And then I went to Harvard in '50 and graduated in '54. So all those were kind of Harvardy, Bostony kinds of years, and then I came out here in '54 to graduate school in Psych and later taught for a year. I was here for about five years, and then I went back to Harvard and taught for five years. In '64 I came back here and I've been basically here since then.

**Bill Zirinsky:** Going back to your early years, were you



Photo by Nina Hauser

Episcopal Theological School. I'd go over and have dinner there, and it just seemed really nice. I don't think it was a deeply theological response or from any great understanding, but compared to everybody going on to Wall Street and the like, this seemed like a wonderful alternative route. But actually, coming to graduate school was about as oddball a thing to do as to go to theological school (laughs). I mean, nobody in that sort of clubby, Harvard world, nobody went to graduate school at all.

**BZ:** I see. They went off to ...

**DM:** They went to business school, med school, law school... Yeah, they did that.

**Claire Crevey:** When you were a child, did you have experiences or feelings that foreshadowed a life of spiritual exploration?

**DM:** The school chapel felt really terrific to me. At prep school, you could get up early on Sunday and go to Communion, and then you always had to go to the eleven o'clock chapel service and then later, Sunday night, there was Evensong. I used to love to get up early, and not very many boys would do that. I'd go in the chapel, and I loved it there. That was the safest but also the most serene and beautiful part of that whole school world. You could even do that on the weekdays, get up really early. During the week, there would only be five or six kids at early communion. In that sense, there was a lot of draw.

I don't want to exaggerate it, because in some ways the connection was pretty thin. I taught Sunday school when I came here for graduate school. Because of teaching here at Canterbury, at St. Andrews, I met this wonderful man, John Walker, who was just the greatest guy, one of the most important people I've met in my life. He was a black priest from Detroit who had an interracial parish. Then he went to teach at St. Paul's, which—by then, I was so anti-St. Paul's, I thought, "Well, what would you

raised in a small family, large family, Presbyterian family...?

**Dick Mann:** We were Episcopalians. The schools that I went to tended to be Episcopalian. My parents were divorced, so my mother was working really hard all through the Depression and into the war years to support the family. She was in public relations. My father lived in Boston for a while and then was gone for a while and then came back to Boston. He was in stocks and investments and various things in his lifetime.

**Bill Zirinsky:** Had your father gone to Harvard before you?

**Dick Mann:** No, he wished that I had gone to Dartmouth. He was a Dartmouth guy. All his family and his parents' generation went to Dartmouth. He grew up in Quechee, Vermont. But he'd gone to the Harvard business school, so he wasn't too upset about that.

**Claire Crevey:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**DM:** No, but when my mother married Hugh Cabot, a Boston Brahmin kind of guy, he had three kids, and so at various times I had step-sibs. Most of my teenage years, there were one or two stepbrothers or stepsisters that were part of my world. But I didn't really grow up with them very much because I was off at school.

**Claire Crevey:** Did you identify with being an Episcopalian?

**DM:** Yeah, I did. There was a time, I suppose in college and then even when I came here to graduate school, that I'd always think, "Well, maybe I won't do this, and I'll go to Episcopal Theological School and become a minister." It never quite happened, and I was under a lot of pressure against that from my stepfather, like, "Ohhh, don't do that," but it always appealed to me. I knew people who were in

want to do that for?" And he became the dean of the Washington Cathedral. He became a high official in the church, and I just thought he was the most lovable human being I had ever met. So it was because of these few really wonderful people in the church that I still feel that connection to all that that happened back there. But it was mostly the people, not so much a really strong... You know, Protestants don't have a very deep encounter with God, typically, at least not in the Episcopal Church. I'm not saying they never do, but it's not... They don't specialize in that (all laugh).

**BZ:** As you look back on the first eighteen years of your life, what's most memorable to you in terms of who you became later in your life? Did anything foretell...

**DM:** I was always the youngest, always the smallest in every class, until I finally... just before I graduated from school, I realized there was one kid in class that I was taller than (laughs). And then I grew a lot in college. It was just sort of odd. I think I was always drawn to... in terms of the teaching, what foreshadowed wanting to teach, I wanted to create a kind of environment that was different from what I had grown up in, which was all so impersonal and so pretentious and fake. There was just no respite in any of those school years from that.

My sails kind of billowed out when I got to college. I think before then, I was trying to figure out how to play the game, how to get along and not be noticed, because noticing led to bad things rather than good things. It was always a manner of staying in the shadows. Prep school was a bad scene. I liked the school part of it. I worked hard at some things. But I wasn't terribly on fire with the intellectual part of it. I just was a little confused, it seems to me.

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(continued)

And then I got to college, and the first year was sort of a continuation. I was a cox on the crew, and all my friends were prep school kids, and they all, or pretty much all, were going down to the boathouse every day and getting drunk on weekends ... and clubs... All that stuff lasted for about a year and a half, and then suddenly I got into this social science world. Freed Bales said, "Do you want to come be in my seminar?" It was a graduate seminar, and I had expressed some interest in it, a small group research thing. You could look through a one-way mirror at how people were ... I just was so fascinated with the idea that you could study what to me had been so confusing—like, how do people get liked, and how do they get influence, and how do groups work, and why do different people like each other more than other people? The idea that you could actually study that was just incredible. And then I was hooked. All my friends were graduate students and faculty members for the remaining two and a half years. I just left the other world. I didn't ever feel comfortable in that, you know ... debutante parties, and yeah. It was awful.

**BZ:** So it sounds like what opened a door for you into what became a lifetime exploration was that early interest in group dynamics.

**DM:** Yeah, for sure. That was really it. A lot of it had a psychoanalytically oriented edge to it. These people weren't just cold, empirical types. They were reading Freud and Klein and ... It was an interesting bunch of people, really good.

**BZ:** So you finished your undergraduate career at Harvard, and then you came here?

**DM:** Came here, yeah. And I didn't know what I was going to do. At first I thought I'd be in Social Psych, and then I thought I'd be in Experimental, then Clinical, then Personality... I was just casting around, and I think again a lot of it was self-exploratory. That was really important. I ended up still doing those group observation things, and even with my research, all through the sixties, it was still studying groups and how teachers relate to students and students relate to teachers, how people relate to each other, you know, all that. So that was important, but also the intrapsychic side of things. That was great.

From the first term I was at Harvard, a large part of my energy was off in Civil Rights. It was like I'm suddenly an insider, so now I get to kind of let the ladder down out the window and let the people come in and help redress the imbalances of this life.

**BZ:** You must have done some outstanding work in terms of your graduate work.

**DM:** Yeah, I think I did. In those days, it wasn't like you had to have already published twenty articles, which is kind of the deal these days. So Ted Newcomb says, "We got a letter sent from Harvard. They want an assistant professor. Do you want me to put your name in?" I said, "Sure." So I go, and there are all these famous professors (laughs). That was fun.

The Civil Rights movement was just starting, and there was a group called CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, and really from the first term I was at Harvard, a large part of my energy was off in Civil Rights. It was like I'm suddenly an insider, so now I get to kind of let the ladder down out the window and let the people come in and help redress the imbalances of this life. I moved to a street in Cambridge, and there were no black people, no Negroes, as we would say then. I said, "How come?" And they said, "Well, nobody would sell to a Negro here. Nobody would

rent to a Negro on this street." And I realized, well, wait a minute. My first child was born that first term. To be an adult suddenly meant I've got to do something about American society. It just drove me nuts. Bill Gamson and I were both in Boston CORE, and later he and I did that whole teach-in thing. It was a nice association.

**BZ:** Was that here or there?

**DM:** Both. We were both in Boston CORE, and then he came here about the same time as I did.

**BZ:** And were you organizing students, or were you ...

**DM:** No, it was just a nonviolent, Gandhian, Boston organization doing picketing and sit-ins. A lot of it had to do with local housing discrimination. You couldn't get an apartment if you were black. We did this thing called testing. If there was an apartment ad in the paper, we'd send a white couple, and they'd say, "Oh yeah, sure." But if you sent a black couple right afterwards, they'd say, "No, we don't have anything (laughs). We're plum out of apartments. I don't know why we're sitting in this office, but ... we haven't got any apartments." Then we'd send in a white couple, and of course they'd bring out all these apartments. So then we'd go back in and talk to them. It was interesting, the fair housing movement. Fair housing was just ready to happen. Accommodations, housing, all these things were changing very fast in the early sixties. It was fun to be part of that.

**BZ:** Even then, were you teaching about groups?

**DM:** That happened at Harvard, when I got back there. My stepfather, Hugh Cabot, had brought a course over from the business school to the Harvard undergraduate college itself, which was called Human Relations. And I had taken it as an undergraduate from somebody else. He left, and Freed Bales, who was a sociologist, had taken over the course. It was Bales who I had worked with as an undergraduate. He was my tutor and mentor all those years.

So when I went back to Harvard, I started teaching that course, which was by now called Analysis of Interpersonal Behavior. That was fantastic. I really loved that. My first big research project involved taping all the sessions of all these classes and analyzing, coding, and seeing how the groups change over time. But the pleasure of it was just being in the class. You know how it goes. You just get people talking in a way that they're engaged.

**CC:** In your graduate studies, and then when you were teaching at Harvard, had you started to get into paranormal or metaphysical studies?

**DM:** I don't think the spiritual thing really came on board until the late sixties. The political people began to smoke dope in about '67, '66. The hippies and the flower children and the yippies, they all were smoking dope, but the heavy, anti-war, revolutionary types were very suspicious about dope-smoking because it seemed to be a distraction, some kind of harmless alternative to overthrowing the state. That was the whole point of everything, was to make some real change, and what was dope-smoking? But then gradually it seeped in. You know this is the Burns Park area. There used to be a group called the Burns Park mafia. It was all a bunch of professors and radicals and dope smokers at the same time.

And then, for me, it turned toward Don Juan and Castaneda and Lobsang Rampa, and all that reading and dope smoking was like, oh, there was this interior world. And the music, all these lyrics from Pink Floyd and the Beatles... That was a big deal. We were all just so angry all the time in the movement, just all the time, so this was a wonderful relief from that.

**BZ:** So in the 1960s, when you were here, were you—I knew you were politically active—but did you have some of that political anger?

**DM:** I got here in '64, and I joined Ann Arbor CORE, and then the Tonkin Bay thing happened that summer, and then the escalation of the bombing across the 35<sup>th</sup> parallel happened in January or February. Bill Gamson and I and a couple of others said, "Well, let's call off classes. We'll just get up on the steps of Angell Hall, and we'll talk about this war and how wrong it is." We went around and talked to all these people and said, "Do you want to join us?" Every day, the chairman of my department would come and say, "How many people have you got?" I'd say, well, thirty. Then forty, then ninety. You know, it was going up and up, and they were getting panicked.

You couldn't turn on the radio without hearing Governor Romney or some legislator saying, "If these professors in Ann Arbor cancel their classes, we'll find a way to kick 'em out." It was a whole big thing. And of course, not all of us really had any classes on Friday anyway, but we were going to do it. It created this huge uproar. Then one night we were meeting up on Olivia 'til two or three in the morning. Fritjof Bergmann and Ted

Newcomb said, "Well, they're after us because they say we don't want to fulfill our responsibilities. Instead of teaching less, why don't we teach more?"

So they coined this word *teach-in*, to mean, "Well, we're going to fill the classrooms all night long. We'll have seminars from eight o'clock at night 'til eight o'clock the next morning." We thought maybe a couple of hundred people would show up, and we'd have a great time. *Thousands* of students came. Every classroom was filled all up and down Mason Hall, and auditoriums A, B, C, and D were all filled. By eight o'clock the next morning, there were still three hundred people on the Diag for the final ceremony. It was an incredible success. So that was only March or something of '65.

Then we started something called the Inter-University Committee for Debate on Foreign Policy, and these teach-ins spread all over the country. Everybody would call all the buddies they had, especially in Anthropology—they were the real dynamos.

The funny thing was we were at this meeting at

Within minutes of Muktananda walking in the room, I was in meditation. He looked over at me, and that was the end of me. I wasn't even in the room. I didn't hear a word he said. I had no idea what was happening, but I was in this peaceful woods, and I could smell it, I could feel the warmth of the pine needles, and I was just in another state.

Bill Gamson's house, and my job was to write McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Advisor, I think because I'd worked at Harvard and he'd been the dean then. So I wrote this letter and thought, "Ah, he's never going to answer." Well, two days later I'm outside, and my wife comes out and says, "The White House is on the phone." We challenged McGeorge Bundy to a debate in Washington, and he said OK. So we all went down to Washington for this national teach-in, and he didn't show up. I was in the audience, waiting for Schlesinger to get through apologizing for the war in Vietnam (laughs), and this guy comes in and says, "Come on, come on." And suddenly Ernest Nagel, the philosopher, and I were whisked away in this limousine that went to the White House, where we were told, "Mr. Bundy's not coming."

We said, "What?" It turned out he was in Puerto Rico, talking to Juan Bosch because of the Dominican Republic crisis that was bubbling up at the same time. So we had to come back and tell everybody, "He's not coming." And all the ultras, which are all the people—because there's always somebody to the left of you, no matter how far to the left you are (laughs). There's always somebody telling you you've sold out, you're a wimp, you're a Fascist or something (all laugh). So they were all enraged.

So when he cancelled, we challenged him again. Two of us went down to Washington. There I am in the White House, and there's Bundy and Fred Friendly and Eric Sevareid, and all these people are going to put on a TV version of the Vietnam teach-in. We thought, "Well, we've won. We've got these guys where we want them." We had all these academics on our side who knew exactly what was wrong with the war in Vietnam.

They *murdered* us. They just wiped us right off the plate because they had all these tricky things they could say. We were completely—I mean, we *lost*. I mean, these were famous academics, but nobody was organized in a way to take on these slick guys.

**BZ:** So the first visit was in Washington, almost like a citywide teach-in.

**DM:** Yeah. It was all over educational TV.

**BZ:** And instead of the government rejecting involvement, they actually participated by sending speakers to debate.

**DM:** Absolutely. Bundy would have come. They sent Daniel Elsberg to speak for the government policy.

**BZ:** And you were certainly treated with courtesy. You were brought in a limousine to the White House.

**DM:** Oh my God, yeah. We would go there lots of times. We would negotiate things.

**BZ:** Well, I mean, that's a sharp contrast to maybe five, four years later, when ...

**DM:** Oh, totally. Yeah.

**BZ:** There's no debate about these issues.



Dick Mann and his grandson, Evan, a couple of years ago

**DM:** That's really true. When I got back here, it just became more and more. Ed Pierce and I and Barbara Fuller headed up something out here called Vietnam Summer, and then there were the marches on Washington in '68 and '69.

**BZ:** You were very involved in all of that?

**DM:** I definitely was. I think that was kind of the main thing I did, was radical politics.

**BZ:** So, during the 1960s, you were teaching your Analysis of Interpersonal Behavior class?

**DM:** That's right. And I was also the coordinator of the introductory course, which really meant that I worked with a whole bunch of really great graduate students. I really spent most of my time in the sixties hanging out with graduate students. We started something called Project Outreach, and we did a lot of really creative things. It was back in the days when all the graduate students had their own sections, so they were really involved with teaching. Now it's all shifted over to huge lectures. When I first came here in 1964, my first year, I lectured to 1350 students in Hill Auditorium once a week for Introductory Psych.

**BZ:** Wow.

**DM:** And that just seems so preposterous, so, just, what a horrible thing to do. So sort of in desperation, we came up with alternative ways of doing something, and Outreach was really what we did. It's part of Introductory Psych, or it was, originally. Now it's just a Psych course per se.

Students go out to mental hospitals and schools and projects and inner city and this and that and the other thing, and it's part of learning firsthand what it means to be in relation to people. Professionals talk to kids in training schools or whatever. And it's still survived. It's huge. Project Community is the Sociology version of it. So, I taught that introductory course, and also Analysis of Interpersonal Behavior.

**BZ:** And the class that you were teaching, Dick, which when I was here was Psych 454, Analysis of Interpersonal Behavior ... I was trying to describe to Claire what those groups were like. They were really groups about groups.

**DM:** Exactly. Right.

**BZ:** It seems like there were twenty years of those classes, or I don't know how long...

**DM:** That's probably true. I think they started in '65, and they probably went through the early eighties, anyway.

**BZ:** And they were kind of an amazing opportunity for someone to get credit at the university for being in a class that was really a group dynamics group.

**DM:** Right. And people learned a lot. It was very intense.

**BZ:** Can you describe a little more about what those groups were really about for the students?

**DM:** There was a lot of reading about groups. So there was some kind of intellectual, academic stripe running along. But a lot of it was: whatever happens in the group is just grist for the mill, and the purpose of the group is to understand what's happening and why it's happening. So sometimes that meant, "Is there leadership emerging, or different kinds of leadership?" Or people would get irritated with each other. What was that about? People would get

exasperated with some of the ... you know, there would be the clique that was sort of running the ... that was very superficial and would go on for weeks, and suddenly there'd be a roar of, "Wait a minute. That's all we're going to do, is come in here and talk about bullshit?" And so there'd be a kind of fiery clique subgroup that would come roaring in.

People would be writing papers about what their own role was and what their perceptions were and what they thought was happening out there and how it related to these books they were reading. It was interesting. The first book I wrote was really about those groups. It was called *Interpersonal Styles and Group Development*. It was very academic, but it was about how if you look at these groups, really interesting things are happening. What kinds of roles emerge in groups like that? There were always two or three times as many people who wanted to take the Interpersonal Behavior class as could get in, which is what also happened later with the Psychology and Religion class.

**BZ:** Those groups were powerful. They were powerful learning experiences about how groups operate, about authority issues, about how I or somebody else would come forth in a group. It was a great, fun, turned-on kind of learning environment that was full of a lot of really interesting information about oneself and about other people.

**DM:** Yeah, I think that's really true. That's pretty much always been true. The fact that I shifted into the Psych and Religion course in '77 was really ... It just seemed perfectly natural. What discouraged me about these 454 groups or even the T-groups was that they were so oriented to the emotional and interpersonal level of things, which I'm not saying wasn't important, but I was just frustrated. It sort of blocked off the other exploration, the more spiritual, not so

In the sixties, the political side of my life, and in the seventies and eighties and beyond, the spiritual part of my life, were always so important that I was always trying to figure out how to get my classes, or what I taught, to cover for what I was really interested in.

psychological. Some people would get stuck at the psychological level.

This intention began to develop in me to do something that opened to include another sense of who we are, who we really are. And that, of course, isn't just about what feedback you get from somebody, or some fight that breaks out in a group. Although that became tremendously exciting, the Psych and Religion class always had another agenda.

**CC:** How did the university or other people in the Psych department respond to those classes and then when you were formulating the Psych and Religion class? Because

they both sound like they were maybe a little far out for the time.

**DM:** Well, it was funny. I feel very fortunate in the sense that it was an era in which there might have been a lot of negative reactions from colleagues in Psychology, like, "What's this? This isn't really Psychology. We should be more rigorous," or something. But at the same time that there was sort of this standard bias of Psychology as science, there was this incredible pressure from the students. Just all themselves, they were saying a lot. "This isn't what we want. This is irrelevant. This isn't it." And at the higher levels of the college, there were always chairmen and deans and vice presidents who were looking around all this faculty cadre and saying, "You know, the students are right. They're clamoring for something, and that's a good thing that they're clamoring for it." So there was a lot of support from top levels in the Lit school and the university to just sort of do it anyway.

In '67, there was what came to be called the riots in Detroit, but if you were hip, you called it the rebellion. It exploded. It was tremendous. There were a lot of people killed. It was really a huge thing, whereupon in '67, when all the students came back, especially the black students, they were like, "What the hell are we doing forty miles away from that? That's where life is." They were pushing and making noises, and the faculty was hearing it. The administrators, deans, and chairmen were hearing it. Vice presidents were hearing it.

And so some faculty, the radicals, we decided, "Well, if students want to get out of here and go and do what's relevant, we should just pool all our independent study-granting powers and sign somebody up for four or five courses, and they can get out of here. They don't even have to be on campus. So we had meetings, and the students were all excited: "We want to do this and this." So we created what they called the City Course, a sixteen-credit course, which really meant that, you know, my buddy in Anthropology and somebody in Sociology would sign them up for independent study, four or five courses' worth, and they'd be gone.

And so the newspaper, the *Daily*, began to say, "There's this thing called the City Course." And the students were all excited. The dean calls me and says, "What the hell is this City Course? It hasn't gone through any curriculum committee." I said, "No, it doesn't have to go through a curriculum committee. We all have powers to give independent study." "Well ...," you know, and he was really enraged. This was Haber, Alan's father.

**BZ:** As a parenthetical note, Dean Haber was the father of one of the people who wrote the SDS Port Huron statement.

**DM:** So we were a bit defiant. The next thing we hear about it is from an LSA report, the dean's report for the year, saying, "Oh, people say we don't have anything that's relevant to the problems of the real world, but we have something called the City Course," (laughs) and sort of brags about this thing that they were really ... And it was always like that, that they couldn't just hold the line against all this pressure to be relevant to what was going on in the world or respond to the war or ...

But the faculty just wanted it to go away so they could do their research. I don't mean all the faculty, but two thirds of 'em anyway. So, there'd be people going into the chairman saying, "Can't we fire this guy?" And it was pretty constant, you know, like they were really after my

ass (laughter). When the red squad files were opened up in the seventies, we all got to go see what the Michigan state police had in their files. So I got my file, and we see that there's an FBI agent who's writing letters as "a concerned citizen," drafting them and sending them to his boss, and his boss was changing the letters, sending them to the university: "You oughta fire Richard Mann and Anatol Rapoport and Tom Mayer and Julie Gendell," and it turns out that a lot of people that they named did get fired. I mean, they really did. I had tenure. They couldn't get rid of me, but ...

It was like, sure, there was pressure, but at the

same time, there was a lot of support. I went to the vice president for academic affairs, who was leaving. It was Bob Heyns, who had been my thesis chairman, and he was being replaced by Alan Smith. I said to Vice President Smith, "Oh, we could do these outreach projects, like somebody could be picketing (laughs) on a railroad track. The munitions trains are coming by ..." He was just horrified. So Bob said, "Well, I'll talk to him, I'll talk to him."

But good chairmen, good administrators, good deans and stuff, are just looking for faculty to come along and kick over the traces. They're sort of against the stodgy faculty. They wouldn't become deans if all they wanted was just to be publishing. And they're educators, and they're ... the good ones. And they mostly have been good. So I feel like I've gotten a tremendous amount of support from my chairmen and from deans all the way through, no matter how far out it is.

**BZ:** And it got pretty far out.

**DM:** It did. I mean, my God, when I started the Psych and Religion class, the dean would call me in for lunch about every two years saying, "I'm getting all these complaints." Mothers were complaining that I was, well, not brainwashing, but leading their kids astray into all these spiritual things. And I'd say, "Well, look. Actually, this kid was tripping his head off for a year before he ever showed up for my class (all laugh). He is in way better shape than he was when he showed up for the course. It is true that he's off, you know, with Muktananda, chanting Om Namah Shivaya all the time, but ..." Of course, his parents' idea was, "Well, we'll send him off to the rebbe in Williamsburg. That would work (all laugh). There must be something we can do to kind of keep him within the fold."

So yeah, it is far out in some ways, but there's always been a kind of a cover. So then Outreach got in trouble. It wasn't academic enough, so some other faculty took it over and made it more rigorous, which was necessary for it to survive. I mean, it wasn't perfect. There was a time I think I must have had 120 independent studies one term. Students would come in, and I'd say, "Sure." Ten, twenty years later, I get all these emails or letters or something: "You know, I just have to say, the time when you said, 'Sure, go ahead. I'll cover for you'—that began this and this and this and this, you know, and that's the rest of my life." So I just feel fine about it. But I'm sure there were a lot of people ripping off. I'm not saying everybody did good work, or ... but I don't know, it's just like that. It isn't that far out.

**BZ:** I went off in 1973 to a Gestalt institute in Italy and got credit from four or five or six professors, from you, and from Jim Crowfoot and from Gary Bron, and a variety of people, for going off to Pellin Institute. I'll tell you, I certainly think those three months at Pellin were the greatest learning of my early years.

**DM:** Yeah.

**CC:** It kind of looks like you've had a charmed work life.

**DM:** That's true. I mean, I would never have gotten hired here these days. When I got tenure, I had published maybe two articles. That was all. You don't get tenure these days unless you've published dozens of articles. The main reason I got hired was because the chairman thought I'd be good at undergraduate education. In fact, he wrote in the margin of some letter of recommendation he had received, "productivity?" He was dubious that I was going to publish a lot. And I haven't been sort of a journal type publisher. I've written some books, but I ... I've written enough, as far as I'm concerned, but I was not one of the big publishers.

**CC:** It must have given you a lot of freedom to get tenure at such a young age.

**DM:** Yeah, tremendous. I was only like thirty-one when I



Richard Mann and his wife, Matruka Sherman.

Photos by Nina Hauser



was hired for the next thirty-five, forty years.

**BZ:** It even allowed you to go and come back.

**DM:** Yeah. It's true. It's been great, totally great.

**CC:** In terms of your work life, the way your career path unfolded, did you feel like you knew what you were doing while it was happening, or did it sort of fall into your lap?

**DM:** I guess, frankly, the truth was that in the sixties, the political side of my life, and in the seventies and eighties and beyond, the spiritual part of my life, were always so important that I was always trying to figure out how to get my classes, or what I taught, to cover for what I was really interested in. I mean, it would've been hell to have to teach something I wasn't very interested in. So I just volunteered to teach the Psych and Religion class. It had been there forever. It was usually about, you know, the reasons that people are involved in religion and they're, you know, they're dependent, they're neurotic, they're brainwashed (laughs), their parents get at them...

**BZ:** It was an already-existing class?

**DM:** Oh, yeah. It was very traditional Psych. Almost every Psych department has a Psych and Religion class. But it's sort of about the "real" reason why they're into religion, which is the psychological reason, not any other real reason.

**CC:** It would be from sort of an atheist perspective?

**DM:** It would be sort of an empirical ... It wouldn't be anti-religious. The man who taught it for years and years goes to church, but he doesn't really believe in God. He likes church because it's sort of an ethical bulwark for society and for his personal life. He's a very sweet, very sweet guy. But we taught, obviously, a very different class. And I again always had that sort of experiential thing. It was sort of getting at something that was inside you instead of

learning something racing at you.

**BZ:** Would you describe the transition that you made into spirituality generally and to Muktananda and talk a little about his lineage?

**DM:** Sure. Well, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I just wanted to meet one of these people. That's all. I wanted to see him for myself. But it turned out that even before the talk that I was going to at the Power Center on a Thursday night, I was invited to come over to the ashram, which was at 902 Baldwin. So I'd already been over there, and I'd organized a little seminar for a bunch of my friends and students to come hear him give a seminar on the mind.

**CC:** This is before you had seen him?

**DM:** I hadn't even met him. Somebody called and asked if I wanted to organize a seminar.

**BZ:** You wanted to meet one of "these people"?

**DM:** Yeah, I wanted to meet a holy man. I wanted to see what all the fuss was about. And also I had this image of Don Juan and Don Genaro from the Castenada books, these magical, powerful beings. I wasn't going to meet them. So I organized this little seminar, and within five minutes or two minutes of his walking in the room, I was in

meditation. I mean, he looked over at me, and that was the end of me. I mean, I wasn't even in the room. I didn't hear a word he said. I just sat there, and I was ... I had no idea what was happening, but I was in the woods. I was in this peaceful woods, and I could smell it, I could feel it, I could feel the warmth of the pine needles, and I was just in another state. I had no idea what was happening. I thought that when he first sat down and was sort of wagging his head around that what he had said by looking at me was, "You think you have this Blue Pearl that I talk about, but you don't have any Blue Pearl. You have no Blue Pearl."

I felt incredibly insulted, like he was saying my spiritual value was zero. So that was one thing. My brain was just on fire, like, "He's insulted me. This is embarrassing. Everybody will think, you know, oh my God..." It was sort of all this

superficial part of my brain, but at the same time as that was happening, within seconds of my being consumed by all that stuff, I just sank into some inner meditative space, which I had never experienced, ever. And I kind of came back out of it, and I'd hear myself, "Oh, who does he think he is?" and then I'd sink back into it. I came up, and the interpreter said, "Oh, Professor Mann." I was the guest of honor because I'd organized the whole thing. Muktananda was about four feet away from me. And the translator says, "Would you like to ask the first question?" So I said ... I couldn't, I mean, I hadn't heard anything he had said. And I said, "Well, yes, just tell Baba that everything he said is absolutely true."

That was a very peculiar thing to say. I mean, it was as if the words were just coming out of my mouth, I couldn't believe them. But that was what I felt, deep inside, was that there was something absolutely true about something, somehow. Really, it was the experience that I had had that was true. And he had that power, and that's who he was. He could just completely change the state you were in just by looking at you.

So I decided to kind of hang around and sort of peek at this man. I'd go and I'd sit as far away from him as I could. He'd be way down at the end of the room, and I'd be looking, and all around him there was always delicious laughter. Within a couple of days, I got this idea that he was the happiest human being I'd ever met. He just was total happiness personified. And I wanted that. It wasn't that I suddenly didn't want the war to stop or didn't want racial equality in the admissions process at Michigan or something. But it was like being in a desert and seeing an oasis. That's just, that's what I wanted. And I figured, well, the

other people around him seemed like they were already moving in that direction, so what do I have to do to get that?

So I went off for a weekend Intensive and had more experiences that were just so completely beyond anything I had ever experienced. I was seeing lights and beings and warm light going out of one eye of his and in my eyes back to him... They were meditative visions, and what they meant to me was there's some connection here that I can count on, and it's all about being in some radically different state of consciousness.

He could be very strong and direct. It wasn't as if he was sweet, feathery lightness all the time. He was pretty ferocious when he was on fire. But two seconds later, it would be over. I just wanted that freedom. This man was so free to be happy and so free to be abrupt with people if he was in charge of their doing a good job. He just would tell them. He wasn't horrible, but he was certainly more fiery than I would ever be. It was awesome to see a person like that.

So I began racing all around the world, down to Columbus, Ohio, and out to Oakland, California, and later up to Arcada, California... Sort of the whole year after was about staying in touch with this man and going to his ashrams and chanting these strange, wonderful Sanskrit chants. It was like I was getting burned up from the inside. It wasn't like I sat there and was happy the whole time I was there. It was like therapy. It was like the most intense therapy imaginable. It was like an inferno inside. All this stuff was coming up, and I'd be totally in the middle of some old dramas and the anti-war stuff, and it's just impossible to describe, but it just felt like the way out of whatever that trap was. It just felt like that was the way out.

At one point my chairman and I were flying down to Kentucky, and he said, "Dick, I hear you've been really getting involved in this ashram thing." I said, "Yeah, I really have." He said, "How many hours a week do you think you spend on this thing?" I said, "Well, about thirty-five" (laughs). He said, "Ohh..." (all laugh). But again, he was such a good guy. He never said, "Uh oh. That's not good." But you could tell he was like, "Thirty-five hours is a pretty big hunk out of a work week, don't you think?" (all laugh). But it was just like that. It just took over. It was a great scene.

**CC:** Was that ashram specifically Muktananda's?

**DM:** It was Muktananda's ashram, and in India—obviously Muktananda was a Hindu, but in India, ashrams grow up around a holy person. It's not really part of the hierarchy. That's what the Indian tradition is really like. If there's a holy man or spiritual being that people are attracted to, they just want to come live where he's living, and they build little houses, and more houses, and big houses, and it just goes like that. So he never... You couldn't become a Hindu. In America, you could become a Buddhist, if you were on some Buddhist path around town. More than likely, one of the first things you'd be asked would be, "So, are you going to become a Buddhist?" And that just never

as we called him, in the early seventies, came back with him the second time he came to America, and they just started creating this world. It was as close as they could get to reproducing what it was like to be in Ganeshpuri, in India. So, meditation starts then, and then the chanting of the Guru Gita, and then breakfast, and then the noon chant, and then the afternoon arati, and you know, it was a whole day of practices, including the work you were assigned to do, which was itself a spiritual practice.

So in that sense, it was Hindu, but I think most of us felt like the deeper we got into it, the more the Christian tradition or the Jewish tradition that we'd already been



Photo by Nina Hauser

raised in came alive. "Oh, *that's* what the Holy Spirit was. *That's* what Pentecost must have felt like. Oh, I know what *that's* about, *now*." I mean, before, it was like, "And they spoke in tongues, and the flames of fire..." you know, but now we were all—everybody was having those experiences, so of course. It was great. It didn't submerge Christianity. It kind of rescued it, for us. So that part was wonderful. It really felt like it was the esoteric side of religion coming alive and only the exoteric part that we'd left behind. I could always go into a church and feel, "Oh, this is wonderful." I could walk in and feel it was beautiful, *more* beautiful, because of that.

**CC:** You lived in an ashram for some time in India, didn't you?

**DM:** Right. In '89 and '90, for about a year. It was just a great year.

**CC:** What was that daily life like?

**DM:** Well, just like that. I mean, you'd get up pitch dark, get up and meditate in the chanting hall or the courtyard in the pitch dark, and then the lights would sort of come up. There was a chant for an hour and a half called the Guru Gita. There'd be hundreds and hundreds of people, half Indian and half Western, and the Westerners would be from everywhere—Australia, Europe, wherever. And then breakfast, and you'd have work to do. You had a lot of hard work.

My job when I first got there was to supervise a group of house painters from Poona, which is maybe sixty miles away from the ashram. I didn't speak any Marathi, and they didn't speak any English, but the boss guy and I could communicate a little bit. I'd be told, "Okay, this day we're going to paint that building or that building." But it was just, I mean, I just hung out with them. I wasn't their boss. I'd sort of go see how it's coming and, you know, run errands for them (laughs). I was sort of a liaison, that's what I really was, with the paint crew. It was a terrific experience. I later got involved in working with some scholars who were visiting the ashram, tried to make them comfortable, and sometimes counseled people. I did a whole bunch of different things.

**CC:** Was that in Muktananda's lineage too?

**DM:** Yes. He died in '82, and his translator, who he'd been training to take over for him, a great woman named Gurumayi (Chidvilasananda), was then the head of the ashram. So now she's sometimes in India and a lot of times in the Catskills in New York. There's a big ashram there. And then in '84 she came here. She stayed in our house on Cambridge Street. Well, we cleared out, but she and all the people traveling with her were in the house for three or four days. Did you go to the League? Were you there when she was there?

**BZ:** No.

**DM:** It was really sweet. It filled the whole League ballroom.

It was really wonderful.

**CC:** So that first Siddha Yoga ashram is now Black Elk Co-op. Is the Siddha Yoga community still strong in Ann Arbor?

**DM:** The community's still huge, yeah. After the first ashram on Baldwin, we bought those two Victorian houses by The Rock that are now Luther Co-op. And at that time, at our maximum, there must have been seventy, eighty people all living an ashram life, bunking down with three or four other people in a room and eating communally and so forth. But then everybody got older and got married, and they started having kids. All over the country the residents began to turn into householders, as they're called in the Indian tradition, who now have a center where they all meet. So now we have a center down at 311 West Huron, just past First, right across from the new homeless center on Huron. That's where we meet. Every morning, there's the Guru Gita, and every Sunday, every Thursday, every Saturday, and every Tuesday, there's always something happening there all the time.

**CC:** Was Muktananda ever living here long term?

**DM:** No. He just came for those two weeks. Then he went off to Columbus, and we went down to find him there. He had an ashram in Oakland, California, and we found him there. He spent a month up in northern California. He was in Ganeshpuri a lot. He died there, in India. So in those early days, if you went to an Intensive, as I did, at the Friends Meeting House, there might be

thirty people, and within a year or two, there'd be three hundred. And in another five years, there'd be 1500 or 2500. It was just incredibly special that you got to see this man close up for two weeks in a way that, if you'd come in later, you never would have seen him in such an intimate way. And he'd know your name, and... Yeah, it was a great time.

**BZ:** Did you and your wife Jean get involved in the Muktananda community pretty equally?

**DM:** Yeah, totally. She'd actually been a student of Indian history. When I first met her, she was in Indian history, and she'd been to India before. So, yeah, we were both involved. We got our kids involved. They were teenagers, and in one way or another, they connected with the chants or different parts of it all, and then they drifted away. I had two sons who were musicians, and they had their world.

**BZ:** Was Jean teaching here too?

**DM:** Yes. She taught at the Residential College. She taught a course called Saints and Mystics of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries in India.

**BZ:** She had a strong interest in religion.

**DM:** Yes, she really did. She taught about Ramakrishna, Shirdi Sai Baba, all the great heroes of the modern Indian spiritual tradition.

**BZ:** It wasn't as if only *you* had gotten involved in Muktananda. You both did.

**DM:** Yeah, totally, right from the beginning. There was no split there. Sometimes she'd be way more involved than me, and sometimes I'd be way more involved than her, but... She was just getting her work life together.

**BZ:** How did family life affect your spiritual life, or vice versa?

**DM:** Well, I guess the kids must have thought it was a little strange, because there were pictures all over the house (laughs), you know, of Muktananda and other Indian things. But oddly enough, I'd say the first thing that comes to my mind is it was really a godsend for them as teenagers to have us be as involved as we were. And we were really involved. We'd get up in the morning and go off to chant but still get back to send them off to school and go back again in the evening and chant. I'm sure there were times when they thought it was excessive, and certainly there might have been times when they thought it was weird, but what they really felt was, "Well, good. Our parents are really involved in something," and so that gave them a lot of freedom. They would be downstairs learning music. They were really, intensely involved in it. They had their world. We had ours.

I'm sure we talked about it a lot. It was what we talked about at the dinner table. But I wouldn't say that they—compared to what it would be like to be in a religious family, to be directed into the Catechism or the Bar Mitzvah or whatever it would be—there wasn't any feeling that that's what it was. There wasn't even a feeling that it was a

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happens in the Hindu tradition as he practiced it.

**BZ:** It doesn't.

**DM:** No. You can't possibly become a Hindu.

**CC:** There are no vows of any kind.

**DM:** No. But of course, all the forms he teaches are Hindu forms. All the chants are rooted in Hindu tradition. It's not eclectic. People who had gone and lived in India with Baba,

The Crazy Wisdom Interview with  
U-M Professor Richard Mann  
(continued)

religion. There was the feeling that it was a path. And the people that I identified with most were the people who believed in adult baptism, that you really have to be pretty much grown up before you take on this great adventure. Your parents don't take it on for you or drag you into it or program your life into it. It's an adult thing. It isn't something that you pretend an eight-year-old or a twelve-year-old is capable of. I mean, not that they don't have wonderful, tremendous intuition, but they really are—they don't see the point of all this stuff.

**BZ:** What were the gifts of fatherhood for you?

**DM:** Oh, that was huge. That was the best. During a lot of the early years, both at Harvard and the remainder of the sixties here, I spent a lot of time with the kids. Some of those years when my first wife was in graduate school, she'd be busy writing research papers all day and into the evening, and I was just hanging out watching Batman and building castles and towers and stuff. I really liked it. I just think it gradually dawns on you that you're doing something really wonderful with your life. If there are ever any doubts about your life direction—I didn't have a lot, but you always sort of wonder, "Well, am I doing the right thing here? Am I contributing?" You don't think that after you've spent hours and hours and hours with your kids. The message sort of comes back like, "Yeah, this is—this is it." And that felt great.

**BZ:** It was a boys' household, huh?

**DM:** It was a boys' household. Three boys. They were great kids. My oldest son ran for school board when he was fifteen, and he got five hundred votes (laughs). He ran on the Human Rights Party.

**BZ:** He did?

**DM:** Yeah. And all the liberals were enraged because it cut into the liberal candidate's votes. It was amazing to see this little kid stand up and just belt out what he thought about the way school should be. He was usually very shy, but he suddenly emerged, and later he worked really hard in the grape boycott. They were out there at Kroger's, picketing for the farm workers. He was an awesome kid. I was really proud of them all.

I don't know why ... It's odd. I think that's what an awful lot of parents don't manage to get to in relation to their kids—just to be proud of them. There's always a kind of, "Yeah, *but*." "Yeah, well, I know they're good at this thing, and they're alive, and they're on fire, *but* shouldn't they be worrying about what's expected of them further down the road, and ..." I mean, I see so many students, and they write papers that ... It's a struggle for them to get that feedback from their parents, that their parents think that they're doing just great. I think that's one of the big ... from

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fatherhood and from Siddha Yoga. Those are the unmistakable signs that somebody's doing what they should be doing. And let that unfold.

And I think it carried over into teaching. I think it's the same. It seems to me that what I love to do more than anything is convince people, at least as far as I'm concerned, that there are some really great things that are unfolding in their lives. My favorite teaching of Gurumayi is "Nothing has gone wrong." I think it's the most wonderful sentence. Nothing has gone wrong. And we live our

lives just constantly ... And a lot of parents are constantly sort of putting it on us, you know, "Something's gone wrong. You've gotten the wrong idea about what you should be doing," or "Where did you go wrong? Where did we go wrong? You've gone wrong. Your teachers led you astray."

**BZ:** What's wrong?

**DM:** Yeah, what's wrong (all laugh)? And yet, when people relax, there's nothing wrong. All these kids, all three of them were just incredibly solid about what they wanted to do. And I see a lot of students who just have no idea what they want to do. That must mean a fair amount of "Uh oh," disapproval or something. Whether to please your parents or not to please your parents ... what an awful choice. That's always an issue. Anyway, I think "Nothing's gone wrong" is a great teaching.

**CC:** As you became more and more absorbed in the Muktananda community and your spiritual path, did that generally complement the kind of work you were doing? Did you ever want to become a monk or something?

**DM:** Well, in some ecstatic moments, I suppose that occurred to me. But no, I always felt very supported from him and from Gurumayi and others I respected that what I

think their work would prove to be an obstacle.

**BZ:** At some point, I know that your wife Jean became ill and later died. How long was she ill before she died, and what were the challenges of that period? And as you look back, were there blessings that accompanied the challenges?

**DM:** Oh, yeah, huge. She began more and more to experience the symptoms of emphysema, from about 1984 on, so maybe it was a five-year period. It was a challenge for her because after one bad episode when she was in the hospital, she had to be on oxygen all the time. So the house was full of oxygen cords trailing all around, and she'd go off and teach with her little oxygen tank dragging along behind her.

She was a very brave person. I think she deeply knew that that thing you hear a lot, "I am not the body," was true, and I think she was very attentive to attaining and preserving a state even in the middle of just an incredibly constrictive physical life, where waking up every morning and after every nap, from her subjective point of view, was touch-and-go—is she going to get that next breath? So there was always that sort of wave of panic which is part of living. Once she'd get things going ... She

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was doing was a really good thing, that it was good for me and it was good for other people. Actually, when I went off to India, I half-thought to myself, "Well, maybe I'll just leave everything behind," and I sold my house and my furniture. I was going to go off, and my future was sort of up for grabs. I hadn't really told Michigan, well, am I leaving or am I not leaving. And Gurumayi, when I asked her, just said, "Go back. Go back and teach." She didn't say anything much more about it. There wasn't a long paragraph saying, "Well, this is my reasoning." She just said, "Go back." I said, "I gotta make a decision whether to go back." "Well, go back."

And that was very much consistent with the general sense that I'd had that there's a quality in the path, in any good path, I strongly suspect, that you gotta play from strength. I wouldn't be a good monk. And that would be like starting all over again. If I had spent my whole life in a kind of monkish way, then it would be fine to be a monk. There's nothing wrong with it. But I'd be like an amateur monk, and I'm a seasoned educator. Which of those two is better? I must have been guided by my own sense of where my strengths were and where my pleasure was.

And I really, I loved being in the ashram. I'm sure that had I stayed in Ganeshpuri or something, I probably would have—I did in fact find ways to be a lot like who I am here, talking to people and teaching classes. I started teaching classes inside the ashram and organizing things. It was a whole creative spurt. I began writing. I mean, it wasn't like I was just in this monkish world. It was a very creative environment for me. But I really, I should've come back, so I did. I'm glad I did.

**CC:** And you've been able to integrate your spiritual work into your career.

**DM:** Yeah. Yeah. I'm very fortunate about that. There are a lot of people for whom it's not that easy. They don't fit together so well. I'm very fortunate. The people I know best in the Siddha Yoga movement—with them I almost never get the feeling that well, their work is over here, and their spiritual life's over here, and the question is how do you get them together? No matter what they are. I mean, they're musicians, or they might be engineers. I can't think of anybody who is endlessly chafing at the tension between their work life and their spiritual life.

I'm sure they wish they had more time to devote to spiritual practices, wish they could easily get up at five thirty every morning and go off like we used to, but that's sort of minor compared to what they are managing. I know a lot of students feel this concern, because they experience a disjunction between the peer culture path and the spiritual path. But you know, if they were really on a spiritual path, which a good many of them are, then I don't

was very single-minded about staying as close as she could to being in a good state. And I can't think of a single time in those five years when she fell into "why me" or "poor me."

When I read Ken Wilber or other people talking about the eventual death of a spouse and what the spouse is going through, I think, well, they did something pretty amazing. They talked about it, they were ready, and they were very conscious of what was happening. I can't say that that was what either of us were really doing. We didn't really talk about it. We kept sort of thinking any minute it could just turn around. It was like, we weren't facing death, you know. But we were. We were and we weren't. There were certain things that she wanted to stay alive for. She wanted to see her youngest son get married. And she didn't get to the wedding, but she was alive. She just couldn't make it to Wilmington, Delaware.

So, it was physically really challenging. A lot of asthma and allergies, you know, that twenty-first-century disease of everything triggering off allergic reactions. It was really hard for her. It was amazing, what she went through. Our oldest son died two years before she did. And there again, if it hadn't been for that ... just, I don't know. It isn't in the words. We didn't have little aphorisms that we said to ourselves. We didn't have little formulas that said, "Well, look at it this way," but we were living a kind of ... I don't know if I can put it into words...

**BZ:** Did years of meditation and chanting and involvement in the spiritual path of Muktananda bear some fruit for you and Jean in that era?

**DM:** Oh, totally, yeah. I mean, it carried us. It was the center. Part of it was the discipline. I mean, we had the Guru Gita at our house, even when she was sick, and every morning at six o'clock somebody would come in through the back door and make chai, and there would be twenty or thirty people coming in, and she'd come down, and we'd chant. I think it was just the discipline and the regularity of what we were doing that made a tremendous amount of difference. And it wasn't just like it was an hour and a half. It spread through the whole day. I guess what I'm struck by, especially when I contrast it—I don't know why I should, but—when I contrast it with someone like Ken Wilber, the words—we weren't doing it with words, that's for sure.

**BZ:** Theirs was a very structured kind of preparing for death.

**DM:** Yeah, that's true.

**BZ:** When my son Sam died, after a forty day hospitalization, last February ... As you know, I'm not part of one of the spiritual communities in town, but our friend, and your friend, Ann Wright, was with us, and she chanted the Guru



Photo by Nina Hausser

But the image of those lights and how incredibly tender they were ... There's something about divine lights that's like ... They're soft. They have this almost texturally soft quality. And I knew that when he said, "That's where I am," that the truth was "Nothing's gone wrong." Everything's fine. And it didn't send me into a whole big cosmological thing about when you die, this happens and that happens. I couldn't tell you ten esoteric sentences about death that I now believe in, but the experience was certainly valid. Whatever that means, it's true. It's fine.

**BZ:** Thank you for sharing that.

**DM:** Yeah. That was a great day.

**BZ:** What are the Siddha Yoga teachings with respect to living a good life? Are there teachings about family life and what it means to live a good life?

**DM:** When Baba first came to Ann Arbor, there was a little poster with his main teaching, which was, "Kneel to yourself. Honor yourself. Love yourself. God dwells within you as you." That's half of it. The other half of that early teaching was, "See God in each other." Those were always complementary teachings. See the divinity in yourself and in everyone and everything. And you certainly get to see what it's like to live that way when you see how Gurumayi or Baba live. But not just them. The people who have been around the longest and seem to have gotten the most—if you ask, "What are they acting as if they were being guided by? By what teaching?" it really feels like they're being guided by a kind of self-regard that's honoring that divinity. And when you stand in front of them, it feels like they're living out a kind of honoring of who every-

body is. It isn't like you're God, and to heck with those other people.

When you're with someone who understands this, you feel like you're a picture on the wall at the Met. Somebody's coming by and looking at you, and they're saying, "Ohhh..." You know, "Ohhh..." (laughs). It's like, which painting do you imagine yourself being in the Met? The irises? What would it be like to be the irises? Hundreds of people are coming in, having an incredible spiritual experience just seeing these irises. Or you could be any of them. One by one, every day you could be a different picture. You could be a Botticelli or a Klee. Wouldn't that be wonderful? You could imagine going through the Uffizi and saying, "Now, today, you're going to be on this wall of the Uffizi, and people are going to come pouring by you, and maybe they won't all get it, but just keep your eyes open, 'cause there are gonna be ... kids will get it, grandparents are going to sigh and weep, and teenagers are going to stop in their attitude and think, "Oh, wow." It would be fun. It'd be fun to have a yearly calendar built

around imagining yourself as each one of those. Imagine yourself as David, you know. People are struck dumb with awe. They can't move. Anyway, just a thought (laughs). And you know, there are a whole lot of other teachings, but ...

**BZ:** No, that's great.

**CC:** Has the Siddha Yoga community changed much since you first became involved with it?

When Baba first came to Ann Arbor, there was a little poster with his main teaching, which was, "Kneel to yourself. Honor yourself. Love yourself. God dwells within you as you." That's half of it. The other half of that early teaching was, "See God in each other." Those were always complementary teachings. See the divinity in yourself and in everyone and everything.

**DM:** Oh yeah, it's changed a lot. The tests get harder in some ways. There are fewer and fewer of the early years' thrills. Those were great, and everybody loves to tell those stories about the time when they were walking down the corridor and Baba came around the corner and said, "Why aren't you at the chant?" and (gasps). Those are really terrific moments, but that isn't going to happen over and over for thirty years. It's going to be more like, okay, you get sort of weaned by a spiritual tradition to get real, to live your life. It isn't just about certain experiences or a certain intensity from visiting the guru or something. It's about keeping all the things going that are precious without necessarily being wildly over-enthusiastic as you're doing it.

It's a little like the prayer wheels in Tibet. You just keep it spinning. Everybody's sort of putting in their little stroke to keep it happening. And so, it changes. So you're more prone to times of, "Oh, I don't know. It's not really as exciting as it was," or "Oh, don't you remember the day ...?" It's just all tricks of the mind. They're there to plague you. Wherever you go, it's sort of like seeing little tempters coming after you to make you feel sorry for yourself or something.

It's almost thirty years now. But when it gets roaring, it feels like it all started yesterday. The connection, the similarity between a chant we just did last Thursday, or the Thursday before that—it might as well have been twenty-five years before.

**CC:** How do you feel about some of the changes in the spiritual life in this country in general since you started? Have you noticed changes in the perspectives of the students who come into your classes?

**DM:** Well, I sensed that the students that came to Michigan in the seventies and the early eighties, they were living out what you might call a moratorium. There was a notion that somewhere when you're in your early twenties, it's really a good thing not to go sow your wild oats like some people were doing and not to plunge right into the work-world, but to take a break from the demands of all this thing and get on some kind of path. And I just think it made perfect sense to people in the late seventies that they would either drop out of college and go live in the ashram, or when they finished, they'd go live in the ashram, or that they'd go to India for a year. It was available.

And there was enough support for it to sustain even the counter-pressures from the parent generation. And the parent generation in some ways supported it too. Like, they were parents who—I don't know what era they'd been in, the forties or fifties—they wanted something for their kids that wasn't just the rat race. There was something about the parent generation—I was impressed by how much they supported their kids to live out something that was highly value driven or spiritually driven.

I feel bad for the kids these days in some ways. It was amazing how many students in the mid-seventies and into the mid-eighties decided that what they wanted was what they would get in a spiritual quest. And they did a million different things. And obviously some people still are...

Gita three different times over the course of the ten or twelve-hour period before he died. It was very powerful and created sacredness in the room. The hospital left us alone and drew the curtain, and then we were just able to be with Sam, with Ann chanting the Guru Gita. It must have taken her an hour each time, I'm not sure. It really helped us to create a space there where Ruth and me and Sam could really enter another zone in those hours.

**DM:** Yeah. I think that's it. And it isn't a very wordy zone. There's not a lot of commentary, fortunately, inside the zone, so... It's so precious. At least for me it was. Those were the times when Gurumayi's teaching "Nothing has gone wrong" was really crucial for both of us. It seemed like everything had gone really wrong on one level...

**BZ:** To the degree that you want to even discuss it, how did your view of the world and of life get altered by being the father of a son who died?

**DM:** I suppose the most dramatic way came when I was at the ashram the year after he died. I went alone because Jean was too sick to go to the normal sort of summer retreat, and I found myself hearing this question inside: "Where is he?" I didn't have to hear it many times to know what it was referring to, but I was surprised that I was absorbed by this question. It hadn't been torturing me. But there it was.

I went into an Intensive with Gurumayi. At one point, she walked out—everybody had almost left the hall, very few people were left—and she walked right by me, and she sort of grabbed my hair and waggled it in a very sweet way, and it just put me in a completely different space. I walked outside, and I was very teary, but not sad teary, just ... whatever those other tears are, those tears of joy, I guess. I went back into the hall, and we were chanting. And after the chanting stopped, I saw beautiful, velvety soft lights up in the periphery of my vision. We'd been chanting OM, and as I sensed these lights—I couldn't look at them, they were more in the periphery—I got the sense in my mind that, "Oh, each one of those lights is an OM." I didn't know what that meant, but it just, it was like rows and rows of OM, whatever that meant.

And just as soon as I thought that, I heard Larry's voice. I mean, it was just as clear as crystal, unmistakably his voice. He said to me, "That's where I am, Dad." And I just sat there, and as I sat there, I saw this picture of him and me walking up Olivia toward Hill Street, and I knew right away that we were on our way up to the Friends Meeting House to take a yoga class. It was sort of like the last healthy Larry, when he was about seventeen, and he was on his way off to Chicago for his freshman year. And he became schizophrenic during that year. His life was really, really hard for the next eight or nine years. So it was sweet to see that last healthy, bonded, strong time with him.

**Recommended Reading for Dick Mann's  
*Psychology and Spiritual Development*  
Class, taught in the  
Psychology Department at the  
University of Michigan**

- Hermann Hesse - Siddhartha
- Thich Nhat Hanh - Peace is Every Step
- Ken Wilber - Grace and Grit
- Eckhart Tolle — The Power of Now
- Stephen Batchelor — Buddhism Without Belief
- David Cooper — God Is a Verb
- Judith Orloff — Second Sight
- Kenneth Ring and E. Valarino — Lessons from the Light
- Gary Schwartz — Afterlife Experiments
- Kahlil Gibran — The Prophet

**BZ:** And I don't think you're overstating it, because that's the world I came of age in, Ann Arbor in the seventies. Everybody I knew, in one way or another, was interested in some fantasy or some ideal about how they wanted to live, whether it was a communal, ecological, spiritual, or psychological ideal. There was a lot of utopianism and a lot of searching. It was serious searching among many different spiritual groups.

**DM:** I think the parent generation is really anxious on behalf of their kids, and they've pushed a kind of "Oh my God, oh my God. My kids are not going to be in the upper one percent of the income level distribution," you know, like that just would be horrible. And I just think with students in the seventies, there were a lot of middle class kids around here whose parents were not panicked their kids weren't going to get their Beemers. The flow of panic from parent through the child or swirling around the child is incredibly high. They have no idea how they're ever going to end up living the same lifestyle as their parents, or if they even want to. And yet they know that their parents can't think of anything else that'd be really wonderful other than that they would somehow just make their way right into that groove.

One thing my wife, Matruka, and I have been doing is running workshops for students and other young adults. We call them "Envisioning A Clear Path: The What's Next? Workshop," and we work hard to identify the authentic and expressive paths each person might consider in the next few years, and beyond. We have found that some mixture of self-reflection, group dialogue, and fun exercises opens up the themes that a person needs to play out and develop.

**BZ:** You get a fairly self-selected group of students. Many of them must have some interest in finding their ways to ...

**DM:** Yeah, I think that's true. Not so much, like, consciously. They don't want to join up. They don't want to join anything. There's a tremendous fear about joining and being influenced by groups, political groups, any argumentation from a sort of organized, lefty or right-wing thing. They're very mistrustful of the motives of any group that's coming after them. I think part of that's the anti-cult thing, that panic.

So there's not a lot of seeking. There was a time when you knew you wanted to do something, you wanted to make an impact, and you were delighted that there was a group that was organized around the war, or delighted that there was whatever group you had found. It provided a function that matched up. You were trying to put your fidelity somewhere. But there's not as much yearning to put their fidelity somewhere, into a larger cause or a larger project, because there's so much distrust of anything that seems like a total, almost cult-like sense of how to live your life. It doesn't feel like many people are coming up saying,

The tests get harder in some ways. There are fewer and fewer of the early years' thrills... Those are really terrific moments, but that isn't going to happen over and over for thirty years. You get sort of weaned by a spiritual tradition to get real, to live your life. It isn't just about certain experiences or a certain intensity from visiting the guru or something. It's about keeping all the things going that are precious without necessarily being wildly over-enthusiastic as you're doing it.

"Look, look, do you know any spiritual communities I could maybe hook up with?" Very few ask me that.

**BZ:** They don't? I would think that if students today were to ask *any* professor at the university in *any* classroom, it would be *you* they would ask. You know, "Dick, I've driven by Packard. I see that there's a Zen Temple. Should I check it out?" They don't come to you?

**DM:** Not too many.

**CC:** Bill and I were both saying that you and your class were catalysts on our spiritual paths. Do you get a lot of feedback like that?

**DM:** Yeah, I really do. I really do.

**CC:** How do you feel you've benefited or influenced people the most, through different things that you've done, such as writing or teaching? I didn't know that you had been so politically active. That kind of speaks to the issue of how we best help other people. Do you think that's through helping ourselves or, you know, how do you feel about activism versus sitting in a cave and meditating?

**DM:** Right, exactly. Well, it's funny. One of the students that I had in the eighties kind of emerged and pulled me

back into the political world that I hadn't been in for so long. You know Phillis Engelbert?

**BZ:** I do.

**DM:** She's just the greatest. She's an extraordinary person. She's the senior staff person for the Ann Arbor Committee for Peace, and she said, "Come on, Dick, be on the Board." She had been in a Peace Studies class that I taught in the eighties with Len Suransky and a couple of other people. So, I did. People really do tug on each other in good ways. And I suppose I've tugged a few people in my day, and I get tugged back. Sometimes I do wonder, "Why do classes go well, in the sense that morale is high, people feel enthusiastic?" I don't know, I just have this sense that whether it's the political era or the spiritual thing, there's some air that comes over the classroom of, "This is a great opportunity. There's something really great that could happen right now."

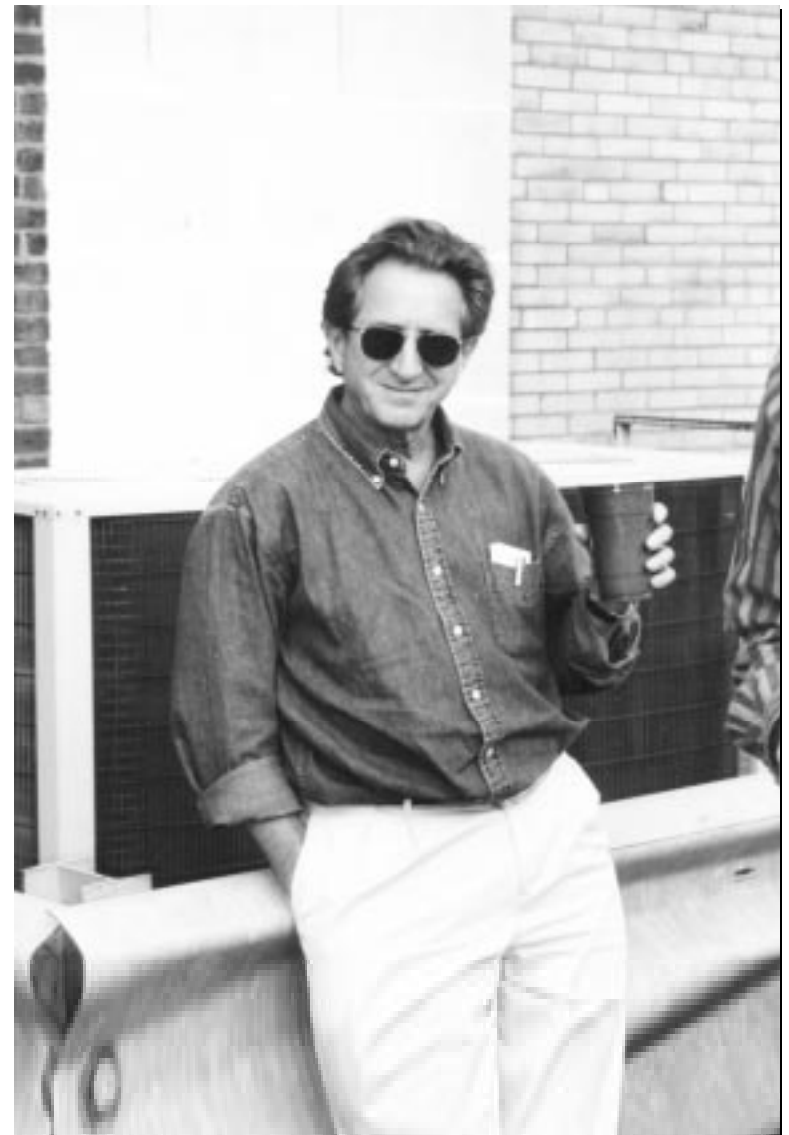
And it isn't just going to be because I say a bunch of things. I really think what I've done more as a teacher is create structures for people to be able to work with each other. I teach in the Psych and Religion class, or Psychology and Spiritual Development, as it's now called, and half the classroom hours they spend interacting with four other people and then the next week four others, the next week four others, the next week four others. The whole class, they read something, and they write a little paper, and then they get together. They start with what they brought in, and maybe they get through all of that, maybe they don't. At the end of the term I think, "Oh, this was such a great class," and I'm waiting for them to say, "And we loved your lectures," you know, "We loved the reading." Instead they say, "Oh, we loved it when we worked in these little teams. It was great. We got to know people. The only class we ever got to know anybody."

It's so reassuring and refreshing for them to get in a situation where you can be serious. I don't mean somber, but earnest, and dedicated, and committed, and vulnerable. I listen to these conversations ... I mean, they're not all like that all the time, but there's a stream that sort of runs through them all the time of "Oh, I read that book, and this is what I thought." Nobody's going to criticize them or say whether their paper corresponds to the postmodern perspective on something or other. They get a lot of really good feedback from each other, just in the simplest form of attention. People really pay attention to each other. And so in some sense, people take themselves seriously. It's

because, I think, they're in this structure in which they take themselves and each other seriously.

I taught this big class this year on Psychology and Consciousness. It was like a hundred people. It was huge for me. And I felt discouraged: "Oh my God, I can't reach people in the back row," and this and that, but at the same time, we got it going... Each group made these little DVDs full of video clips and music and voice-overs and poetry, like they produced a fifteen-minute, twenty-minute kind of production in the laboratory. The equipment these days is so incredible, you can just bring in film clips and cassettes and everything, and what you turn out is this amazing, flowing portrait of what it's like to be mature. That was their assignment. It was to take basically any take on any of Wilber's books or Bob Kegan's or whatever and capture what this developmental transition is about.

They were really involved in that. They made all these decisions: "Oh no, let's not use the clip from *Vanilla Sky*. Let's use the one from *Lost in Las Vegas*. Let's do this. Underneath it, let's put Annie Lennox. No, not Annie Lennox, that's not quite it." You're just kind of forced to



bring your own seriousness to bear.

**BZ:** What are the books that are part of the curriculum these days for Psych and Consciousness?

**DM:** Well, it changes all the time. I got way involved in the first-year seminar that Claire was in, Non-Ordinary Reality. It was all about clairvoyance and telepathy and out-of-body and near-death experiences and reincarnation and mediums.

**BZ:** And at some point you got married again?

**DM:** Yes.

**BZ:** When was that?

**DM:** I moved back to Ann Arbor in '95, got married in '95, and both of us are involved in the Siddha Yoga community.

**BZ:** You had left Ann Arbor and left teaching for a while.

**DM:** Yeah. I went and lived on Long Island. I lived in Southampton, and then Matruka and I got married and moved out here more or less the same year.

**BZ:** You left here in 1990 or something?

**DM:** '89-'90 I was in India, '90-'91 I was here for a year, and then I thought, I just need to move out there to be closer to where she was.

**BZ:** Had you met Matruka in New York?

**DM:** Yeah, at the ashram. She was part of that community there.

**BZ:** And the university, again because of your tenure, you were just accepted back even ...

**DM:** No, they didn't have to accept me. I mean, I was a Professor Emeritus in 1991, so ...

**BZ:** What did that afford you? What did that allow you to do, in a sense? To leave and then come back?

**DM:** No. If they don't want you back, they don't have to take you back. I wrote the Chair. She was Pat Gurin. I said, "Could I teach a freshman seminar?" She said, "Oh, yeah." And gradually I slipped back into Psych and Religion. Then the next chairman said, "How about a big class? We're getting a little squeezed here. We gotta get our numbers up. Let's get a big class." I said, "Okay."

**BZ:** What other traditions have you read of over the years which have had resonance for you?

**DM:** I think the easiest for me is the Sufi tradition. I mean, it's so drenched in love imagery, and it's got such a wonderful grasp of the teacher-student, the real master-disciple relationship. I think both those qualities are just crucial. I love it when they're there. I used to read a lot about the Hasids, and they always made perfect sense to me. I'm sure there were things that they said that I didn't understand, but I got again that main kind of mystical, devotional quality, and a lot about the rebbe. I don't read much Buddhism, although I like Batchelor. You know Batchelor's books?

**BZ:** Yes.



**DM:** I think he's great. I use him a lot in classes.

**BZ:** Other writers that have spoken to you over the years?

**DM:** Well, Ken Wilber. I know him well, and I've worked with him, and we were going to write a book together. Maybe we will.

**BZ:** How did you come to know Ken Wilber?

**DM:** He had read my stuff, I had read his stuff, and we had actually corresponded way back in the seventies when he was the terrific editor of *Revision*. And then more recently through my friend, Karl Pohrt of Shaman Drum. He found out that Ken was coming to town and got me and Elliot Ginsberg to come have lunch with Ken.

Which painting do you imagine yourself being in the Met? The irises? What would it be like to be the irises? Hundreds of people are coming in, having an incredible spiritual experience just seeing these irises. Or you could be any of them. One by one, every day you could be a different picture.

**BZ:** Was it in the eighties that you wrote the book about transpersonal psychology or the seventies?

**DM:** It was in the eighties, *The Light of Consciousness*. It came out in '84. You've always been really sweet to carry it.

**BZ:** Will you describe for our readers what that book was about?

**DM:** Well, I had been particularly struck in Muktananda's autobiography, which is called *The Play of Consciousness*, with his meditative experience of the Blue Pearl. That had a lot of meaning to me, both in meeting him and in reading his own saga. So I decided I would take that particular part of his own meditation, which he describes as it unfolds over a nine-year period—it's really a meditation journal—and use it to talk about what it means to attain yogic mastery, but also to grasp what real devotion is. And also to have a kind of higher understanding of what our human nature is, and what's the intellect.

So anyway, those were the changes that he goes through to realize ... you know, he doesn't start off saying, "I am God." The Kashmir Shaivite form of Hinduism culminates in this realization of one's true identity. But in the process, he has these beautiful passages about devotion and ... it's a beautiful story. I just decided to interweave his meditative segments with my own experiences with him or anywhere in life. So it was sort of a mixture of personal stories and exploration of the text. And it ends up talking about transpersonal psychology, which was still barely in formation. And I still edit a series, the SUNY Press Series in Transpersonal and Humanistic Psychology.

**BZ:** Do they come to you to review what they're going to publish, or to actually ...

**DM:** Yeah, they send me manuscripts. I'm the series editor. And you've got a lot of the ... They publish a lot of those books...

**BZ:** Yeah, we do have a lot of those books.

**DM:** Yeah, SUNY's done a great job. So yeah, I loved writing that.

**BZ:** What are the gifts and challenges of being seventy?

**DM:** Oh, gosh. I just feel delighted with my life. I don't particularly feel like I have to rack up a whole lot more points on the board. But I feel like they're going up there anyway. There are a lot of things happening that I'm really happy about. I just feel lucky. You know, I get to do all these things that I want to do—garden, and I can go putter around, and teach, be involved in politics, spiritual community ... I mean, it's a great combination.

And you know, it could change overnight. I don't feel like I've got, you know, twenty more years of teaching ahead of me, or forty more or even ten, or ... but I love doing it. It's a perfect way to spend a big hunk of the day.

But not the whole day. It's great. It's a great diet. I'm out of the house maybe three hours a day, for four days of the week (laughs). That doesn't seem like a very difficult assignment.

This war in Iraq was a wake-up call. A small group of us started by packing up relief boxes, things like band-aids, soap, and combs, which the AFSC sent to Baghdad after the bombing. We were trying to struggle against the all-too familiar states of helplessness, paralysis, or rage. This turned into a group we call Compassion in Action, partly for the ironic acronym. We try to balance inner and outer change. Outer has come to mean contributing to ongoing projects like AIDS orphans in Africa, empowering women in Nepal, and direct support to families in America. And inner means staying close to the wisdom and spiritual practices that will sustain us individually and as a group. Combining individual development, group building, and acting to make a difference in the world is a great and satisfying challenge.

**CC:** Did you have any vision or concept of what your life would be like now or at various stages, and did it turn out to be anything like you thought?

**DM:** Mm. Pretty much. I suppose certainly when I was twenty, I was just trying to figure out what to do. But I think once I found a way to teach, like with the interpersonal course, and a couple of things to really study and a thing to be passionate about that's independent of all that, like politics or a spiritual community, gosh, what a combination of things. What more could you want?

I am enjoying these really good years of home and marriage. I mean, clearly, that's the most absorbing of any topic, in terms of, "What is my life?" I suppose. It's hard to say much about it without sounding goopy, but I think that's the most validating part of life, working on the endlessly ongoing quality of a real relationship. It knocks you off of any sort of easy, airy assumption or stance. The pressure is just huge to be real with what's happening, which is never predictable. I'm very happy about that part of life.

**BZ:** You always continue to look a good deal younger than your years. And yet you're seventy-one. Do you fear illness or death?

**DM:** I guess I'll have to tell you when I get there. I mean, I don't brood about death. And yet when I have an occasional health scare, I'm hardly sanguine. So I don't really know. I don't think I've been put to the test.

**BZ:** Boy, I think that's a really honest, good answer. I feel like it's not until we're put to the test that we really know how we're going to react.

**CC:** Do you have an idea of how your future years will be?

**DM:** I mean, they won't be the same, but I have no idea how they'll be different. I think a lot of us who have been involved in Siddha Yoga kind of always want to create in our minds the image of some kind of intentional, more communal, spiritual community to be plugged into. It isn't going to be sort of moving into the ashram. But it would be very nice to not be so isolated. Sometimes I like to look at these co-housing communities, especially if they have a spiritual basis. But I'm not saying it's going to happen in that form. But if we could do something like that, where you created a spiritual community where what was central wasn't just that you eat together, but that you have a meditation hall or some kind of regular practice that everybody could show up to. That would be great. One of the best things about the ashram is that they kept it going. That flame is still burning. It's been burning for thirty years. It's so sweet. Such an incredible contribution.

**BZ:** Have you done much writing in recent years about your life and your thoughts?

**DM:** I haven't. I think about it every once in a while.

**BZ:** Thank you.

**DM:** Yeah, thank you both.

**CC:** Thank you.

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