A LIFE IN SUBUD

A LIFE IN SUBUD

Raymond van Sommers

DAWN BOOKS
Australia

A LIFE IN SUBUD

Published by DAWN BOOKS
PO Box 531 Northbridge
NSW 1560 Australia

Reprinted June 2004
Reprinted January 2006

© 2003 Raymond van Sommers

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without prior permission of the author.

SUBUD® and the seven circle symbol are registered marks of the World Subud Association.

Copyright for the talks by Bapak Muhammad Subuh is held by the World Subud Association.

Copyright for the photography is held by the photographers.

National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT
Catalogue-in-Publication Information:

van Sommers, Raymond, 1928 -
A Life in Subud

ISBN 0 9751159 3 6

1. van Sommers, Raymond. 2. Spiritual Life. 3. Subud.

299.933

A contribution
to the history of Subud

The Meaning of Subud

From talks by Bapak Muhammad Subuh

SUBUD is an abbreviation of the words *Susila Budhi Dharma*. Subud is not a new religion, or a sect of any religion, nor is it a teaching. Subud is a symbol of the possibility for man to follow the right way of living.

Susila denotes those qualities which give rise to character, conduct and actions which are truly human, and in accordance with the will of God.

Budhi indicates that in all creatures, including man, there is divine power that works within him as well as outside him.

Dharma signifies sincerity, surrender and submission to the Will of Almighty God.

Susila Budhi Dharma means to follow the will of God with the help of the divine power that works both within us and without, by the way of surrendering oneself to the Will of Almighty God.

Contents

Acknowledgements		Page xi
Prologue		xiii
PART ONE:		
Chapter One	Coombe Springs	3
Chapter Two	Childhood & Youth	17
Chapter Three	Study, Work & Travel	25
Chapter Four	Subud at Coombe Springs	39
Chapter Five	Preparations for Cilandak	71
Chapter Six	Subud in Indonesia	93
Postscript 1976		147
PART TWO:		
Chapter Seven	Helper Activities	151
Chapter Eight	Kejiwaan Councillor	165
Chapter Nine	Visits to the Asian Zone	177
Chapter Ten	International Subud Centre	197
Chapter Eleven	National Committee	207
Chapter Twelve	Personal Enterprises	217
Epilogue 2003		227
APPENDIX:		
Reference	PT International Design Consultants	231
Glossary		243

Acknowledgements

Bapak's received mission to establish Subud inspired my life since I first received the latihan. To the extent that this memoir contributes to his mission all thanks should go to Bapak.

To my sister Tess who was the perfect editor my love and gratitude for her professional help and familial patience. To Subud friends who read the archive version and encouraged me to see it as a book, Tony Bright-Paul and Hussein Rawlings, and to those that made valuable suggestions, especially David Week, Lilliana Gibbs and Blanche d'Alpuget, my warmest thanks. Finally to Harris Smart of *Subud Voice* magazine who suggested that the book would fill a place in Subud literature and undertook distribution, my ongoing appreciation.

The cover photograph is by Ulf Honold.

Raymond van Sommers

Prologue

Whereas my life started as an exploration of the world around me, it changed radically at twenty-six to a search for the purpose of life. As a result this memoir is as much about inner experiences as it is about outer events.

The ideas that triggered this change in 1954 were those of Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. Becoming a follower of their teaching with JG Bennett led me, three years later, to receiving the spiritual exercise of Subud and practising it for the rest of my life, including ten years in Indonesia with Pak Subuh (Bapak), the founder of the Subud movement.

The story is divided into two parts and a reference:

Part One contains an account of my Gurdjieff training, my childhood and my early working life, and the first twenty years after finding Subud and learning to follow the guidance of the *latihan* (spiritual exercise).

Part Two recalls the next twenty years, putting the latihan into practice in life—establishing and managing an enterprise and working with others in the role of a Subud helper.

The reference is part of a history of the Subud enterprise PT International Design Consultants in Indonesia during its first ten years, 1966-1976.

This memoir, as a record of my experiences, necessarily includes some observations about other people. If these offend in any way, I sincerely ask forgiveness.

Raymond van Sommers

A LIFE IN SUBUD

~

Part One

Chapter One

Coombe Springs

'Ah, you have come!' he said, fixing us intently with his light blue eyes. He seemed genuinely pleased. At two metres tall John Godolphin Bennett towered over us. I judged that he was about sixty, although his skin was still fresh and his brown hair showed few signs of grey. He had perhaps combed it back but now it stood out dishevelled as if by the wind. He had a broad forehead and strong clean-cut features, and a trimmed army-type moustache which reminded me that I had read he had been in British Intelligence in Turkey during World War I. He was wearing a baggy sports coat with leather elbow patches, and shabby corduroys. I heard a bell ring. 'We are about to assemble for lunch.' he said. 'Come and join us. Sit at the main table. Afterwards come to my study at three o'clock.' His voice was kind and encouraging. He strode away and up the stairs.

To get here my wife and I had made our way up the curved gravel driveway through trees and rhododendron bushes that screened the main house. We had made an appointment, and the tall wrought iron gates had stood open at the entrance. A glance at the long high red brick boundary wall, overhung with huge oak and chestnut trees, that ran down Coombe Lane to the left suggested privacy rather than security. The Edwardian gatehouse in brick and stone prepared us for a substantial main house. We were at Coombe Springs, at Kingston-on-Thames, near London, the premises of the Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences Limited—the name for the esoteric Gurdjieff school for the study of man's higher potential run by Mr JG Bennett.

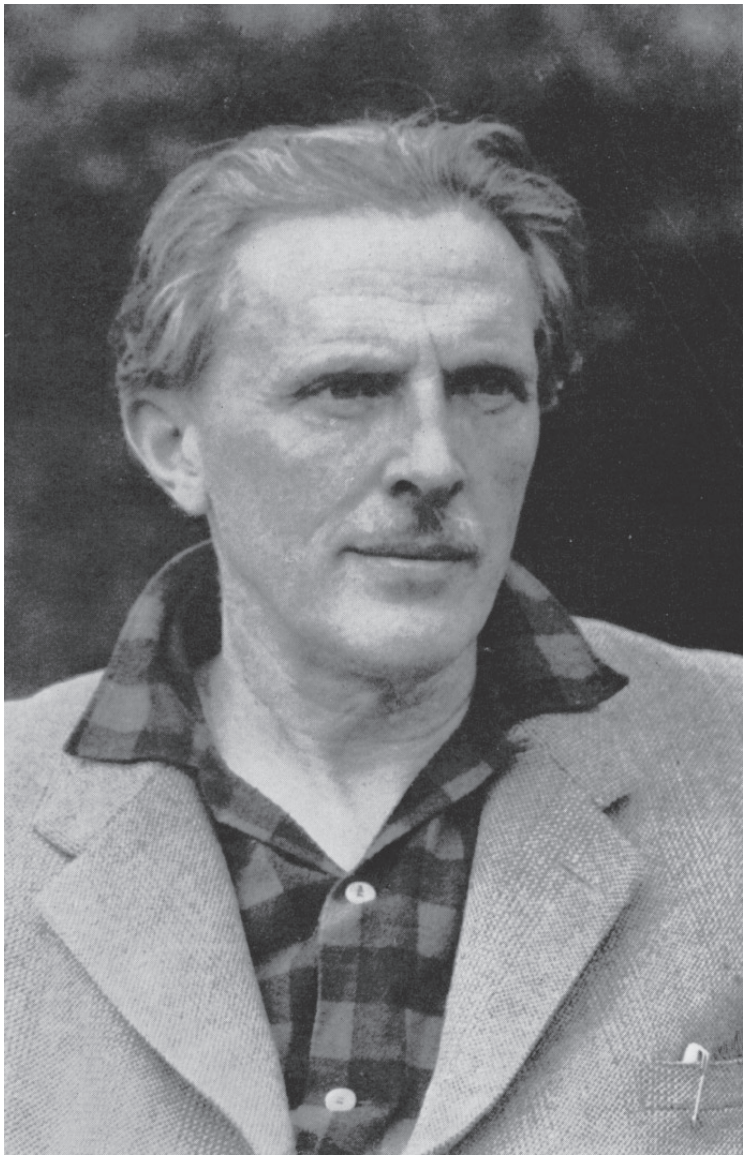
Mr Bennett had first met George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, from whom the teaching derived, in Constantinople in 1920. In London in 1921 he became a student of PD Ouspensky, a Russian pupil of Gurdjieff, and spent time with Gurdjieff in France in 1923. After working with Ouspensky he started his own study group in 1930 in London. His profession as a physicist led him, in 1934, to be appointed director of the newly formed British Coal Utilization Research Association (BCURA). During World War II German bombing drove BCURA out of London at a time when Mr Bennett was looking for a place for his study group. He arranged for Coombe Springs to be leased by BCURA for its laboratories and for the grounds to be used by the study group. When the war ended BCURA moved out and Mr Bennett and his pupils purchased Coombe Springs as a permanent centre for his school.

At the top of the driveway we had barely left the sound of our footsteps on the gravel and reached the entrance porch of the two-storey mansion when Mr Bennett had appeared in the hall.

Now people began coming into the porch from the garden, men and women in casual clothes, some with gardening boots. They moved deliberately and quietly towards the dining room. A short and plump middle-aged woman introduced herself to us as Kate, and asked us to go with her to the dining room. She showed us to seats at the end of the large main table, some four metres long, made of solid oak, amber-grey with use, and worn to reveal the grain.

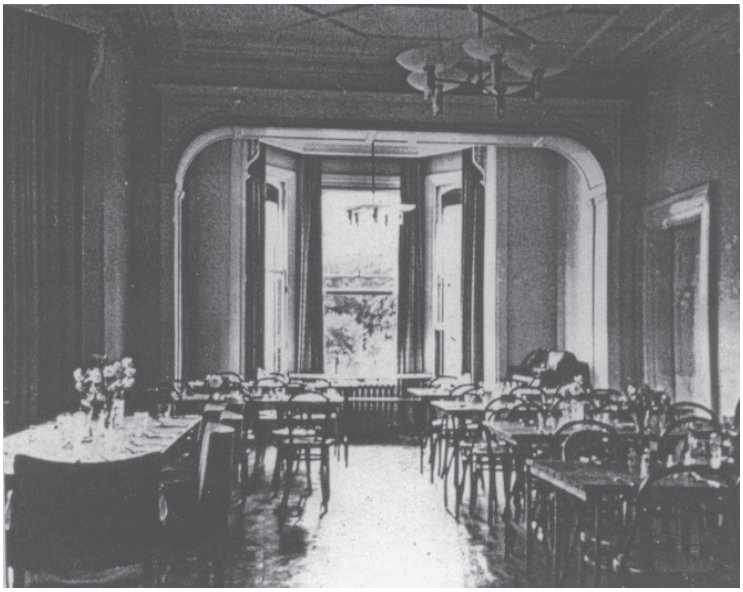
The rest of the dining room was set up with bare, scrubbed timber trestle tables, laid with simple cutlery. There were two large glass bowls of salad and one of fruit on each, and wholemeal bread on a table near the entrance door. There were chairs for about forty people.

I was alert with excitement. I was, I felt certain, in the sanctum of the world's most secret school and among those who had discovered the purpose of our life on earth and how to wake up in a world that was asleep. It was the equivalent no less than being sighted in a land of the blind. It was 1 May 1955.



John G. Bennett, Director, Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences, Coombe Springs, UK.

Coombe Springs main house entrance (East side) 1955



Coombe Springs dining room 1955

The room quickly filled. Chairs scraped on the wooden floor. People were talking, but the room became quieter as Mr B (as Mr Bennett was called) entered. He took his seat in the centre of the main table with his back to the huge bay window that overlooked a rose garden. Even seated he was an imposing figure, radiating energy. I had already decided that he was in a continuous state of conscious self-awareness—a goal of the Gurdjieff teaching. He introduced us to the others at the table as coming from Australia and gave our first names, Jan and Ann, but not theirs. He spoke very distinctly, always looking straight at the person he addressed. There was one other guest from overseas, an older man who, it seemed, had known Ouspensky. This man sat on Mr B's right.

Several students, apparently rostered for the job, served us each with a plate of kedgeree. It smelt of smoked fish and hard-boiled eggs. Everyone fell silent for a full two minutes. Mr B moved first and began eating with the same larger-than-life energy that I had already noticed in all his movements. He talked with evident interest to the visitor on his right.

My kedgeree tasted good. I chewed every mouthful deliberately, trying to maintain awareness in the way that I had already learned from reading Ouspensky. By now there was a hum of conversation around the room. Just as I reached for a piece of fruit, Mr B shouted 'Stop!' I froze—simply out of shock—my hand resting on an apple. I saw everyone else had become like a waxworks figure. I held my breath. A minute later we were released. I realised it was some kind of exercise in self-observation.

'What did you see?' asked Mr B, addressing the question at large. There was an air of command about him, but charisma as well.

An attractive young women with a Dutch accent and a red and white Lapland sweater started to speak. 'At that moment', she said, 'I was thinking: "I am now *remembering myself*". But when the *Stop!* came I was startled. I saw that "I" wasn't *awake*. It was just my thoughts.'

'Ah, yes!' said Mr B. 'That is how it is. Often we are nothing but our thoughts.'

'Anyone else?' he went on. His tone suggested that, whatever our experience, it was important.

'I was day-dreaming about my work in the garden planting out pansies', ventured the woman I had seen in the driveway. Mr B said nothing.

Several others related their experience and then the room fell silent.

'All right then,' Mr B said, finally relieving the tension. 'What about this morning's exercise, how did you get on with that? Could you *remember yourself* at the given times?'

'After you called "Stop!" in the garden,' a young man began, 'I found that I could return to the state that I felt in the morning *preparation*.'

'That's how it should be.' said Mr B. 'Something was collected in the morning. It was like money in the bank. But what about at the predetermined times? That was the exercise. Did you manage to remember on each hour? '

'Something in me remembered,' said a bearded man at our table, 'but it was weak. I just thought, "It is the time," and immediately lost it. However, when the bell rang for lunch and I started to walk towards the house I suddenly had a clear experience of the morning *preparation*. It was after I had given up trying.'

'There you are,' said Mr B, 'you realise that the experience didn't come from nowhere. Your earlier efforts created the finer energy and, when you relaxed to come to lunch, it returned. We have to learn from experience. Little by little we gradually come to see what it is that gives results.'

The lunch and discussion had run for about an hour, when Mr B got up and brought the proceedings to a close. 'Good!' he said . 'This afternoon there will be *movements* here in this room at four thirty. *B Group* first.' He left the room swiftly, as if something else awaited him.

I felt stimulated, alert and alive. I was from my reading already familiar with many of the terms Mr B had used. *Movements*, sometimes known as temple dances, were exercises to music which were only possible to perfect in a state of higher consciousness.

Ann and I had an hour before our meeting with Mr B. We left the dining room through an adjoining conservatory and went into the rose garden. The house appeared to have about thirty rooms. Two wings towered over terraced lawns leading down into three hectares of gardens. Beyond the rose beds a path led into a glade of ancient trees, with patches of daffodils. Here, in a clearing, was the spring house that gave Coombe Springs its name, built by Cardinal Wolsey in the sixteenth century to supply water to Hampton Court. We went down a flight of steps to where water was spouting from a pipe in the wall into a stone tank. The splashing echoed in the high vaulted ceiling. Although everything was wet it was fresh and wholesome. Leaving the spring house we followed a small landscaped stream through some fruit trees and a substantial vegetable garden where people were working in silence. They ignored us as we passed. Further up the slope we found a long, single-storey pre-fab building with a wall of continuous windows, apparently used for accommodation. Later I heard that this was called *The Fishbowl* because people felt exposed by the windows. (It had been the BCURA research laboratory during World War II.) Beyond this was a newer two-storey brick building also for accommodation, with a Swedish sauna downstairs.

Now it was time for our appointment. We found Mr B in his study. He was sitting behind a large desk spread with papers and books, neither over-tidy nor disordered. The room was spacious, perhaps five metres by ten, with the same bay windows as the dining room below but commanding a view through the tree tops to the properties across Coombe Lane. It was carpeted with Persian rugs and uncluttered. There was a secretary's desk at the far end and shelves of books on the walls. He motioned us to sit in armchairs and joined us.

Again I noticed the intensity of his gaze.

'Tell me now,' he said, 'How did you hear about *The Work?*' (This was the term the Gurdjieff people used for their teaching.)

Stream from the springs in the garden at Coombe Springs

Weekend work in the orchard, Coombe Springs

Lawn under the great oak, Coombe Springs

The XVIth Century Spring House, Coombe Springs

As it had been I, not Ann, who had come across the Gurdjieff teaching, the brief history was mine:

'In March 1954 I sailed on a P&O liner back to Australia after a stay of four years in England and in West Africa. I was single and my main object in life had been to travel, enjoy myself and earn a living at my calling of engineer. I had never reflected seriously on the meaning or purpose of life. On the boat I fell into conversation with the ship's engineer. He lent me Ouspensky's book *In Search of the Miraculous,* which included an account of the ideas of the mysterious Caucasian teacher Gurdjieff.

'As I read it, suddenly it dawned on me—*I am.* Ouspensky's ideas not only momentarily *awakened* me but also posed the fundamental question of the very purpose of my existence and of human existence in general.

'At twenty-five I had been unexpectly roused from simply being awake in the normal sense to glimpsing a state of self-consciousness where *I am* had a new meaning and validity. The experience was as if I had been asleep to my own existence until then. This *waking up* was just as clearly defined from the normal waking state as was waking in the morning from ordinary sleep. Until that moment I had never experienced myself self-consciously, that is, with any sense of objectivity. Ouspensky was right; our normal waking state was a sleeping state. I was a sleepwalker and didn't know it.

'Gurdjieff called the returning to this self-conscious state *remembering oneself* or self-awareness. Each time it happened it rudely confirmed that the rest of the time I was still asleep. It was shocking to know that I was unconscious of myself and that life was just happening to me without my participation. I had to find a way out of this situation. *Remembering myself* became what Ouspensky called a burning question.*

* CG Jung calls this conversion *enantiodromia*—a psychological flip from one extreme to its opposite which can happen when a person is totally identified with their outer life image to the exclusion of any awareness of their inner life (soul).

'As soon as I was home in Melbourne I read all the Ouspensky books I could find. In his six lectures published as *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, he proposed that nature has brought humanity to a certain point and from there on it is up to people themselves to develop certain inner qualities by their own efforts to become different beings. Help is needed from those have already started and attained a certain degree of development—hence *schools* (of esoteric knowledge). A Gurdjieff school, he said, consists of people dedicated to *waking up* and developing *self-consciousness, unity, permanent 'I' and will.* Only with these capacities could a person 'pay the debt of his existence' and contribute anything of significance to the welfare and destiny of humanity. I began to look for a Gurdjieff teacher and, through library references, came to know about Coombe Springs.'

'And how about you, Ann?' Mr B said kindly. Ann looked at me and then back to Mr B. 'Well, Jan told me about it, and it seemed right. We are just married, so we do everything together.'

'We have just formed a new study group—*Y Group*,' said Mr B. 'They are mostly young people like yourselves and you can join them. It meets once a week on Saturday afternoons and then of course you can come on Sundays for practical work with others. In the group you will do awareness and self-remembering exercises. Come early next Sunday and take part in the morning *preparation:* relaxation and sensing the body. About fees, speak to Kate. If you have a problem, pay what you can afford. Where will you live? Have you got a job yet?'

'We are living with my aunt in Sutton, and she will introduce me to Mr WF Rees, chairman of the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors, a family friend. Perhaps he can help,' I said.

'You can watch the *movements* at 4.30,' Mr B said and got up. We thanked him and left the room.

Kate was in the office and recorded our contact address and telephone number and next of kin. She gave me a list of the members of Y Group. I was surprised to find that there were thirty one, plus three leaders. Ten lived at Coombe Springs.

The *movements* were in the dining room. We sat with several other pupils cross-legged against the wall and watched. The music sounded Middle Eastern. Some had been written by Gurdjieff, some by the Russian conductor Thomas de Hartmann, some were sacred dances collected from the Sufis. Most had a strong rhythm which I felt impelling my body to move. Only a mazurka was lyrical. The pianist was a tall, slim, elegant man, a professional concert performer from Australia. He played faultlessly, with passionate expression. The pupils, men and women in about equal numbers, in light clothing and soft leather heelless pumps, stood evenly spaced in three rows. Most seemed to be under thirty. In some *movements* the pupils followed a sequence of steps and arm positions out of phase with each other, which created a complicated pattern of ripples down the rows. In one they spun like dervishes.

That night I couldn't sleep. All that week I felt fired up by the images of my one long day at Coombe Springs.

In my twenty-seventh year, I believed I was about to discover, for the first time, who *I* was. What I had been until then was a plain enough story—and one that I was later to look back upon as, in a sense, two dimensional only.

Mr Bennett directing *movements* at Coombe Springs 1955

Gurdjieff students watching *movements* 1955

Donald Neil accompanying Gurdjieff *movements*, Coombe Springs

London presentation of Gurdjieff *movements*

Chapter Two

Childhood & Youth

I was born at *The Pines* hospital, Ringwood, on the eastern outskirts of Melbourne, Australia, on 21 November 1928 and given the name John van Sommers. My mother was twenty- four and my father, an artist and writer, was twenty-seven years her senior. Her memoirs suggest that she was idealistic and inexperienced in the ways of the world at the time of meeting my father.

My father had already been married before. He was a veteran of World War I, where he had served in Egypt and France. After the terrible experiences of the war in France he was discharged in February 1918 with a chronic chest illness—perhaps from being gassed in the trenches, or from trench fever—which later developed into pulmonary TB. He had a small Army pension.

As my sister Tess, who was nine when I was born, recalls, 'There is much speculation about our ancestors—an elopement with the Earl of Douglas's sister and a line of van Somer Court painters from the time of Charles II. Father told me his grandmother dressed him in the Douglas tartan and had a velvet jacket made for him with silver buttons that carried the Douglas crest. ... My father's father was an artist and teacher of drawing, and was a pupil and good friend of Fredrick McCubbin.'

John Charles Douglas Sommers or Jack Sommers, as my father signed his paintings, had as a young man studied at the National Gallery in Melbourne under its director Bernard Hall with such celebrated artists as George Bell, Max Meldrum and Chas Wheeler.

He knew the Lindsays well, having shared a studio with Norman Lindsay in Sydney. His work included Australian landscapes and regular illustrations for *The Lone Hand* magazine. After the war he painted portraits and worked as a part-time journalist contributing stories, verse and illustrations to *The Bulletin*.

Initially my parents set about buying and refurbishing a goldminer's cottage in Warrandyte. In spite of their meagre income from his painting and writing, my mother records that their early days were at times idyllic—a bush setting, riding horses, and occasional visits from other artists and writers of the period. My mother was riding every day until a month before I was born.

I was very close to my mother. She was the hub of the family, caring and responsible. Although she came from strict religious English parents of the Victorian period (they gave her the Christian name Grace) she was nevertheless an optimistic, practical and outgoing woman, charitable in her attitude to other people. This showed itself in her belief in, and support for, my father as an artist, and later in her success in helping refugees during the war and founding one of Melbourne's first women's community clubs.

By the time my brother Peter was born in 1930, life for my parents had become extremely difficult. The Great Depression meant that, where my father had had continuous private commissions as a portrait painter—and had just completed painting the heraldic scenes on the ceiling of the Regent Theatre in Melbourne—now he could not even sell his paintings. His health also deteriorated and for the last four years of his life we travelled in a horse-drawn wagon through inland Victoria and New South Wales seeking a warmer and drier climate.

My mother wrote about this period as an increasingly desperate time—a young inexperienced woman with the responsibility for a sick man, sometimes violent with the frustration and pain of his illness, a young girl not yet in her teens, and two small boys, one a baby, moving from place to place on outback roads, far from supplies for themselves and the two horses.

To what extent these first six years of my life moulded my character I can only guess. I was restless from an early age, exploring new places and new interests. I took on some aspects of my father's bohemian disregard for authority and convention, and his urge to please himself. I have his self-reliance and confidence. I do not have my father's explosions of temper, probably because these were not in the family line, but rather a result of his traumatic experiences in World War I. However, perhaps his outbursts have caused me to be extremely adverse to rough behaviour by others.

After my father died my mother returned home and Tess went to a boarding school. A year or so later my mother met and married Eric Thake, an artist her own age. He was a mild-natured man with regular work as an illustrator. Peter went to live with our grandparents (on my mother's side) and I stayed with my mother and stepfather. From that time on I enjoyed a happy family life, first living in Black Rock, a seaside suburb of Melbourne, and later in Ormond where Joan, my first younger sister, was born.

When my grandmother died in 1938 the family came together in my grandparent's house in East Kew. My grandfather was a cabinet-maker and a kindly man. His workshop was an Aladdin's cave where he made us all the toys of our childhood. These were still frugal times for everyone in Australia but we had enough. Peter and I went to the local State School for the remainder of 1938 and 1939, walking the two kilometres to school, idling on the way home on the swings and climbing-bars of the public playgrounds. In short, we had a normal childhood in a safe middleclass environment.

I remember little about these years of schooling, except for two social-studies projects. One was on the geography and people of the Dutch East Indies (later Indonesia). Its artistic layout shows that my stepfather helped me no small amount. I was fascinated by the exotic pictures in a way that nothing else in my early schooling touched me. I have never believed that the future is determined, but I must admit that it strikes me now as strange that I should have had this strong attraction to Indonesia, which was later to be so important in my life.

When Jennifer, my youngest sister, was born we moved to a larger house. The years that followed were stable and happy. I loved my family and occupied myself with various hobbies, particularly collecting butterflies. The house was on a typical Australian suburban quarter acre with a large back garden. We had fruit trees, grew vegetables and kept chickens. There was a swing and a sand-pit for my baby sisters. It was the days of radio and we would listen together as a family to the weekly nature programs.

My stepfather left parenting largely to my mother. He was absorbed in his art, spending most of his home life painting and engraving in his studio. The house was decorated by him with furniture that he designed and it was hung with his drawings, paintings and lino-cuts, beautifully mounted and framed. By exposure to his artwork we were all influenced by his artistic judgement and appreciation. As a well-known fine-artist he was soon appointed an official war artist in the Australian Air Force. This took him away to the Pacific Islands during the Japanese advance and retreat, only occasionally returning for leave until the war ended in 1945. Many of his paintings are held at the Canberra War Memorial and in State art galleries.

My mother pressed me to get a technical education. I believe this was in part a reaction to her bad experience with my father during the Depression. I went to Swinburne Technical College for my secondary and tertiary studies from 1940 to 1947, first studying practical trade and craft subjects—carpentry, metalwork, blacksmithing, clay modelling, etc—and then going on to take a diploma in civil engineering.

I enjoyed the outdoor activities of a teenager growing up in those times in Melbourne. From 1942 to 1948 my close friends came from the local Scout troop. We had weekly meetings and Saturday excursions—trekking, mapping, and nature study, finishing with a cookout. Once a year we went on a longer camp in the mountains. We also spent our spare time together, cycling and swimming in the local river. Movies were a rare treat.

Two incidents remain in my memory from those times which seem to have foreshadowed my disposition to religious experience and psychology. The first was at the dentist when I was thirteen. I was given nitrous oxide (laughing gas) as an anaesthetic to have two large teeth removed. This is as I now remember it:

I sat in the chair and, as the dentist tilted it back, another man in a white coat wheeled the gas equipment up to my face. Suddenly I felt very nervous. As I looked around for the nurse to give me reassurance, the man with the gas put a mask on my face.

'Take deep breaths,' he said.

I smelt the gas as I breathed. It was warm and slightly sweet and then, all at once …

All was light, and everything was there and known. Then I was in darkness—nothingness, hopelessness and utter despair. Then I was in the light, then the darkness, then the light … Within a disk of black and white, spiralling to an infinite centre, I moved alternatively from light to darkness inwards, everything … nothing … everything … nothing, forever.

I woke up struggling and felt someone let go my arm. The nurse and dentist were standing back a little. Very shaken, I saw around me fragments of broken glass and blood. There was consternation on the dentist's face. 'You gave us a bad time,' I heard him say. I staggered out, still more 'there' than here. I had been to a fearful place, a prison of the mind where I was trapped for eternity.*

* Years later I read *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James where he writes: Nitrous oxide when sufficiently diluted with air, stimulates the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree. Depth upon depth of truth seems revealed to the inhaler. This truth fades out, however, or escapes, at the moment of coming to; and if any words remain over in which it seems to cloth itself, they prove to be the veriest nonsense. Nevertheless, the sense of a profound meaning having been there persists.

Of his personal observations on nitrous oxide intoxication, he goes on: One conclusion was forced upon my mind at the time (of my experiences) and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that the normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.

The back garden of our house in East Kew, Melbourne 1940-1950

My parents, grandfather and sisters seeing me off to England by ship in 1950

The second experience was a religious conversion when I was about fourteen. Although my grandfather was a committed Christian, teaching at the Sunday school and spending much time reading religious books and studying the Bible, his dedication had little effect on me. Strangely, it was when a boy at school showed me texts from the New Testament that I was overwhelmed with religious fervour. I was filled with a kind of elation and endlessly read the verses highlighted in my copy of the four gospels. I went into churches and prayed with charismatic intensity. This state ran for some months before it subsided.

I finished my fulltime study at Swinburne at the end of 1946 and, following a friend from my class, took a job with the engineering section of the Victorian Railways. The work was surveying and drafting for railway trackwork. I had a capacity for neatness and developed some skill in fine technical drawing—probably from my genes. Gradually I spent more time outdoors surveying track alignments and found going to new places exciting as I travelled around the country areas of Victoria. Somewhere about this time I began to be called Jan as a contraction of John van.

It was in 1948 during an assignment in Gippsland that I met a Dutch engineer who changed the direction of my life. He was an older man who had just returned from working in Indonesia. Surrounded by his souvenirs—paintings, carvings, and so on—and the trappings of his lifestyle including a large short wave radio, he puffed on cigars and talked with great enthusiasm about the huge projects that he had been responsible for in Indonesia and before that in South America. He advised me to study overseas and get international qualifications so I could work anywhere in the world.

I was very impressed, and once again there was this numinosity about Indonesia. I resigned from the Victorian Railways and took a job with an oil exploration team in Papua New Guinea, with the idea of saving enough money to study in England.

Chapter Three

Study, Work & Travel

At nineteen working in Papua New Guinea was a tremendous adventure and I revelled in it. Here I was in a remote and primitive land, virtually unexplored and unaffected by the outside world. In 1948 there were just twentyfive miles of road in the whole territory, and that was near the capital, Port Moresby. The only areas of development were the copra plantations along the coast, reached by boat. Elsewhere the island was covered with almost impenetrable jungle. It had extremely difficult terrain, from the inaccessible swamps of the large river deltas to the rugged foothills and mountain escarpments. It had a heavy rainfall, in some places amongst the highest in the world, which created enormous rivers winding through the jungle from the interior. Its people lived separately in hundreds of isolated tribes, speaking different languages and often hostile to one another.

Papua which comprised the south-east quarter of the island of New Guinea was administered by Australia through a Governor. It was policed by patrol officers who travelled by boat and on foot using local people as guides. The language of communication was *motu*, an adaptation of the Port Moresby dialect.

Evidence of oil had been noticed three or four decades earlier, but it was only after World War II that an oil company, Australasian Petroleum Company (APC), intensified the search with modern equipment. Drilling had started at Hororo in the south gulf country.

I joined APC's first geophysical survey of the upper reaches of the Purari River. The project was to map the underground geological strata by seismic refraction to try to locate potential reservoirs of oil.

Geophones were used to record the vibrations from dynamite explosions. I joined as a surveyor under Mr S.E. Evans, a Welshman who had been working in Persia. It was our job to fix the position of the geophone stations and explosion points, using aerial photographs, astronomical fixes and ground tacheometry.

The surveying turned out to be a minor aspect of the work. The logistics of getting to the area, supplying ourselves, and managing the labour force were the major tasks. Learning the language was another, it took several months. We took with us hired labour and supplies from Port Moresby. The people were recruited from several different tribes, including the famous 'Fuzzy Wuzzy' heroes of the Kokoda Trail. Some were tall well-built men from the coastal islands, some were shorter, from the river deltas. When our team of ten Europeans, including a doctor, was complete we were joined by two hundred of these Papuan workers.

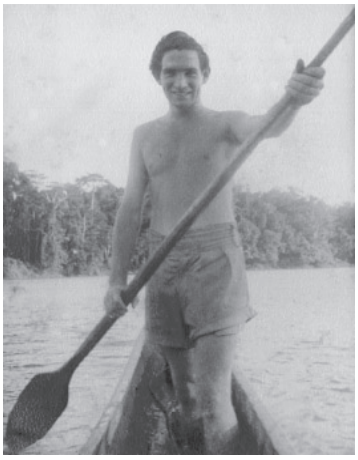
To get to the inland site I travelled aboard a fifty-tonne steamer (a K Boat) along the coast and then up the Purari River. Standing on the plunging bow I delighted in the experience of the shallow draft vessel riding the swell of the aqua-coloured water of the Gulf. For the next thirty hours I was seasick until we bounced over the sand-bar into the quieter water of the river. Once we left the villages of the delta, the area was almost unpopulated.

We built our base camp about one hundred kilometres inland. Even so far upstream this large river was two hundred metres wide and could flood fifteen metres overnight. We chose high ground and cleared the dense jungle back from the river bank. The Papuans were experts at building with forest materials. They built us small thatched bungalows and storehouses and long shelters for themselves. They were issued with a cloth sarong and a machete and provided each week with a ration of food—rice and tinned beef—also tobacco twist, matches and simple trade goods. The rest of their payment was kept until the end of their contract. Medical attention was provided by the company.

For our work we were each allocated a 'line' of ten or twelve men as bearers and as workers to cut our way through the jungle. These were to be my only company at times for weeks as I surveyed and set up the position of the geophone stations. In those days the white person automatically assumed a role as headman over his labourers. This superiority was expected and depended on establishing mutual respect. We all created a close relationship with our line and were reluctant to let them work with anyone else. Many of the men were working for the first time away from their village. Only my cook had had any previous experience and that was in the civilisation of Port Moresby. As we progressed inland we moved into territory where white man had never been before. Occasionally the workers would get very nervous, saying that there were Kukukus, feared nomadic hunters, in the area. No one liked to be alone or at the end of a line for fear of being silently attacked by a poison arrow. We never saw anyone. Although I was the youngest member of the team, my bravado and perhaps my shotgun—which I carried to shoot wild pig and pigeons for fresh meat—strengthened their confidence.

The jungle was full of life, much of it unfriendly. Not only was the vegetation so thick that it closed out the light and entangled anyone that tried to pass with hooked vines, but it also crawled with biting insects. There were stinging flies and ferocious red ants and all kinds of spiders. As we cut our way through the dense foliage, we disturbed snakes (some poisonous, like the death adders) and pythons of various colours and sizes, some big enough to eat a cassowary (a type of emu) whole. For good measure there were leeches. On the river banks and up the creeks there were swarms of sandflies and mosquitoes. Scratches and leech wounds had to be carefully treated to avoid festering in the steaming humidity. We took prophylactic pills against malaria and depended on our clothing and insect repellent to avoid dengue and blackwater fever carried by another type of mosquito. In spite of all these hazards, it was a great adventure and I soon became adjusted.

Surveying in Papua New Guinea



On the Purari River 1948

Bearers with new dugout canoe on the Purari River

Bearers at Mena Bend base camp, Papua 1949

Village on the delta of the Purari River

Where possible we would use a creek as a route to a new site or travel by dugout canoe, either with paddles or for long journeys with an outboard motor. We carried adzes and the bearers could build these canoes in a few hours. Selecting a perfect jungle tree of a particular wood, they would fell it and cut out the inside to leave a thin strong shell, which they then launched on rollers into the river. Paddles were cut and carved with the same speed and dexterity. It is hard to describe the exhilaration of standing in a dugout canoe as it speeds down a jungle river with a dozen powerful natives singing and beating a rhythm with their long paddles.

There were many crocodiles in the big rivers and everyone took great care near the water. Some were huge, several metres long, and could run faster than a man on land. They were silent in the water and reportedly often took a villager off the bank.

I worked in three areas. The first was up the Purari River in rugged broken country with dense jungle. The second was further inland and higher up on the Mena River, and lastly I was in the swamps of the Purari delta. To get to the Mena we had to trek into unmapped territory and be supplied by air-drop. It was on that trip that I was nearly killed by my own bearers. After Purari, my labour line had been repatriated to Port Moresby and I had been given ten new men to replace them. They were from the delta and they greatly feared going into this Kukuku area. One morning, far away from anywhere, I called them to line up for the day's briefing. After getting no answer to a second call, I went to their hut. They were very sulky and rebellious. I shouted at them in the style which I had normally adopted, threatening them with some kind of penalty for not obeying. In a few minutes I was in a fight. It was a pandemonium of shouting and shoving. I reached for a stick and saw out of the corner of my eye a man picking up an axe. I yelled, 'No! that is a killing thing!' That frantic call must have touched something because the fight stopped and order was restored. I was never able to work with those men again and was given a new group at Mena.

Coming out of the Mena area later, instead of retracing our steps, we cut across country to the upper reaches of the Purari. Here we built large balsawood rafts. We then erected a framework with a canvas tent-fly roof and tied our belongings and stores securely in place. Launched out into the rapid water, it was the adventure of a lifetime. For three days we were swept along by the current, at first through rapids, then into the wider river, often spending hours paddling our way out of huge, slowly-circulating whirlpools or poling off sandbars. On the second day heavy rains upstream scoured the banks and brought huge trees into the river to become a hazard as they floated swiftly beside us. We tied up at night and slept on land above the flood level.

The swamps of the delta were not such fun. In fact they must be one of the worst places on earth. There was no dry land. It was a jungle of spiky sago palms growing in brackish water. All the worst of the stinging biting insects were there and the humidity was stifling. We could move only by cutting down trees to form floating pathways. We were constantly wet, either from slipping off the logs or from the endless pouring rain. Luckily my contract came to an end after a month in that area.

Now I had saved enough money to go to England, I returned home for a short holiday and then boarded the *Himalaya* to London, prepared to obtain a higher engineering qualification through the Institution of Civil Engineers.

…

On the ship to England there was a woman who, having noticed my surname on the passenger list, told me that my sister Tess was in London working as a journalist for a group of Australian newspapers. I had not seen or heard of Tess since our father died in 1934 and in fact, my being so young at the time, I did not remember anything about her. Soon after arrival I contacted her and we hit it off immediately. Tess knew London well and together we went in search of paintings by our reputed ancestors, of which there were a number in Hampton Court and the National Portrait Gallery in London.

It was not only a pleasure to meet Tess, but it was also very fortunate for me that I did. Soon after arrival in London I began to feel weak in the afternoons. Before long I was staying in my bed sweating with fever and slightly delirious. Tess arranged for a doctor, who diagnosed that I had a severe attack of malaria. He sent me to hospital. Without her attention, I may have had serious complications.

It turned out that I had picked up the disease from the mosquitos in Papua, but it only became virulent in my system weeks after I stopped taking the prophylactic pills. By the time I was admitted to hospital I was extremely anaemic, with my blood count down to sixtyfive percent of normal. Although cases of malaria were very rare in UK, my doctor happened to have worked in Africa and knew the symptoms. I was placed in the tropical diseases section of London University Hospital, where I became a showpiece for the students, who came in groups to see my extended spleen. Drugs were available and in two weeks my red cell count was restored and the parasite eradicated from my system. I never had a recurrence.

At twentyone, although I had come to London to extend my engineering qualifications, I was soon caught up in the fascination of new places. Travelling by ship I had seen the exotic port cities of Colombo, Bombay, Port Said, Aden, and Marseilles. Although I started to study engineering as an external student at Kings College, London University, in Bloomsbury, after four months I set out to travel around Europe. I spent the remainder of the year largely hitch-hiking and staying at Youth Hostels, in France, Italy, Austria and Germany. I met Tess briefly in Paris, where she introduced me to some of the more famous landmarks and places. I then followed the guide book highlights—the Loire Valley with its innumerable châteaux, the Riviera, Rome, Pompeii and Capri. I returned through Umbria to Florence and Venice, then crossed the Dolomite mountains to Innisbruck.

Europe was still recovering from the war and visas were needed at all borders. Few people hitch-hiked, although it was safe. Local people showed an interest in meeting an Australian. In Germany I joined a goodwill project of foreign students working together in the forest of the Harz Mountains with German young people.

Some had been Hitler Youth and were anxious to rehabilitate after the disorientation of defeat. I was then invited to stay in Hamburg with the German count who was sponsoring the project. He had a beautiful apartment and accommodated me with the refinement of his class, although, like everyone else at that time, he had lost all his wealth with the issue of new currency.

Back in London from France in August 1950, having spent all my savings in Europe, it was obvious that I would have to work and study part-time. Living in digs in South London, I took a job for a few months at Liberty's in Regent Street replying to customers' letters but, as winter came on, I found it too difficult to also keep up my studies. Through the Institution of Civil Engineers I found there was a possibility of an external course and of going out to Africa with the Colonial Service. I joined the Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN) under the chief engineer Mr CU Jessup and sailed on the *Apapa* for Lagos on 15 November 1950.

I lived and worked three years in Nigeria. The salary and working conditions were good and, as it turned out, so was the social life.

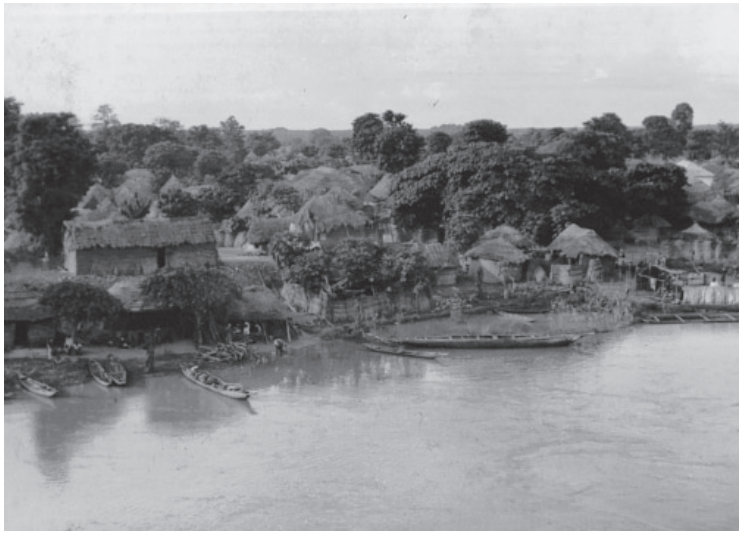
The ECN had taken over operation of the Government electricity undertakings in 1951. At that time the consumption of electricity per head was only 4 kWh per year. The equipment in the oil and coal power stations was in a poor state often breaking down. It had been hoped that a cheap supply of power could be provided by developing the country's water resources, chiefly the Niger River and rivers in the Cameroon Highlands.

Initially I was junior engineer for general civil works and when I returned for a second term I was in charge of hydro-electric investigations. I was given the responsibility to arrange my own work program, ranging over a country one and a half times the size of France and with a population of more than thirty million people. I was equipped with a Land Rover and boat and travelled throughout the river systems, collecting information on stream flows at Ogun Gorge, Oni Gorge, Gurara Falls, Cross River and many other sites.

The countryside ranged from savannah with stunted trees over large areas to tropical forests in the south-east and semi-deserts in the north. Although West Africa was not so well endowed with large wild animals as East and Southern Africa, there were animals of some kind in all the remote areas. Where I camped on the Ogun, tribes of baboons would sit and watch me working. There I saw the extraordinary aardvark—a primitive mammal anteater like a huge pig. West Africa's most dangerous animal, the bush buffalo, left its tracks close to my camp one night.

With consultants from UK, I measured current speeds in rapids on the Niger River and explored the Bamenda Province in Eastern Nigeria, a remote and beautiful plateau where Fulani people lived virtually unvisited by outsiders. I spent some time in Victoria, near Cameroon, setting up gauging stations on a series of waterfalls in the dense jungle. The British had established a high standard of civil administration in this, their largest colony in Africa, and with it had set up a network of good rest houses. Using these, I travelled throughout Nigeria, working with the people in all three regions, visiting the highlands and meeting some northern chiefs. I prepared designs for large (barrage) and small (run-of-river) hydro-electric projects, the Niger River at Jebba being the most promising.

Just as I had a dangerous moment in Papua, I also got into trouble one day on the Oji River near Enugu. I started out to survey an area for a new power station and in order to clear a space where I could set up my theodolite, I set the grass alight, thinking that I could limit the fire. In a moment the wind swept the fire out of control and up the hillside towards a village. The fire was an enormous danger to the people's grass roof huts, threatening their children, their animals, and their granaries. There was panic as the whole village turned out to fight the flames. Luckily, they controlled it before it got to the houses. For a few moments I thought that I would be lynched. If the fire had reached their houses, I probably would have been. The village policeman suggested that I leave quietly and quickly. I was badly shaken and needed no convincing.



A village on the Niger River, Nigeria, West Africa

Meeting local chiefs with UK consultants, Northern Nigeria 1953

Nigeria was not yet fully independent from Great Britain in 1951 and the European expatriates still enjoyed many of the privileges of colonial living. Housing and cars were part of the salary package and everyone had servants. The tropical working day was short and social life was for most people the focus of their spare time. I played tennis and joined the yacht club, buying my own boat and spending weekends racing in the harbour and sailing to beautiful ocean beaches nearby. There were few single English women, but one , who was an ECN secretary, became a close friend. We sailed together, played tennis and enjoyed classical music. When it came to eating out and dancing, there were two clubs where Europeans could go on weekends. We got in with a crowd of BOAC (British Airways) pilots and joined their hectic party life.

After three years I completed my course by correspondence with BIET (affiliated with London University) in the UK, and passed the examinations for Associate Membership of the Institution of Civil Engineers (AMICE). I returned to London by ship in October 1953.

I now went to Paris to study the history of art. I took lodgings with a French professor of English on the Left Bank and began a systematic study of the galleries. I had been introduced to Mme Tanaka, widow of the Japanese artist, Tanaka. The American-born Mme Tanaka was in her eighties and with her husband, had been part of the group of artists including Picasso, Matisse, and Braque, who gathered in the cafes of Montparnasse in her earlier years. She was an enchanting personality, she knew the galleries well and had a fine artistic eye. Over the next three months I went with her regularly to all the galleries and exhibitions, examining, comparing and discussing the paintings from the Renaissance to the Moderns. I studied the history of the various movements and spent hours at her studio—stacked with Tanaka's gentle paintings—drinking coffee and listening to her stories of the famous artists and their agents, for whom she had mixed respect. 'Picasso owed much of his fame to his good agent,' she said.

Meantime I enjoyed the cafe life of the students. I had a French girlfriend, of whom I was very fond. She was a wine chemist and loved dancing. I think her parents were relieved when I left as they had a Gallic suspicion of the English, which extended to me.

Such had been my life when I encountered the writings of Ouspensky when travelling back from Europe to Australia in March 1954.

In Melbourne I returned to my parent's house. I took a job with one of the well-known firms of consulting engineers designing concrete structures, but my mind was elsewhere. I was obsessed by the implications of the Gurdjieff ideas: I could only hope to stay *awake* if I could find an esoteric school. For the time being I was simply earning a living.

When winter came I decided to go for a skiing weekend at Mt Hotham. I had brought a car with me from West Africa so I was able to drive up on the Friday night and the next morning enjoy myself on the snow. That evening as I sat with others around the large open fire in the chalet an attractive girl with her leg in plaster came in on crutches. I was introduced and spent a pleasant evening talking with her. We arranged to meet again back in Melbourne.

Ann lived in Balwyn only two kilometres from East Kew and I began to see her often at her parents' house. We were in love and soon became engaged. The following summer we were married. Ann's mother had a business that designed beautiful clothes. Her clients were the rich and famous. Our wedding was held in a fashionable church and the reception was, so the papers said, one of the most elegant that Melbourne had seen in those days.

I had told Ann about the Gurdjieff ideas. With her agreement I rang Coombe Springs and asked Mr Bennett if we could join his school. Apparently he thought that if we would travel half way around the world to attend, then we should be given a chance.

We decided to spend our honeymoon in India. We took a ship to Bombay and from there travelled across the country by train to Calcutta, and then on to Darjeeling. We stayed on a tea plantation with a young couple I had met the year before on the boat to Australia. Their house was on the high point of the estate and had a wide view of the Himalayas. We climbed Tiger Hill to watch the sunrise on the Kangchenjunga Range, met Sherpa Tensing (who had climbed Mount Everest with Edmund Hillary) and visited Sikkem, the nearest point in India to Tibet. On our way back we went sightseeing in Benares, then to Agra to see the Taj Mahal, and to Jaipur and Udaipur to see the water palaces of the Moguls. Three weeks later we picked up a ship at Bombay for London to start our new adventure at Coombe Springs.

Chapter Four

Subud at Coombe Springs

The day after my meeting with Mr Bennett at Coombe Springs, I went up to London and was shown into the large oak-panelled office of Mr William F Rees, in Victoria Street, SWI. (Victoria Street was to civil engineers what Harley Street was to doctors). As founder and managing director of the substantial company of building and civil engineering contractors bearing his name he was at the top of his profession. He greeted me with a friendly smile and fatherly touch on the arm. It was obvious by the way he spoke about my aunt that he was a close friend. After asking about my work experience and particular interests, he offered me a job in his company's project office in Norwich.

I returned to Coombe Springs and told Mr B what had happened. He said that there was a small group of Gurdjieff people in Norwich meeting under the leadership of Dr Brian Jennings, a psychiatrist. We could join them and, as Norwich was only a hundred miles away, that we could drive down each weekend for the *Y Group* meetings. I took the job and moved to Norwich that same week.

Brian and Mary Jennings became our mentors and the source of our daily Gurdjieff self-knowledge exercises. The basis was the writings of Ouspensky, which I continued to read: Firstly the admission (which I had come to) that man does not know *himself.* He is in fact a machine brought into motion by reacting. As he is, everything just happens to him. However, he can know that he is mechanical and then he may find ways to change. He must realise that *h*e is not one; not one unchanging *I,* he is many. (His body, his name, and his habits give him the illusion of always being the same.)

'Development,' Ouspensky wrote, 'cannot begin until man realises that he does not possess the qualities that he ascribes to himself: capacity to do, permanent ego, consciousness and will.'

Observation of our ourselves, he said, leads us to the conclusion that man is not conscious of himself, but man has the possibility of four states of consciousness: *sleep, waking state, self-consciousness* and *objective consciousness.* He lives only in the first two states: sleep and waking state. Our waking state might be more accurately called 'waking sleep' or 'relative consciousness'. Of this I was convinced.

We rented a flat and set up our first home. We drove the three and a half hour journey to Coombe Springs each weekend. After two long days of heavy manual work in the garden I would return so tired on Sunday night that I would fall asleep at the wheel. We only made it by Ann sharing the driving those long hours after midnight on the deserted roads.

Winter brought its share of snow and rain and long evenings by a small briquette fire. The WF Rees office in Norwich had been established for a large contract in the area so when, after Christmas, our tender was unsuccessful it was decided to close. Mr Rees sent a message to say that the only job he had available for me was on Jersey, in the Channel Islands. This wouldn't permit us to continue attending the Gurdjieff group so I resigned. Mr B said if we came back to London we could live at Coombe Springs in the *Fish Bowl.*

I now took a job as a design engineer with Soil Mechanics Ltd, the consulting division of John Mowlem and Company, one of England's four main contractors. The office was in Victoria Street. Ann learnt to type and also went out to work. As winter lingered on, the London fogs—it was the days of London's infamous smog—were so thick that, if we used the car, one of us would have to walk in front to keep us on the road.

Now in residence we became immersed in the 'secret society' atmosphere of Coombe Springs, devoting ourselves daily to the psychological exercises designed to awaken us from our sleeping state and to establishing a more permanent waking consciousness.

Mr Bennett was the leader for the residents' special group and, although I would not have thought in those terms at the time, he was a father figure to me. I loved, admired and trusted him. He was the finest man—in terms of his humanity, intelligence and value system—that I had ever met. He became an important influence in my life for which I was to remain forever grateful.

I was totally committed to *The Work,* as the Gurdjieff system was called. It was said that inner work must proceed on three levels: for oneself, for the group, and for mankind. I had no problem in honouring this, as I was convinced of my own need and that mankind needed conscious people. As for the group level, the feeling of brotherhood among the Gurdjieff people surpassed anything I had ever known.

Living at Coombe Springs was, for me, a wonderful experience. The rituals of 5.00 am cold water ablutions in winter to midnight saunas only reinforced my zeal. I was young, strong and healthy. We practised sensing exercises—through relaxation and attention; self observation —through acts of self denial, and the movements. All these produced higher quality energies and improved awareness. Not that self-knowledge was always a happy experience. When I found that I couldn't experience the sensation of my limbs in the relaxation exercises I was very frustrated. As time passed, I found that my quality of perception improved and I had glimpses of a more intense experience of reality. For example, after a weekend of concentration, I would see the actual *being* of my environment that I had passed a hundred times before, seeing it only as objects. A tree seen with this higher energy became a living being, with a *presence.* Ouspensky might have called such modest experiences 'Living on pennies found in the street—a poor standard of living', but to me it gave my life aim and direction. As a young pupil I had so much to learn from Mr Bennett that the bigger question of whether the Gurdjieff system could ultimately bring me to a permanent change of being rather than to a temporary change of perception never bothered me.

In August 1956 Ann and I went for a holiday to France. Mr Bennett arranged for us to meet the leader of a Gurdjieff group in Paris on the way. The teacher was Tchekhovitch, a Russian émigré, who had been with Gurdjieff before he died in 1941. All I knew about him was from a story told by Mr B that he was a huge man (he had been a wrestler as a young man) and that one day when he was with Gurdjieff he had fallen asleep with exhaustion while working high up on a scaffolding. The other students had the job of getting him down.

We had been invited to arrive at 9 pm at a small upstairs flat in a poor district of central Paris. (It may have been the flat used by Gurdjieff himself.) We didn't know that there would be a meeting and there had been no mention of a meal. In England our dinner was at 6 pm. We therefore had something to eat—not just a snack but a substantial steak dinner. When we arrived we found a narrow room almost filled by a long table. Several people were preparing food in a kitchenette. Everyone was, in the Gurdjieff fashion, going about their business in total silence. More people arrived and more food was placed on the table. There was seating for about eight but the food looked enough for thirty. Every dish was different from any I had seen before—soused fish, goulash, a very special red beet and herb salad, and so on. Finally we sat down and we were toasted as guests and invited to eat. Taking only a little, I was pressed to take more. The next hour was agony. I had to keep eating because every dish was served and I was a guest. I never forgot my lesson: when invited out, be prepared to honour the host's hospitality. After the meal came the mental exercises. They were like mathematical puzzles with a twist. Tchekhovitch would ask questions, going around the room person by person. Not speaking French, I thought I could escape this game, but no, the questions were translated. I didn't fare any better than I had with the food. When it finished in the late hours, I left unhappily aware of my shortcomings. The objective to show me my weaknesses had been successful. But what I remember more than the shame was the extraordinary feeling of love from the big Russian as he walked us down the dark wet cobblestone street, his arms enveloping us like an huge bear.

At Mr B's suggestion we went to visit the Château du Prieurè, Avon, near Fontainebleau, where Gurdjieff had located his school before the war. Now used as a nursing home, its grounds neglected, it was hard to imagine the intensity of life that filled its halls and gardens in the days of Katherine Mansfield. From there we went south to see the pre-historic paintings discovered this century at Lascaux in France and those in Altamira in Spain. Mr B had visited these caves with Gurdjieff who, he said, had interpreted the mysterious composite animal as being an emblem of an esoteric society, and the deer as totems of individual people, the number of points on the antlers representing the degree of attainment.

After almost a year living at Coombe Springs we joined with four other families to buy and convert Beverley Lodge, a large Edwardian house nearby in Coombe Lane, into apartments. It had great oak trees and, in spring, drifts of bluebells and daffodils.

I had meantime joined the Coombe Springs architects' group on the design of a new *movements* hall called the Djamichunatra (a Gurdjieff word relating to the transformation process, later shortened by popular use to the Djami) and became responsible for the structural engineering design. The group of twelve professionals worked together with Mr B to develop a building with an atmosphere appropriate to its sacred use such as Mr B had seen during his travels in the Middle East. The proportions were calculated according to the symbolism of the Gurdjieff *Enneagram,* a mystical symbol portraying the transformation of man's spiritual energies. We all believed the building was very special, both for its aesthetic design and for its symbolism. Mr Bennett's record of the design and building of the Djamichunatra is described in his book *Witness*. He writes that on 15 September 1953 he went on a journey to South-west Asia:

> '… to make a study of the buildings old and new which had been used for various rituals and spiritual exercises by Christians, Muslims and the lesser sects of South-west Asia. My aim was to discover, if possible, the way in which enclosed spaces can concentrate psychic energies. My own studies had led me to the belief that the shape and size of buildings and the disposition of the masses have an effect upon the psychic state of those who enter them to share in an experience.

'In Istanbul, I went out of the old city through the Adrianople Gate, and found the monastery of the Mevlevi dervishes which I used to visit in 1920. … I measured the Sema Hané and made sketches. Later, I did the same at the Mevlevi Hané in Péra, now a police station, and found that the basic dimensions were identical.

'On the 22 September I travelled to Konya. … Every day that I spent in Konya I went to the great Mevlevi Tekke, the home of the poet Djellaluddin Rumi—founder of the Order of Mevlevi Dervishes. The Sema Hané was built in the twelfth century under the direction of his son, Sultan Veled, by the Seldjuk Kings of Konya. It is the prototype of three hundred and sixty-five similar buildings, distributed throughout South-west Asia. As I studied it, I became convinced that the size and proportions of the building were derived from some lost art of creating a concentration of psychic energies, that could influence the inner state of those who met in it to worship God.

On 11 May 1955, Mr Bennett went for a two week trip to Baghdad and Damascus where a dervish teacher told him that 'a Messenger is already on earth … to show the way (out of the present great wickedness in the world) and that he (Mr Bennett) was one of those chosen to prepare the way.' He then writes:

'Within fifteen days of leaving London, I was back again at Coombe Springs. Two decisions had been taken. I would propose to the Council of the Institute that we should go forward with the building of a great hall at Coombe Springs, and I would give a series of public lectures in London in the autumn. The group of architects, under the leadership of Robert Whiffen, was delighted with the decision to build. The money was made available by loans made by our pupils in amounts from one pound to two thousand. A new life seemed to inspire Coombe Springs.

'On 23rd March, 1956 … (we) started work on the great hall. Snow was on the ground as we worked. As the weeks passed, we were surrounded by crocuses, daffodils and bluebells. The team formed itself. In addition to English residents at Coombe, we had Americans, Canadians, Australians, South Africans and a Norwegian. Whenever a specialist was needed, he appeared from somewhere. The work of the architects' group was out of the ordinary. Twelve to fifteen men, with sharply differing tastes and views on architecture, worked together without either pay or personal credit. 'No single feature was incorporated in the building that all did not accept. This sometimes meant waiting for weeks or months before some part of the building could go forward.

> I took some part in all this, but we were all convinced that no one person could do anything. The building seemed to have a plan and a purpose of its own, and all we could do was to wait until one part after another of the plan was revealed.
>
> 'We had laid out the hall so that the central axis pointed to Fontainebleau where Gurdjieff was buried. He had spoken of a nine-sided building which exemplified in its proportions the Laws of World Creation and World Maintenance, and as the plan of the new hall came to life, we found in it an expression of the laws of which Gurdjieff wrote in *All and Everything*. … I was asked to give a name to the building, and chose the word Djamichunatra, taken from Chapter 46 of *All and Everything,* where it is used to describe the place where the soul receives its spiritual nourishment.'

In March 1956 at Mr B's suggestion I gave up my work with Mowlem's in London to supervise the construction. He arranged for me to have the conservatory in the main house as an office. When we came to start we found that we had all the skills necessary within the membership. Largely they were capable amateurs and included carpenters from among the architects, a hobby welder, a plumber trained in copper roofing, and a sculptor. A stained glass artist, Rosemary Rutherford, was a professional. A small team worked during the week and up to forty on the weekends.

As part of *The Work* Mr B made everything as difficult as possible. We had to dig and screen our own gravel for the concrete from within the grounds. At first he insisted we build a crane instead of hiring one. When this proved dangerous and unworkable, he allowed us to hire one, but only on condition that we erected it ourselves piece by piece. Our trust was exceeded only by our sincerity and commitment. We worked physically until we almost dropped from exhaustion and then continued on with our psychological exercises. We forged a brotherhood through sacrifice and common desperation—the need to *remember ourselves.* Every detail was constructed with loving care. Scrolls containing information about *The Work* were sealed into the large redwood frames for posterity.

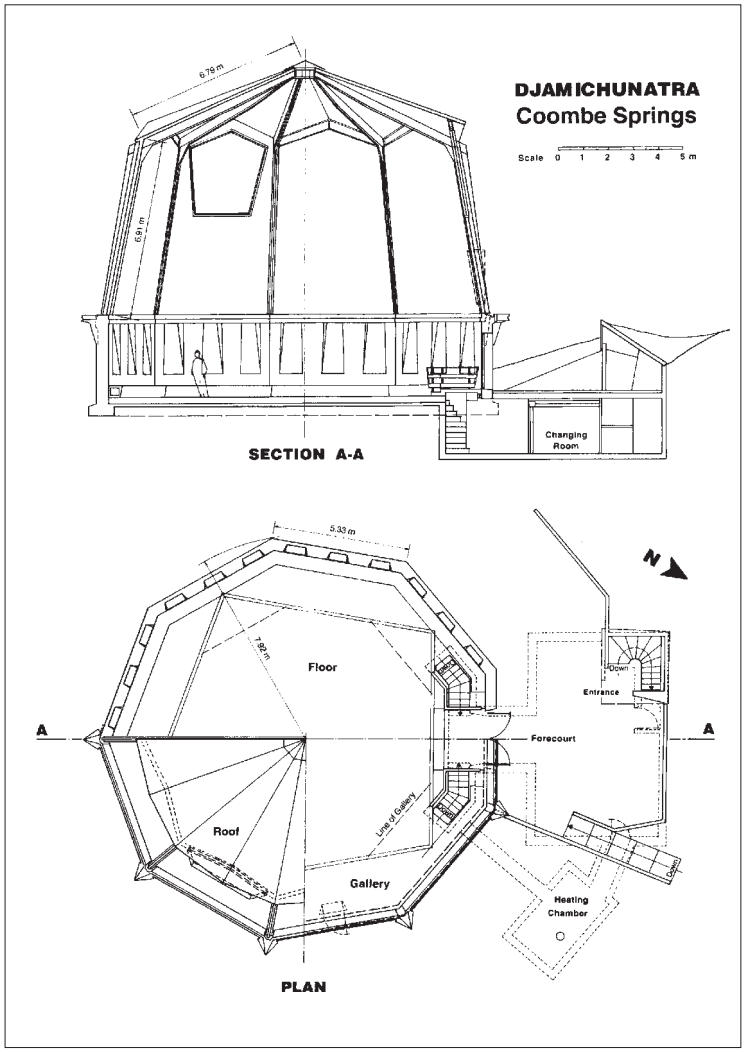
In appearance the building shape was unique and striking. It had nine sides with large slanting cedar walls rising from a fifteen metres diameter concrete base. It stood twenty metres high with a sloping faceted roof. Inside, subdued light filtered down through slots in the top of the walls, and three large stained glass windows high up on the timber walls lit the space above. There was no furniture except for a seat for about eighty people around the inside perimeter. The timber floor was covered with rugs for large meetings. Although the building did not appear large from the outside, the height and vaulting ceiling inside created a sense of inner space. Even with three hundred people seated it did not seem crowded.

We were delighted when Frank Lloyd Wright, whose wife had connections with the Gurdjieff movement in the USA, came to see it and gave his approval. 'A nice little building!' he said.

Architects: Left background Richard Bigwood and right Bob Whiffen

Djamichunatra meeting in the Conservatory, Coombe Springs,1956

Architects' meeting. John Donat left, myself centre right, Tom Pope right



Architect's drawing of Djamichunatra, Coombe Springs

Djamichunatra construction, the nine main frames in position

Inspecting the roof framing. Bob Prestie on the right. Photos John Donat

Placing the Djamichunatra frames. Bob Whiffen (left) and John Blakey

Djamichunatra construction continued late into the night

Djamichunatra completed in autumn 1957. Photo John Donat

Djamichunatra in the winter snow 1957

Frank Lloyd Wright inspects the Djamichunatra 1957. Photo John Donat

An Experiment in Modern Living

by
JESSICA
YOUNG

Five families share an Edwardian house in Kingston-upon-Thames

FIVE FAMILIES, all close friends, who wanted a home near London, have worked out a novel solution to the housing problem. They found a large Edwardian house, Beverley Lodge, Kingston-upon-Thames, pooled their resources and bought it between them. The house could have only two legal owners, but, in practice, each of the five contributed according to the floor space they intended to occupy. As only one or two of the flats had "usual offices," each was equipped with kitchen and bathroom fittings from the common money pool.

After two years, the participators report that they are still the best of friends, and, far from finding themselves at too close quarters, they all live quite independent lives and are delighted when they meet away from home. A courageous experiment in mutual confidence, and a most successful one. Our photographs show three of the five homes.

THE JAPANESE FLAT

Although separated by only one floor from Mrs. King's Dutch flat, one seems in walking upstairs to have travelled halfway across the earth. Jan van Sommers is a constructional engineer with a family background of interest in design, and he and his wife, Ann, were inspired by Japan for the appearance of their beautiful modern flat. Its decor is almost all white, with natural pine boarding used everywhere for its feeling of cleanness and for its simplicity.

In the hall an African carpet in ochre, black and white sets the colour scheme, the ceiling being painted ochre. A linocut by Mr. van Sommers' father has an African theme.

Leading straight through from the hall is the kitchen-dining-room, with a solid modern table and chairs of natural beech in the dining recess. The working surfaces in the kitchen and also the deep window recess in the living-room were all cut from a huge old kitchen table and match the mellow colour of the grooved-and-tongued pine boarding.

As the rooms were small, it was decided to keep them as free of furniture as possible. In the sitting-room, the floor space is empty, and guests are asked to remove their shoes before entering, for they will sit on brightly coloured cushions on the white Indian carpet. A divan with a vividly striped cover is available for those who need more support! Ground-level bookcases and plenty of prints on the wall banish any sense of austerity in this tranquil, beautiful room.

Top: for the Japanese living-room colour was limited to blue curtains, a striped divan cover, bright cushions against white walls and white carpet.

Left: the kitchen shows Japanese influence in its use of natural wood with white walls and a sunny, yellow floor — simple, practical and spotless.

Left: the hall of Mr. and Mrs. van Sommers' Japanese flat. Light is admitted from the staircase through a large plate-glass panel wall.

The van Sommers' flat conversion in Beverley Lodge, near Coombe Springs

In early 1957, as the hall was nearing completion, Mr B told us, in the 'Young Group', that something important was going to happen. He said no more, except that it was confidential. In the weeks that followed I began to experience a deep remorse. It was not a feeling of self-judgment about any specific error. It was more a general and overwhelming heavy feeling that I was altogether less than I ought to be. When I told Mr B's wife Elizabeth, she said, 'I believe that what you are experiencing is connected with something important that is coming.'

About this time Mr B told us that he had come to believe that the prospects for any of us ever reaching a change of *essence* through the Gurdjieff teaching were extremely limited. However, he said, a man has now come who can help us. He believed that this person had been foretold in Gurdjieff's writings as the one who could open the conscience of man. He said very little else about what to expect.

What we were to learn later was that this help involved a completely new and different process where, instead of us relying on a spiritual teacher and our own efforts, we would be brought into contact with a tangible higher power, or life force. And that by surrendering to this higher power, the higher power itself would work the transformation of our essence or soul. This power, moreover, had only newly become available to mankind, and was a gift from God brought by the one sent to transmit it, Pak Subuh, who had founded the *Subud* brotherhood for this purpose.

Before telling us, Mr B had himself received the contact with this higher power and had been *opened** in Subud. As I had been doing relaxation exercises in a group with him every day, I had been exposed to its working, known as the *latihan,* and it was this, I later came to understand, that had stirred my conscience.

Soon afterwards Bapak Muhammad Subuh (Pak Subuh) arrived at Coombe Springs.

* For the meaning of this and other Subud terms, *see* **Subud Glossary** .

On 7 June 1957 I joined a small group of about six men to be *opened* by Pak Subuh in Mr Bennett's study in Coombe Springs. As I entered the darkened room—the only light was filtered through the drawn blinds—I didn't immediately see the figures already there. The air was warm and smelt of some aromatic spice, which I later found to be the clove cigarettes smoked by the Indonesians. I had taken off my shoes and was aware of the carpet underfoot. Then I saw Pak Subuh and with him Mr B and one or two others. We were told to close our eyes and relax. I stood quietening myself with all the piety that I could command.

Then Pak Subuh said 'Begin!'. Nearby I heard movement and sighs, and sensed, or perhaps imagined, he was in front of me. I felt my consciousness draining away and fell as if in a faint. I came to as someone said 'Finish!' and I saw that others were also on the floor or starting to get up.

Three days later I repeated the *latihan,* again with Bapak (as Pak Subuh was known) and a group of other men who had also been opened. We were told to close our eyes and follow whatever arose from within us, and to take no notice of other people. As soon as Bapak said 'Begin!' I could hear activity and sounds all around me. Some people were moving about, some letting out cries, some laughing with relief, and so on. It was not easy to ignore the noise but as no one actually bumped into me I gradually relaxed and followed the slight indications of movement that I seemed to feel. That week there was a constant procession of new people coming to Coombe Springs to receive the *contact* from Bapak. The atmosphere of expectation was intense.

The following week, on 14 June 1957, Bapak gave his first explanatory talk to newly-opened men and women at Coombe Springs. This was the first time that I had been able to observe Bapak. He was of medium height, taller than the other Indonesians in his party, and well built. He moved easily without haste or superfluous movement, giving the impression that he was completely at ease with himself and his surroundings. He was in his late fifties.

Bapak Muhammad Subuh at Coombe Springs, June 1957

He dressed neatly in a western suit and tie and wore an Islamic black velvet petji (a hat without a brim). His soft brown eyes were direct and steady, seeming to see much more than ordinary people do and yet friendly. He had a ready smile which showed perfect even white teeth against his smooth light brown skin. When he spoke he accompanied his rich voice with expressive gestures, his body moving with the eloquence of his words.

Bapak started by saying that his talk was only for those who had already been opened and were following the latihan. From this I understood that he wished to avoid anyone inadvertently being opened who had not freely asked for the contact. I quote him here at length as this explanation was my introduction to Subud:

'For those of you who are not yet opened it is not time for you to listen to this, for what Bapak is going to explain is more or less the direction and requirements of the spiritual way. Maybe one day you too can listen. According to Bapak's experience, it is not Bapak who would be harmed, but those listeners who have not yet received the training [latihan], since they still lack the inner strength to receive this. It might lead to unpleasant consequences, and if that happens they will certainly blame Bapak.

Brothers and sisters, all of you who are present here at this time, before Bapak explains what is needed and other matters related to the spirit, Bapak—as an ordinary human being who is always affected and enveloped by mistakes in his behaviour—does not forget to ask your forgiveness in case there is something in what he says that offends you, that hurts your feelings and makes you unhappy. That is what Bapak asks of you all.

As regards the training [latihan] that you have all received, it is in truth the worship of the One God by human beings, but not in a way that is familiar to you, for Bapak can say that this training is something new that he has been willed by God to practise. But its content is not new: it was present at the beginning of everything, and it was recorded as the content of all those who have tried to worship the greatness of God.

'And why does this particular method differ from the others? Maybe because nowadays human beings are truly oppressed by the conditions of rapid progress that are taking place, and are unwilling, or find it hard to resist all the pressures that are continuously acting upon them. For human beings nowadays are no longer like those in earlier times who only experienced quietness and tranquillity; today human beings are confronted by conditions that are full of things that can harm and diminish their human status.

'This is perhaps why it is God's will that we should be able to practise our worship without neglecting or putting aside or withdrawing from the state of the world we face at this time. It is clear that, whatever it was that you received in your training [latihan], you remained fully conscious. The purpose or significance of this is that God indeed intends human beings to worship Him without withdrawing from or putting aside their normal needs in this world. So, in order to worship God you do not need to isolate yourself, avoid society or your worldly needs. You should be able to worship God while living a normal life, enjoying the companionship of your wife, children and friends.

'Indeed, this state or experience you have received is unexpected and also beyond the realm of the human intellect. It is also beyond human expectation that a teaching or practice or training that leads to the worship of God looks so simple and be practised while living the complete life of a normal human being. That is why there are very many people who consider—and say—that what we obtain in the training [latihan] cannot be true because we only practise it for such a very short time. In general, as Bapak himself found out, many of those who practise what Bapak called the worship of God or apply themselves to mystical ways, spend considerable amounts of time at it.

'Bapak does not find fault with these opinions, for indeed that is generally how it was done in the past. But the fact that Bapak has been able to receive, and in turn to guide you, by such a simple way, is fortunate for human beings in general. And perhaps this has happened because of the will of God who—if we thought of God as a human—

has remembered the state of mankind at this time. However, if Bapak examines the state of the world—and God's response to it—more deeply and more broadly, it becomes clear that [what we have received] is indeed well suited to our time or our epoch and works in a way that fits with today.

'In fact, in times past something like this already existed, and was also received by the prophets; the reason why it was not practised is because at that time such a way was not needed. The present is different from those earlier times and those earlier times were very different from today. This is what Bapak needed to explain regarding the apparent difference between one and the other. …'

At the end of his explanation Bapak answered questions.

Questioner:
'In us there is an attention that has to be fixed on something, or it will go into thoughts, feelings, or daydreams … (What should we do about that?)'

Bapak:
That will come by itself, later, for this is from the power of God, so it can overcome any obstacle. Indeed, it is an attribute of the human brain that it must think, therefore it is not possible for you to quieten your thoughts until your brain has been separated from your self: God will not take it away but He is able to reach through it. So the part of the brain that thinks will continue to think, but the way in which it thinks will be different. For previously it was filled with desire (in Indonesian nafsu) and eventually it will be filled with the power of God. That's how it works.

Take something that is easy to see, like walking. You may have seen or experienced it yourself in the training (latihan), that you are trained to walk, even though you clearly already know how to walk, since you are already accustomed to walking. But with the latihan your walk is different from your normal walk. When you are walking with the latihan you may feel, 'This is very strange; I am walking even though I have no desire to walk.'

What this shows is that the power of God is there before every beginning. Thus the steps you take after having received the latihan can eventually be a guidance that will save your own feet, for your feet will no longer be able to get lost.

For example, once these legs have been filled (with God's power), they spontaneously turn away. You experience the same thing in your training (latihan) when you are walking like this and there is a friend in front of you, you turn around by yourself. Clearly the inner part of you knows more than the outer. In Dutch they call it instinctlief.

[Recording 57 CSP 1]

As to the origin of the *latihan*, I first read about it in the book *Concerning Subud,* which Mr Bennett wrote in 1959:

'Bapak was born near Semarang in Central Java, on 22 June 1901, a date which coincided with the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad on the Islamic calendar. The baby was named Sukarno but with that name he was always ill so it was changed to Muhammad Subuh, to correspond with the time of his birth, 5 am—Subuh,* meaning dawn. He was raised by his grandparents. At school he was taught in Javanese and Indonesian, and later in the Dutch language. When his grandfather died Bapak took a job and studied book-keeping, taking over the care of his parents and younger brother and sister.

'One night in Semarang in the summer of 1925, when he was twenty-four years of age, he received the latihan. He had gone out for a walk and at about 1 am on his way home he was startled by a light shining from above. He looked up to see a ball of radiant white light fall on his head. His body started shaking, and his chest heaving. He hurried home and lying on his bed he surrendered to God. He then arose, but not from his own will, and performed his Islamic prayers. From then on he was woken almost every night and made to move: martial arts, dancing, singing new melodies, and so on.

'In the years that followed many friends interested in spiritual matters used to regularly visit Bapak's house to seek advice.

* Subuh: The word Subuh has no direct connection with the word Subud.

He continued to receive and follow these movements of his inner self which he later called the *latihan kejiwaan* and, although these people came in contact with the life force that he was receiving, Bapak said he felt that it was not yet the time to open people. …

'During 1932 he had a number of strong spiritual experiences and as a result he felt it necessary to give up work in order to devote himself totally to the latihan. The confirmation to do this came around the time of his birthday in June with his experience of a spiritual Ascension. He then understood that it was his mission and his task to transmit to everyone who asked for it the latihan that he had received. …

'During World War II, he moved to Yogyakarta and by 1945 there were about three hundred people following the latihan. He gave the group the name *Susila Budhi Dharma*, or SUBUD for short.'

…

For the months after my opening, the latihan was everything. Every day it was my preoccupation. Every latihan I wondered at my good fortune. In the Djami, and later in a large wooden hut, at various times I ran or shook, I wept or laughed, I shouted or sang, I felt my breathing change and stop, I prayed and felt deep silence. Outside I was occasionally touched with blissful joy. I remember sitting in the sun in the rose garden marvelling at everything around me, too beautiful to be expressed in words. The overall effect was inner peace and certainty about the latihan.

My earliest advice from Bapak came during this time when, soon after I was opened, he entered my office where I was working on the construction program for the Djami. He looked at the bar charts showing the building activities in sequence with connecting lines and arrows and said simply, in English, 'Right work!'

The impact of this was, not so much to reassure me that I had chosen the most suitable calling, as this had never been a question for me, but rather to establish a personal relationship with him.

Bapak and his wife Ibu at Coombe Springs, summer 1957

Bapak giving a talk in the Djamichunatra:
(left to right) Ibu, Sjafrudin, Bapak, Icksan Ahmad and John Bennett

The scene outside the front door of Coombe Springs at Bapak's arrival:
(front, left to right) Anwar and Ratna Zakir, Eva Bartok

Then pointing to my chest he said (through his interpreter), 'You were lucky to receive the latihan, otherwise you get sick in there.' I was quite healthy at the time, so this was clearly insight about a weakness. Perhaps because my father had died of pulmonary TB? As my latihan progressed I sometimes breathed heavily, and more than once my breathing stopped for a short period. Again Bapak's assurance that the latihan was of value to me was unnecessary, instead the effect was to consolidate my feeling of connection with Bapak.

As the weeks passed I began to experience doubt about myself. I could not 'find myself'; I felt I had no *I*. My mind found me wanting in every way. It said that I could not relax enough, I could not surrender enough. I was outside God's love. I had never doubted like this in my life. This was my first experience of purification. The problem of *I* which was central to the Gurdjieff work had, by my efforts at concentrating my will on the question, built or crystallised an inner attitude to the problem of identity. Now this attitude was being worked on by the latihan. The unseen concerns which I had accumulated by the Gurdjieff work and which had become imprinted in my psyche were now becoming apparent on their way out. This might be compared with the notion that 'at death our whole life passes before our eyes'. My surrender of my will to God's Will in the latihan was causing a death of these concerns.

One day Ichsan, Bapak's translator, saw me in this state. 'Come! we walk,' he said, sweeping me up with his smile. We walked arm in arm in the garden. 'Just feel,' he laughed, 'You (are) relaxed!' Gradually over the weeks I became accustomed to my doubting and to my ever-changing thoughts. I was all of them—all these *I's*—and, as I gave my attention to other things, my peace returned.

On 3 November 1957 the Djamichunatra was formally offered to Subud. In his inauguration talk Bapak said not to attach undue importance to a building, a reminder of how involved we had become. Mr B rewarded my efforts by paying for an overseas holiday.

We chose to go to Morocco, flying to Gibraltar and crossing to Tangier by boat. Through Husein Rofé, who at that time was coming to latihan at Coombe Springs, we arranged to stay in a small hotel owned by friends of his, the Buckinghams. Husein was an Englishman who was opened by Bapak in Java in 1950 and subsequently played a key role in the spread of Subud outside Indonesia. He brought the contact to England and opened Mr Bennett in November 1956. The Buckinghams were Americans who had lived many years in Tangier. When we arrived I noticed that they were well-known in the Moslem community. They sent out plates of food regularly to the needy and were greeted by the locals wherever they went. As we walked down the street with them we were invited to take tea and cake with the shopkeepers who sat on low rug-covered platforms at the back of their stalls.

Tangier was small and exotic in those days. The hotel, in a long-established area of good quality houses, was built in a beautiful location on a steep cliff that overlooked the Atlantic. The winding narrow streets of the district were bordered by whitewashed walls hung with bougainvillea. The Buckinghams treated us more as friends of Husein than as paying guests, taking us sightseeing and out to restaurants at their expense.

We went inland by train to Fez and Meknes in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. The intensity of Gurdjieff work during the months in UK, and probably the effect of the latihan (although I was not yet conscious of its effects), heightened the quality of my seeing. I was spellbound as I watched the spectrum of pinks and purples of the desert in the changing afternoon light and the awesome canopy of brilliant stars at night. There were few tourists and most local people living in the old town streets and markets appeared to us to be following a life unchanged from medieval times. We visited the markets and the colourful wool-dying area. Berbers, tall and straight, every face etched with character, could be seen dressed in their traditional long handwoven robes. The serenity of these people seemed to us proof of the effectiveness of their Islamic religion.

In the spring of 1958 Bapak returned to Indonesia. Before he went he appointed emergency helpers to take care of the hundreds of people now attending latihan. I was one and had the added task of corresponding with members who had returned to their homelands.

Meantime I had written to my mother about Coombe Springs and in the summer she travelled from Australia to stay with us at Beverley Lodge. She said later that she had hoped to join Subud, but when she got there it somehow didn't work out. I don't know what happened. Perhaps I didn't handle it well. On her way home to Australia she had a severe heart attack. This was later followed by a stroke and some paralysis. In fact my mother was never without illness from that time on. She bore her disabilities with courage, constantly occupying herself weaving, producing beautiful and intricate designs for table linen. She was opened later.

On 18 December 1958 we joined Husein Rofé in Malta for a holiday. A mutual woman friend from Coombe Springs was also visiting there. We all lodged at the same small hotel on the waterfront, where we stayed five days, talking a lot and making excursions together over the rocky fields. Our friend was considering living permanently on the island, and planned to make an income by painting and pottery. She was anxious about her future and we were at times worried by her emotional state.

As it approached Christmas we left Husein in Malta and moved on to Assisi in Italy. We had hardly arrived before I started to quarrel violently with Ann, something that I had almost never done. I was angry beyond measure and stormed off up a grassy hill saying that I was going to leave her.

I had so little experience of the latihan that I did not realise that I was going through a strong purification. It seems that I had picked up our friend's anxiety in Malta and it was coming out on my wife. *It must out* had been an Indonesian saying at Coombe Springs, but now I didn't understand what was happening to me.

By Christmas Eve the experience had passed and we attended midnight Mass at the basilica of St Francis in Assisi. The church had three levels, an upper one where the frescoes of the life of St Francis attributed to Giotto were located, the main church at street level in the middle where services were held, and a crypt at the bottom with the tomb of St Francis. As it approached midnight and the church became packed to the doors with standing worshippers, I began to feel very oppressed, so much so that I had to push my way out through the crowd and leave as quickly as possible to avoid being overcome by the experience. Here again I didn't know enough about the latihan to realise what was happening.

Later I understood that forces activating people's moods can be transferred from one person to another without talking. Ideally, as the latihan cleans our *inner feeling,* we can know what is our own state and what force is coming to us from others, and also know how inwardly to separate from these forces. *Inner feeling* as used by Bapak in his explanations about the *latihan* has a particular meaning in Subud and is difficult to grasp, even after having been opened and having received the *latihan*. In writing about inner experiences, this problem is further complicated by the normal ambiguity of familiar words when applied to spiritual matters. For example the word *feeling* is used loosely by us in English to describe almost every experience: We say we *feel* hot or cold when we have a sensation, we say I *feel* you are right or wrong when we are actually making a thinking judgement, we use *feel* to describe a hunch which may be an intuition, and most commonly we talk about *feeling* angry or sad when we are describing an emotion. CG Jung limits the meaning of *feeling* to describe our function for making a judgement of value—for example, agreeable or disagreeable.

Inner feeling as used by Bapak has a different meaning. It refers to our experience of our inner self in the latihan state, when we are inwardly separated from our judgements, our emotions, and our opinions. It is therefore given a singular noun.

Sensitivity to the forces is needed for us in Subud in order to live according to guidance from the grace of God. As it was, I had begun to be sensitive but had no idea what was happening or how to handle the experience. As my experience in the church became overwhelming, I did the only thing possible—leave. Once outside, we went down to the crypt. It was empty, as everyone was attending the Mass. Now as I approached the sarcophagus containing the body of St Francis I felt myself become deeply peaceful. It was so immediate and clear, that I felt that I was experiencing the presence of the saint himself. With the peace came a sense of the holiness of this place. I left with gratitude and veneration for the saint.

In August 1959 Bapak returned to Coombe Springs to attend the First Subud World Congress. After the Djamichunatra was completed, I had returned to work with John Mowlem and Company where I was employed on the construction of the 33-storey Vickers-Armstrong building in London, and in the evenings I was assisting Niels Lisborg, lecturer at the Architectural Association, with the writing of his textbook *Structural Design.* Both jobs were interesting but for some reason I had become restless and uncertain about staying in England.

This time Bapak's guidance to me was more direct. I was among a small crowd of members waiting at the front door to see him arrive. As he began to walk from the car his eyes met mine and I felt at that moment that I would like to go to Indonesia and work with him. My lifelong commitment to Subud was born. During the following weeks, I asked his advice as to where Ann and I should live. He said New Zealand, but agreed that we first come to Indonesia.

On 26 May 1960, after Bapak had left England on his way to Indonesia, we sailed from Southampton aboard the *Willem Ruys* for Singapore, then flew to Jakarta.

Bapak and Mr. Bennett, Coombe Springs 1957-59

(left to right) Mariam Kibble, Ibu, Irena, Bapak, Icksan, Bob Prestie, Ismana

Delegates at the First Subud World Congress, Coombe Springs 1959

Temporary dining tent, Subud World Congress 1959, Coombe Springs