

~~~ *The Story Of The Lost Expedition (part one)* ~~~

0)Introduction

- The story of The Lost Expedition is rather shaggy and hard to explain concisely.
- In the everyday world we consider things in a linear fashion: first we understand one thing, then we move on to the next thing, then to the next... one thing leads to another as we follow along with this step-by-step progression.
- However... with the Story Of The Lost Expedition everything about it relates to every other thing about it; many essential qualities of the story only come into focus after a number of seemingly separate and unrelated parts are brought into relationship with each other. Not surprisingly this complete inter-relatedness can lead to difficulties
- For one thing, there's a tendency to think we understand one part fully when we first encounter it. But each part of the story has a number of levels to it that are not easy to see initially; it's only after one part of the story is combined with another part that deeper levels of either part become available. So it is often necessary to return to something we think we already know to see if a new part of the story has shifted that first part of the story and given access to these deeper levels.
- Another problem is we want each part of the story to be clear and complete on its own. But the story of The Lost Expedition is a sentient story, it's not about any one part, but rather about the larger whole that the smaller wholes are contained within.
- It's important to remember that if you did make any one part of the story complete it would close off its connection to the larger whole it is part of. It is only because each part is open-ended and non-complete that the whole story can evolve and change (and each individual part within the whole story can also evolve and change)
- It is nice though to have at least some idea about what the whole story is about right at the start. So... we might say that 3 of the essential aspects involved are:
 - **changing the level of consciousness** (which often involves a shift in scale)
 - **landscape** (which is the place where the new level of consciousness manifests)
 - **story** (which becomes a path from one level of consciousness to another)
- Consciousness can seem very subjective and not at all easy to define.
- Landscapes other than the everyday world are hard to find and access.
- But Story is more approachable. You don't have to understand or even agree with a story; all you have to do is follow it along to where it's going.

1)Story

- Story is used in the everyday world in a variety of ways: for entertainment for instance, to illustrate a point perhaps, to make us feel something we want to feel, to make us feel something we don't want to feel...All the various usual things in the usual various ways.
- However with the Story Of The Lost Expedition we'll be using story as a way to talk about something that can't be talked about, to refer to something that can't be seen directly, to bring unknowns (even unknowable unknowns) into relationship together. You might say it's a bit mathematical in a way, like algebra.
- It's not about getting an answer, it's not about finding a value for an unknown "x", or "y". If we bring an unknown "x" into a relationship with unknown "y" we may also notice that unknown "y" is already in a relationship with unknown "z". And if we already know the relationship of unknown "x" to unknown "y", it will suddenly become possible to also bring unknown "x" into relationship to unknown "z" as well.

We might also discover that unknown “z” has relationships to other unknowns too. If we refrain from trying to understand or solve each unknown individually, but focus instead on the relationships the various unknowns form with each other, we can use this inter-relatedness to think in new ways and access levels not available before.

- Used in this way story can become a useful framework for containing many complex relationships in a personally accessible way. Because when you take on a role in a sentient story you become one of the unknowns yourself! And when you do you'll be able to personally experience these new relationships between unknowns first hand.

- En Burk and I began working with the story of The Lost Expedition in Vancouver in the mid 1980's. Over the years the story has continued to evolve as our relationship with it deepened and became more intimate. Many artists have been involved in the story's evolution; though only En and I have been associated with it the entire time.

- When the story of The Lost Expedition first began to reveal itself we only just knew the smallest of fragments (though that one single fragment contained the whole of the story):

***“When The Lost Expedition met
they sat in a circle of 12 seats,
one of which was always empty”***

- Initially just the smallest of fragments, but soon enough it began to grow until something much more evolved and complex came to the fore and presented itself.

2)The Story Of The Lost Expedition (version one)

- Once upon a time a long time ago, a group of explorers discovered that there was another landscape that existed outside of the everyday world. They called this landscape the *Territory* and were quite keen to go there and explore it.

- Very little is now known about this group of explorers except that they thought that access to the *Territory* landscape could be gained by shifting to a different level of consciousness. They hoped this new landscape would give rise to the possibility of further shifts in consciousness, both individually and as a group.

- So way back then (however long ago that was) the group mounted an expedition to find the border to the *Territory* and enter in to investigate what was what and what wasn't.

- Off they went - off and away from the everyday world, and everyone they'd left behind waited for them for many days, eager to hear what they might have found. But the group of explorers never returned. They soon became known as The Lost Expedition.

- For a while there was talk of mounting a new expedition to look for them. But the link between the everyday world and the *Territory* is a tenuous thing and the border between the two landscapes is hard to find at the best of times. Days went by and turned into weeks. Weeks became months and years. Little by little the memory of The Lost Expedition began to fade, and after a while they were completely forgotten.

- Eventually though, as time went by, the everyday world and the *Territory* became re-aligned again. The border between the two became clearer and easier to find.

- The Story Of The Lost Expedition re-emerged and began to be known again. In 1986 a group was formed to go into the *Territory* to try to find out what had happened to them.

- The *Expedition Of '86* started out easily enough. They were able to find a border between the everyday world and the *Territory* right away, and as soon as they crossed through they noticed various indications that could only have been left by The Lost Expedition. They eagerly followed this trail of clues. It led them straight to the ***Happy Ghost House***.

- The Happy Ghosts welcomed them with great enthusiasm. They were in the throes of a massive celebration which featured every holiday all at one time: it was everyone's birthday, it was New Year's Eve, it was Valentine's, Groundhog and Mothers Day too. There were lots of presents and games and balloons, cakes and costumes galore!
- As the festivities abounded all around them The Happy Ghosts assured their visitors that The Lost Expedition had certainly been there. They had many stories and memories about their visit. Jokes and pranks and feats of skill were eagerly recalled and relived; songs were sung and dances danced; tears were shed; great laughter ensued. It was all quite effusive and very emotional - the party continued all through the night. But in the end when dawn arrived the Happy Ghosts had disappeared. And *The Expedition Of '86* was none the wiser about who The Lost Expedition were and where they had finally gone.
- *The Expedition Of '86* continued to follow the trail. After discovering many curious clues they found themselves outside the **Hungry Ghost Hotel**. The door was ajar so they let themselves in.
- The Hungry Ghosts were interested to see them. They told them that The Lost Expedition had certainly passed that way. In fact they'd had a very important discussion with them about a whole new direction of Thought and Art. It had all been decided and understood and they were now in the midst of the planing stage of an elaborate project that would soon be realized. They urged *The Expedition Of '86* to join their discussion. Much impassioned debate ensued, disagreements arose and a few fights broke out as the project unraveled. When the Hungry Ghosts suddenly disappeared some of the expedition's gear went missing as well.
- *The Expedition Of '86* continued on. Though they realized they hadn't learned all that much from the Hungry Ghosts, they sensed that they were on the right track and more would soon be revealed.
- The clues became stronger and more compelling. They found a key to a storage locker. When they finally found the locker itself they discovered a few rather curious objects along with a message from one of members of The Lost Expedition.

Dearest Sharon: I must rush to complete this note to you to ensure that contact is made. I don't know what awaits, something is pressing in upon me with no uncertain strength. How long has it been since we set out? I have lost all track of time. Images of past experiences keep recurring, recollections of gaiety and laughter, times of great sadness, striving to determine the correct path of pursuit! And now suddenly I am being pursued, not only myself but this whole group is being followed. There's a man with a black hat on our tail! Why he is so interested none of us know, but he's definitely stalking us. All we know is we must keep moving, but where we are headed none of us can say. Will I ever see you again? Will we ever know the simple pleasures of sharing together? Will I ever be able to come back home? I don't know how long it will take you to find this note, but for some reason I'm sure you'll eventually pass this way and chance upon it. My love for you never wavers. I look forward to seeing you at this journey's end. Must go now, everyone's getting ready to leave. We've all left something in this locker, some valued token of our passage so far in case our time is up. Our friendship is my most valued possession. I both carry it with me and leave it with you to outlast me. Love forever, Nancy

- As the members of *The Expedition Of '86* were reading all this they suddenly noticed that a man in a black hat was standing nearby watching them as they read the note. It was very disturbing! They left in a rush, but as soon as they did the man in the black hat followed close behind. Things got pretty fast and furious after that!
- Luckily though, the Dangerous Ghosts were looking out for them. Not long after they managed to get away from the man in the black hat they discovered a packet of blindfolds as they stopped in an alley to catch their breath. Nestled inside with the blindfolds was an invitation asking them to dinner at the **Dangerous Ghost Hostel**.
- They put on the blindfolds and very soon after they were whisked away by the Dangerous Ghosts for a night of fine dining and daring dances.

- As the night continued and grew more intense *The Expedition Of '86* knew without ever asking that The Lost Expedition had been to the Dangerous Ghost Hostel before.
- But they never had time to learn anything more about where they were now. The Dangerous Ghosts kept them hopping all night - very little talk but a great deal of action and intimacy. When things settled down just before dawn the blindfolds came out again. After one last dance and many embraces the Dangerous Ghosts packed them all into a *Territory* taxi which drove them quickly away.
- After the taxi dropped them off the members of *The Expedition Of '86* removed their blindfolds. They found themselves on a lonely path that meandered its way through a densely packed forest of immensely tall trees. Eventually they found their way to a circle of seats in a clearing at the heart of the forest. As sunrise came and the day began, they joined with the birds and the wind in the trees and sang a song with the *Territory*.
- After the sound of the song dropped away, they found themselves at the border again. Soon they were back in the everyday world. One by one they each drifted away and went home to their own separate lives.
- Later on when they talked together about what they had done and what they had seen, they all agreed they had come across much compelling evidence that The Lost Expedition had certainly been traveling through the *Territory*. But in the end no-one could say what had happened to them or where they might be today.

3)“Act As If You Believe”

- It is not necessary to actually believe the story of The Lost Expedition is true. But if you **act as if you believe** that it is it will be possible for you to do something new that was not at all possible to do otherwise.
- **Acting as if you believe** is to let go of judgement, to refrain from deciding if something is right or if it's wrong. It is a way of action.
- You can decide how you feel about it any time you want, whether it's true or whether it's not; but if, in the meantime, you **act as if you believe**, something can happen to you while you're deciding. And if you are trying to shift or change yourself this is exactly the opportunity you need, as artists in your artistic work or as persons in your personal life.
- To actually do this it is important not to think of the Story Of The Lost Expedition conceptually. When you **act as if you believe** do so whole-heartedly, don't separate yourself from the story. Remember, each and every member of The Lost Expedition completely believed they were a part of the Story Of The Lost Expedition 100%!
- It is necessary to **act as if you believe** with this same intensity if you want to discover who the members of The Lost Expedition were, what their work was and where they all are now.

4)Starting To Work with The Story Of The Lost Expedition

- Let's return to the initial fragment of the story and examine the 3 main components:

***“When The Lost Expedition met
they sat in a circle of 12 seats,
one of which was always empty”***

- Firstly: The Lost Expedition were attending a meeting together (though the fragment doesn't say anything about what the meeting was about).
- Secondly: At the meeting members of The Lost Expedition sat together in a circle of twelve seats (most likely with each member sitting on one of the twelve seats).
- Thirdly: One of the twelve seats was empty (and presumably not being occupied by any one of the members of the group).

- As we've worked with the story over the years, the circle of seats where they met has become increasing more apparent and accessible. Here's a picture of the most recent version now in the Territory Orphanage :



- A number of questions arise from the initial fragment of the Story:
 - Why were they called The Lost Expedition? Who were the members of this group and where are they now? What were they meeting about?
 - Why did they sit in a circle of twelve seats? Where was the circle located? Did each member of the group always sit on the same seat?
 - Why was one seat always empty? Did anyone ever sit on the empty seat? Was it kept empty for someone that was not part of the group?
- Each unanswered question soon gives rise to another and it seems quite impossible to resolve any of the questions that begin to arise. So. How to proceed? The initial fragment is so extremely small and seemingly unconnected to any source of information other than itself. How can we possibly begin to unravel the story of The Lost Expedition?
- Luckily for us the story of The Lost Expedition is a **sentient story**; and because this is so it will respond to those who take on an active role in how it unfolds. If you think about it, this is a bold and somewhat disturbing statement with many far-reaching implications:
 - How can a story be sentient? Is it alive in some way? What other types of sentience are we familiar with? We would all probably agree that other people are sentient, but are cats sentient? Does a dog have Buddha-nature? And what about plants? If something has sentience what does that mean? What possibilities arise? All good questions (with many different good answers).

- But one thing seems to be true throughout: we, as sentient beings ourselves, are able to enter into a relationship with any other sentient beings we encounter. These relationships are invariably intimate ones in the sense that they operate at a deeper and more interactive level than usually encountered in the everyday world.
- So. It's actually not as confusing as it might first appear: because the story of The Lost Expedition is a sentient story, to find out more about what it's about all you really have to do is pursue a relationship with it. If you **act as if you believe** you are a member of The Lost Expedition, you can enter into the story itself and take on a role in the story's unfolding (!).
- Quite an intimate thing to do with another sentient being, and surprisingly simple too! One simple action makes it all available: **act as if you believe** you are a member of The Lost Expedition and sit down on your seat in the circle. If you sit on your seat in a whole-hearted way you'll be able to discover what you do individually as a member of that group and what the group-as-a-whole does together.
 - When you sit on a seat you don't have to invent a new character to be. If you **act as if you believe** you are a member of The Lost Expedition you will find yourself sitting down on one of the seats in just exactly the way that you yourself would actually sit there!
 - Initially you may well find that it's not all that comfortable to sit on your seat. However, after a while, you will begin to notice that when you sit on your seat in a whole-hearted way you'll have some new possibilities that were not so readily accessible before.
 - Really though it's not all that surprising, you've always had these extra levels - when you finally catch a glimpse of them you'll realize they've been there all along. What are these new levels? And why can you suddenly access them now as you sit on your seat? Good questions! Something to ponder while you sit on your seat...
- You will find that entering into a relationship with the Story of The Lost Expedition will have useful parallels in your artistic and your personal life. Discovering and pursuing your own art practice in the everyday world, trying to uncover who you are and what you can personally do is exactly like sitting on one of these seats while **acting as if you believe** you are a member of The Lost Expedition, (except that it's in the everyday world so it's completely different).
 - It's completely different because you are entering into a relationship with a sentient story when you take on a role in the story's unfolding
 - It's exactly the same because everything in the everyday world situation of your personal art practice is in the same basic relationship to every other part of that situation in the same exact way that everything in the circle of seats is in relationship with everything else that is there in the circle when you **act as if you believe** you are of a member of The Lost Expedition.
- This means that everything that works when you **act as if you believe** you are a member of The Lost Expedition will also work while trying to discover and pursue your own personal art practice. It also means that the problems that arise for you when you act as if you believe will probably be the same ones that arise for you in the everyday world.
- However... one is on one level and one is on another; one is in the everyday world and one is within a sentient story. And here's the thing: a sentient story is more conscious in how it relates to you - it responds to you in a much more intimate way. It will actually help you resolve any difficulties you are working through as you act as if you believe you are a member of The Lost Expedition.
- Now it's also true that the everyday world is conscious of you too; though I think you'd agree it's not at all to the same degree. This could be because the role you pursue in the everyday world is not as conscious as the one you take on when you **act as if you believe**.

5) *The Circle Of Seats, The Empty Seat*

- It's not now known who sat in this circle before or what their work entailed. But the way the seats are arranged suggests some useful clues to pursue.
- The circle arrangement and the empty seat would seem to point to a group that wasn't led by any one member of the group - none of the seats in the circle is in charge of the circle of seats.
- This arrangement also suggests that there was a consciousness of the group-as-a-whole as well as the subjective consciousness expressed by each individual. What the nature of this group consciousness might be isn't clear from the arrangement of seats, but it does seem that no one member would know or be able to do the work of the group on their own.
- While it's certainly true that the individual work associated with each of the seats is key for the member of The Lost Expedition that is sitting there; it is also crucially important for the work of the group-as-a-whole. So it's useful to pay attention to the other members sitting in the circle if you want to catch a clue or two about what the group-as-a-whole is doing. And don't be disturbed if others in the circle have an unobstructed view of you.
- The fact that there is an empty seat in the circle is highly significant and there are many levels of the story of The Lost Expedition that can be accessed through this feature. It is advisable to return to the empty seat from time to time and reconsider the story as a whole, particularly when new aspects of the story are revealed.
- The empty seat is a good example of the principle of non-completeness inherent to the story of The Lost Expedition. If the empty seat was full of somebody it would block out any interconnectedness to other levels of the circle of seats as well as to other parts of the larger-whole the circle of seats might have a relationship to.
- This is a far reaching principle and can be applied to any number of other situations outside the circle or the story. It is the general principle that lies at the heart of Holism and likely to the ongoing evolution of consciousness itself.

~~~~~ End of Part One ~~~~~