

Living With Carter

In the early days of the FWBO I was living on my own in a second floor flat on Highgate West Hill, NW London. Two or three times a week I would go down to Sakura, our Centre in St Martin's Lane, either to lead a meditation class in the basement shrine and meditation room or to attend a council meeting. Usually I walked down to Camden Town, took the Tube from there down to Tottenham Court Road, and then walked along Shaftesbury Avenue to St Martin's Lane, half way down which Sakura was situated. One fine summer evening in 1968 I arrived there to find a cluster of people waiting for me, some of them being in the shop and others on the pavement outside. One of them was a shabbily dressed young man who seemed to be the object of general disapproval. Clearly something was wrong. The proprietor of Sakura told me what had happened. A young American had turned up the previous evening, and as he had nowhere to stay, he, Upaya (Emile Boin), had allowed him to spend the night in the shrine and meditation room downstairs. The young traveller had fallen asleep while reading by the light of a candle, something had caught fire, and soon the whole place was ablaze. Fortunately he had managed to grope his way through the smoke to the narrow winding stairs and had emerged into the shop. He had had no time to dress and therefor emerged naked and the clothes he was now wearing were some of Upaya's old working clothes. Clearly there could be no class that evening, and for many evenings to come, and slowly the people who had gathered there went their several ways. What was to be done with the young American? No one wanted to accommodate him, and he could hardly occupy the shrine and meditation room a second night, it having been gutted by the fire and much of it was black with soot. I was not particularly keen to accommodate him myself but I felt sorry for him, and I therefore took him back with me to my flat.

Over a drink and a snack Carter, as the young American was called, told me a little about himself. Like millions of other young Americans of his generation he had heeded the call of Baba Ramdas (Richard Alpert) to drop out, tune in, and turn on. He had left his comfortable middle class home in California, had experimented with LSD and other psychedelic drugs, and for the last few weeks he had been hitching his way around Europe. He had been I think in Norway and had spent a few days there in prison, apparently on account of drugs. Now he was in London and with me. By this time we were in my bedroom and it was time to sleep. 'Shall I make you up a bed on the floor, or will you sleep with me?' I asked. 'I'll sleep with you', was Carter's prompt reply. I slipped into bed and he soon followed but not before he had divested himself of Upaya's paint-stained cast-offs. It was as though a beautiful butterfly had emerged from its chrysalis. Six feet or more in height, and twenty-one years old, he had tousled, sun-bleached hair and blue eyes, and his well proportioned body seemed made of gold rather than flesh. The words that came to me were, 'the gift of the gods'. I had been kind to Carter and perhaps my kindness was being rewarded. As soon as he was in bed, he snuggled up to me and I put my arm round him, saying 'Is it alright?' 'Yeah, sure, sure', he replied putting his arm around me, and although I could not see his face I knew that he was grinning. Within minutes we were being swept up on a wave of sexual ecstasy such as I, at least, had not experienced before. How long we remained on it I do not know but when it subsided I was left feeling deeply satisfied and went straight to sleep. That wave was to sweep us away more than once during the months that followed and I shall remain ever grateful to Carter for the part he played in my initiation into the world of erotic bliss.

It was several weeks before the Triratna shrine and meditation room was again fit for purpose, but it took Carter only a matter of days to acquire some new clothes. His sartorial taste was by no means the same as mine. Among his purchases was a pair of what he called his 'bermudas'. I had not seen or heard of this garment before, which was too short for trousers and too long for shorts. Carter's culinary tastes were also very different from mine. He was fond of peanut butter and jam sandwiches, whereas I had discovered peanut butter only after my return to England. He also used expressions that were new to

me, such as 'nitty-gritty', and he was fond of music that was not always to my liking. Like other west coast hippies he had dipped into Zen, but he was not seriously interested in either meditation or Buddhism, and during his stay with me he hardly ever accompanied me to my classes or lectures. Although he had turned up at Sakura, he was not really part of the FWBO. His relationship was with me. If he had any spiritual practise at all it consisted in his having dropped out, and his trying to tune in to something beyond ordinary experience with the help of drugs. Besides acquiring new clothes Carter soon found a way to supply himself with cannabis, of which he was a regular user. I had not tried it, though some of my friends were devotees of the weed; but it was not long before Carter persuaded me to share a joint with him. During the time that he was with me I must have smoked it every day. Our favourite place was Hampstead Heath, which lay immediately behind my flat and could be seen from the kitchen window. A corner of the Heath was covered with long grass, and there we would lie, flat on our backs in the sunshine and gazing up at the blue sky. Often I had the sensation that I was floating, as though on a magic carpet.

One afternoon, as we lay there, Carter confided to me that he had taken LSD not once but eight times and that every trip had been bad one. If he could have a trip with me, he said, he was sure he would have a good one at last. Despite initial reservations, I eventually agreed, and Carter went about making the necessary preparations, including choosing records for us to listen to during the trip. Rather than writing a second time about the trip I shall quote what I wrote when I was a little nearer to the experience than I am now. 'The trip lasted for about twelve hours. I had intended to record the effects of the LSD as it took hold, but this proved not to be feasible. All I could write was 'feel as though little fish were nibbling at my brain', followed by the single word 'laughter'. I was, in fact, laughing uncontrollably, and the laughter was releasing huge quantities of energy. After that, there were only squiggles on the paper. The entire trip is virtually a blank to me. All that I could remember of it, even immediately afterwards, was of my being present at the dawn of creation. 'First light on first water' were the words that came to me, accompanied by the visual image of a vast expanse of water upon which light was shining.' Carter did not have a good trip but he was relieved not to have had a bad one, and for this he was grateful.

Carter was with me for two summers, that of 1968 and that of 1969. Both were fine English summers and both provided the setting of events that were significant to me. There was my holiday in the New Forest, which took place either in 1968 or 1969, and my visit to Glastonbury which took place in 1969. Joy Baines, my landlady, owned a caravan in the New Forest and she agreed to rent it to me for a week. Ananda would be staying with us in the caravan, which was quite a small one, and Mike (Abhaya) would be paying us a day-visit at some point. A couple of days before our departure Carter asked me if we could add a young woman called Samantha to our little party. He felt very sorry for her, he explained. She was being badly treated by her mother and elder sister and needed a break. I could not but agree as I could see that Carter was genuinely concerned for her. She could spend the previous night with me at the flat, he suggested, and he would spend the night with a friend nearby. He did not say who this friend was, and in retrospect I do not know whether it was a male friend or whether he had at last found a girlfriend. A few weeks after moving in with me he had complained that I did not go out and about with him very often. I spent much of my time at my desk, which was the truth. I had letters to answer and lectures to prepare. I therefore told Carter that he should find a girlfriend, and that she would probably go out and about with him as much as he wanted. To this he objected that he did not know how to get a girlfriend, and I had the impression that his experience of women was limited and that he was not altogether at ease with them. All you have to do, I insisted, is to go to parties and sooner or later you will find someone you like and who likes you. He must have followed my advice, for he did in the end find a girlfriend. Her name was Andrea and she was to play a decisive part in both our lives.

Samantha turned out to be about twenty and she had long amber-coloured hair, violet eyes and milk-white skin. After Carter had left, she seated herself on the edge of my bed without saying anything. When she did speak, it was in a tone that was one almost of defiance. 'Either I sleep in all my clothes' she said, 'or I take everything off.' 'Do as you please', I responded, as I got into bed, 'I don't mind either way'. She seemed to consider this, then, very slowly she took off her clothes and climbed into bed with her back towards me. I did not know what Carter had told her about me, but she seemed to expect that we would have sex. I had not had sex with a woman before and I wanted to find out what it was like. Before I could do so I heard, clear as a bell, an angelic voice. The voice said, 'Don't', so I didn't, for soft and gentle though the voice was it was utterly compelling and could not possibly be disobeyed. I have often wondered where that angelic voice came from and why it should have intervened when it did. Since then I have not had the slightest inclination to have sex with a woman, even to find out what it was like. For me women have always been friends, not sex partners.

Joy's caravan was situated on the edge of a piece of woodland and Carter, Samantha and I reached it after a long walk uphill. Ananda arrived soon afterwards from another direction. It was a wonderful day, with a sky of unclouded blue. We enjoyed the warmth of the sun and the little breezes that fanned our cheeks from time to time. We enjoyed the size of the trees and of the tall purple foxgloves that grew among the fern. We enjoyed one another's company. We enjoyed watching the famous New Forest ponies which, unafraid of man but a little shy, grazed not far away. Mike came up from Bournemouth as promised. Thus for a day I enjoyed the company of two of my closest friends and for a while, at least, Samantha seemed to be drawn into our little circle. All this and much more is reflected in some of the poems that I wrote that summer. It was a time of light and colour, of harmony and peace. From time to time Carter and I wandered off on our own, just to get some exercise, and in the course of one of these excursions we came upon a magnificent oak, which, as the inscription informed us marked the spot where William Rufus died, slain by an arrow from an unknown hand. On another occasion we returned to find Ananda sitting with just a towel round his waist. I do not remember what Samantha was wearing, if indeed she was wearing anything at all. And I had the impression Ananda had just warded off an attack on his virginity.

A few days after my return to Highgate West Hill I received a visit from a troubled young man. He had been Samantha's boyfriend, he told me, and she had given him and others syphilis, for which he was receiving treatment. He had urged her to get treatment, but had met with denial and defiance and his purpose in coming to see me was to ask me to intervene. This I did as soon as I could but whether she did seek treatment or not I do not know. And I never saw her again.

My 1969 visit to Glastonbury was not planned in the way that the visit to the New Forest had been planned. It just happened, as one might say, and it involved not just Carter and me but quite a number of other people. So far as I remember, it grew out of one of the Buddhist festivals that the FWBO was celebrating at Aryatara. There was a bonfire in the garden and perhaps fireworks, though I may be confusing that year's celebrations with those of another year. Be that as it may, a dozen or so people stayed on after the rest had gone home. Among these were the three members of the English Mystical School of Painting and their respective girlfriends, all of whom I had got to know after seeing their end of year exhibition at the Goldsmith's College of Art. They were not so much members of the FWBO as personal friends who attended some of my lectures and visited me at the flat. There was a xylophone in the shrine-room and one of them started playing it. It was an improvisation that went on and on, hour after hour until some of us went into a sort of trance or fell asleep. In the morning we set out for Glastonbury though how we reached the decision to go there I do not know. Soon we were on the road. As we crossed London Bridge we saw thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of tightly packed people streaming towards the City. 'Where are all those people going?' asked Carter, his eyes goggling. 'They are all going to work', I explained. 'To work!' my friend exclaimed in tones of mingled shock, horror and disgust

that people should be going to work on such a fine summer's day as this. They should all be on the beach. But of course this was not California. Before long we were heading west and I noticed that the big van in which we were travelling was being joined by other, smaller vans, and that we were all picking up hitchhikers. It was as though a wind was carrying us all in the same direction, carrying us towards Glastonbury.

My long poem *On Glastonbury Tor* was written shortly after this visit, and I do not propose to describe for the second time, in prose, how we made the ascent of the Tor or what happened when we reached the top. The poem is the definitive account. I want simply to make the point that the events described in the poem did actually happen. I really did see, with my physical eyes, the three UFOs that suddenly appeared in the evening sky. They were UFOs in the literal sense of the term, being unidentified, at least by me; they flew, and they were objects in the sense that I saw them with my physical eyes, as did many others including some night watchmen, as was reported in the newspapers. Similarly, I actually did see a dark shape enter into the young man and speak from or through him words in a language that was unknown to me. In the poem I do not reproduce the actual words but only give an impression of their sound, which was harsh and guttural. The young man was a Canadian who was known to Carter but whom I had not met. The poem ends with the Tor expanding in all directions and soaring aloft. It was an image of Vairocana's Tower, which contains in a state of mutual interpenetration everything that exists. All this I actually experienced, though whether the experience was mundane or transcendental, or something in between, I cannot say. *On Glastonbury Tor* was not only one of my longer poems, but it was written in a style quite different from my usual one. It was not deliberately experimental but the style seems to be the natural expression of what I experienced. Indeed, the poem itself was an expression of much that was happening in the 1960s, especially among the younger generation.

By this time Carter had his girlfriend in the person of Andrea and I had met her once or twice. She was of medium height, had long fair hair, and was thin rather than slim. Her face was quite pale and drawn probably because she ate little and was on drugs. Whether she was estranged from her upper middle class family in the way that Samantha was I never knew, though I gathered that her grandfather was a dignitary in the Church of England. At times she seemed small, pathetic, and waif-like and I imagine that this was one of the things that had drawn kind-hearted Carter to her, for as the poet says 'Pity melts the mind to Love'. Andrea had an upstairs room in a house not far from where I lived, so that it was easy for Carter to come and go between us. Sometimes he spent the night with me, sometimes with Andrea. Although he had originally wanted a girlfriend who would go out and about with him, Andrea must have been a disappointment in this respect. She spent most of her time in her room smoking so that if Carter wanted to go out with someone he sometimes had to fall back on me. I would call on him at Andrea's place where more often than not I found both of them in bed despite the lateness of the hour. After the three of us had chatted for a while, Carter would dress and we would go out together. On one of my visits I found that Carter had covered a large sheet of paper with doodles executed by pencils or crayons of various colours. The effect was bright and positive and I thought it reflected the state of Carter's mind at the time. He was happy. He was happy because he had Andrea and he had me. On one of the rare occasions when the three of us went for a walk on Hampstead Heath together he put an arm round each of us and declared that it was the happiest time of his life, for he had with him the two people whom he loved best in the world.

This idyllic state of affairs did not last. As the weeks went by, I noticed that, in Carter's case, just as pity had melted into love so love had developed into infatuation. With Andrea there was a similar transition. In her case, infatuation had developed into possessiveness and jealousy. Two of my memories at the time illustrate what was going on. We had booked seats for a play at the Aldwych and we were making our way to the tube station. We walked together, but every ten or fifteen yards Carter and Andrea

would stop for prolonged smooching, as though they could hardly get enough of each other. This delayed our arrival at the theatre, where we found we had the wrong tickets. The scene of my other memory was the Highgate West Hill flat. Carter had come to see me with Andrea. He came upstairs as usual, but she remained obstinately down in the hallway so that Carter could spend only a few minutes with me, as no doubt was her intention. On his leaving me Carter put his arms round me and gave me a big hug and I noticed that he had an erection. He noticed it too, and we both laughed. Carter eventually realised that all was not well as regards Andrea's attitude to me. I was quite happy that he should sleep with Andrea, but Andrea was not happy that he should sleep with me or see very much of me. One day Carter suggested that the three of us should spend a week together on holiday. Though he did not say so, I knew that he hoped that this would bind the three of us more closely together and help Andrea develop a more positive attitude to me. I was sceptical, and told Carter that I did not think his scheme would work. I could see that Andrea was implacable in her dislike of me and that we would never be friends. Nonetheless, I allowed Carter to persuade me and agreed to take part in the experiment.

Mike was willing to lend us his car for a week. He had moved from Bournemouth to Millbrook in Cornwall, and it was therefore to Millbrook that we travelled to pick up the car. Behind the wheel Carter was a very different person. The carefree hippie had changed into a competent young American who had been driving all his life. We had no plan as to where we would go on our holiday and I left it to Carter to decide the route. Our first stop was in Laugharne. I had visited the little town the previous winter with Rick, one of the English Mystical painters, and we had visited Dylan Thomas's grave in the churchyard and seen the famous boathouse. I was not just sightseeing, but looking for a country centre for the FWBO. We found only one that might have been suitable, but at £4,000 it was beyond our means. The owner was an elderly woman and Rick and I spent some time talking with her in her kitchen. She seemed to have an animus against marriage. 'Don't you get married', she told Rick. 'First they marry you for your beauty, then they throw you away. So don't marry.' It was as though she was addressing a young woman rather than a young man. Neither Carter nor Andrea was interested in Dylan Thomas and we spent our time in Laugharne driving up and down the broad, flat sands where Sir Malcolm Campbell had broken the land speed record with his Bluebird. At one point Carter handed over the wheel to me and I drove round in circles for a while greatly enjoying myself. It was the only part of our holiday that I really enjoyed. The following day found us at Glastonbury Tor. Carter wanted to show Andrea the place, and in fact we spent the night in the grim old tower.

The only other part of our holiday that I remember was finding myself in Bath. In particular, I remember the three of us being in a small park. Carter and I felt like stretching our legs for a while. Andrea wanted to sit down and we left her sitting in a little arbour. When we returned fifteen or twenty minutes later Andrea was nowhere to be seen and Carter panicked. We at once set about searching the neighbouring streets, he frantic with anxiety and I scarcely less worried. Eventually we found her more or less by accident. She was sullen and silent and would not say where she had been or what she had been doing. It seemed to me that she was playing on Carter's fear of losing her. If she was, it worked. For the next day or two he would not allow her out of his sight and the situation became rather strained. In the end I told Carter that the holiday was not proving a success and that we should separate, and to this he unwillingly agreed. There was an emotional parting and even Andrea seemed a little moved. He would return the car to Mike at the end of the week, then take the train back to London and me.

I never saw him again.

From friends of friends I learned that he had sent home for his best suit and that shortly afterwards he had married Andrea and taken her back to America with him. Before leaving he sent me a message. It

was scribbled on a postcard with various coloured pencils and it read 'I know I am hurting you. Give me two years, and I will be back'. I was indeed hurt. Carter had been an important part of my life for just over a year, and it took me a long time to recover from the loss. Recover I did, and was soon finding consolation elsewhere.

Two years later I had news of Andrea. She had been attacked while alone on the beach one night and had returned to England. She had been injured but how badly I did not hear.

Many years later I was in San Francisco, and one day I found myself in the centre of the city being driven through heavy traffic. Suddenly, I saw a shabby figure, clad in black, standing between the streams of traffic, panhandling. He was in profile, and I knew that profile. It was surely Carter! There was no time to check whether I was mistaken or not. The traffic moved on and me with it and in an instant the black-clad figure was out of sight. I have never been sure whether or not the figure I had glimpsed was really the Carter whom I had known and loved.

Sangharakshita
Adhithana
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