

Burying the Shaman

by Jeffrey Brooks



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In memory of Roger

A few puffs of down
floated across a lapis sea
sky washed clean by three days
of southern spring rains.

Paradise lay at the feet
of Silver Peak gleaming
with late snow.

A Cathedral of jagged red cliffs
erupt from this fallen valley
of Cave Creek. Where
a river of life flows
with sacred sycamores

shining silver in the bright
warm sun, filtered through
an emerald blanket of new
leafed cottonwoods.

The Shaman's twelve apostles
bore his ash through cedar
and juniper medicine-
scented trails to his rocky
pool below jutting alters
where I rang the bell,

and chanted the spell
for a blessing
attended by whirling
starlings, and anointed
by sudden rain.

Burying the Shaman

It was mid-February, when spring comes early to Tucson. I was at a blues concert and looking for my seat just before the show, when I ran into an old friend, Anna. She is Hispanic, from the small southern Arizona town of Safford. She is beautiful with small Castilian features and the dark skin and long straight black hair from some Native American genes. Her hair hung to her waist and it was held together with a beaded hair clip. She wore a hand woven shawl and elk hide moccasins. Over the many years we've been friends, I've seen her black hair grow streaks of distinguished gray.

After a warm hug she put her hand on my heart and said, "Jeffrey, Roger is very sick." After a pause to increase the weight of what she was about to say, she continued, "They flew him from his home in Columbus (New Mexico), to the VA hospital in Albuquerque."

For Roger, who hated modern medicine, being admitted to a hospital meant his condition must have left him helpless. I remembered him as the picture of health. He was about twenty years older than me, and lean from his austere life of health fanaticism and regular exercise at the gym. I was incredulous, "What's wrong with him?" I figured it must have been an accident that took him down.

Anna said, "He has hepatitis, and he was trying to treat it herbally. The hepatitis destroyed his liver."

Knowing the depth of Roger's herbal knowledge, I was surprised he wasn't successful in treating his condition. "If anyone could have treated it, he could have."

“Well, he hasn’t. He is just too stubborn. He should have gone to a medical doctor.”

Anna and I go way back in the old nature hippie movement of the mid ’70s, when we were all eating raw vegetables and fruit, and curing ourselves with natural remedies. I was shocked that she said he should have seen what we called an allopath, a practitioner of conventional medicine. Anna, Roger and I were of the old guard. We were still living according to the rules of natural living, and treating ourselves with herbal and other alternative remedies, but with some modifications over the years. I had started living in a house instead of sleeping under the stars every night, and I was eating cooked food. While I never gave up vegetarianism, Roger and several others in our group had reintroduced a moderate intake of meat and fish into their diets.

The house lights dimmed and brightened a few times, indicating the start of the concert. We gave each other another hug, and parted for our respective seats. The concert opened with one of our local blues legends playing dobro, a tin guitar. I only half listened to the concert while memories blew through my mind.

I knew him as Roger Davis. In later years he went by a name he claimed came from an earlier life time in China, Sun Tzu, the author of the *Ancient Art of War*. I had met Roger twenty-two years earlier when my peers were either getting BAs in economics or smuggling smack across the border. I was eating raw food out of my organic garden and periodically fasting in the desert. I was studying Chinese medicine, Asian philosophy, meditation and yoga. It was late January and I had just come into Tucson from an ashram in the desert to re provision at the CoOp before I was to attend a ten day Buddhist meditation retreat. I had heard of Roger’s body work, and I had arranged a session with him before the retreat. The treatment was an unusual style and it basically consisted of two hours of acupressure using a blunted deer antler to outline my acupuncture meridians with special attention paid to each acupuncture point along the way. It was very painful and it took days for the bruises to disappear. He ended the treatment by covering my body with uncut crystals and stones. The cessation of pain followed by quiet and I believed the proximity of the stones produced a

euphoria that I enjoyed for several hours. The idea was to create the greatest amount of change in the shortest period of time. In those days, we were all in a hurry to attain a combination of perfect physical and mental health which we believed was Nirvana.

A few days after the concert, I called a mutual friend in Albuquerque, Elizabeth, who was looking after Roger. I offered to give him a healing ritual, and I was willing to drive up as soon as he was ready. A few weeks later she called to let me know Roger had wanted me to come, but he had died before she could arrange my visit. She said, "I want to thank you for offering the healing ritual. Roger was touched that you were willing to help him."

I had been surprised to find myself so eager to see him. It really wasn't until he had become very ill that I was willing to make contact with him again. The last time I saw him was in San Francisco in the late 70s, when my first wife and I were mourning the death of our first child.

About a month earlier, we were expecting the child. We decided to have the baby at home, because we had a great mistrust of the medical establishment, and we didn't think the risks warranted a hospital delivery. We thought a home birth would be a more intimate experience. Three days before the delivery, and after the midwife's last checkup, the child moved from head down to head up. It happened late at night. My wife thought it was just a strong contraction. We didn't discover what had really happened until halfway into the delivery.

During my wife's labor, everything seemed to be going along just fine. The labor did seem a little heavy but no one commented on it until the baby was just coming out and I heard the midwife suddenly say, "Oh shit! The child's breach." What we had thought was a head crowning was a buttocks appearing in the birth canal. The midwife quickly checked the fetal monitor and then said, "We've got to get the child out as soon as possible."

We all focused on accelerating the delivery. My wife was incredible. She kept pushing until she had that kid out. I guess it only took fifteen or twenty minutes once she knew she had to move.

When the child was delivered we found his umbilical cord wrapped around his neck and it was tied in a knot. He was all blue, and he wouldn't breathe on his own; so we started CPR immediately. The ambulance came in about fifteen minutes, and rushed him and me to the hospital. After three days of modern medicine's best efforts, they told us he was brain dead. They let us unplug him from the machines, and take him home from Children's Hospital to die.

The midwife, her two assistants, Anna and I sat in a circle around my wife who was holding the child. He lay limp in her arms breathing shallowly. I placed my left hand on his head and my right on his tiny chest, and opened myself up to transfer the maximum charge. I hoped he would just wake up and start crying.

Anna, who had come to town for the baby's birth, had called Roger. He came over right away. He brought his medicine bundle and performed a healing with stones and feathers. The child seemed to breathe smoothly afterwards. About a half hour later, while we were watching him expectantly, he just stopped breathing, and after a few moments of shocked silence, we all began to weep. We made no further attempt to keep him alive.

A few weeks later, my wife and I returned from a ten day meditation retreat in the redwoods of Pescadero, which is in the mountains just north of Santa Cruz. Roger called up, and said he needed to see us. It was Saturday, and we were still mourning our son's death. When Roger came by, we were sitting on pillows on the floor holding each other in front of our big window that looked out across the city and was letting in the sunlight from a rare sunny day.

Roger sat down on the floor with us. He was obviously in a bad mood, and he seemed to be angry with me. After a few moments strained silence, he said that the child was his, spiritually, and that my wife and I should never have lived together. He also said the child's death was my fault because I was neglecting what he saw as my spiritual work. It was because I was no longer celibate and I had started eating cooked food and I wasn't sleeping under the stars in my garden anymore.

I could see he was upset; so I did my best to keep from reacting to his inflammatory statements. Then he engaged me in a psychic battle. I could see that he wanted to use his

forces to harm me. We sat there cross legged simply staring at each other for what seemed like two hours. While our eyes were locked in battle, Roger's face shifted and turned into something demonic before my gaze. Light streamed out of him in twisting blades of color. Fortunately I had undergone enough demon attacks to know that resisting him would only be my defeat; so I remained completely passive and subjective. I could see he was in great pain and I had the utmost compassion for him. With our eyes and auras fused I learned things about Roger I had never before known. I had not known the depths of vulnerability that he hid behind his powerfully deep voice, sharp blue eyes and tall sinewy body. I had no idea he was in love with my wife. I felt some betrayal, but my wife and I were more like brother and sister than husband and wife, and I loved Roger as the father I never knew. He was also my friend and mentor.

Eventually Roger got up and left without a word, apparently defeated. It wasn't long before he left San Francisco. In spite of our long friendship, he never attempted to make contact with me. I made no attempt to contact him either, because he was willing to use his psychic capacity to harm another, me. I knew such people are dangerous and should be avoided. Now that Roger was in the spirit world, I felt he would be less trouble and I could deal with him there.

It was early March when Anna and her long-time mate, Jackson, returned from Minnesota to help with Roger's effects. Elizabeth was on spring break from acupuncture school. She came to Tucson with Roger's ashes. The people who were close to him, and could make it, were to meet at Cave Creek in the Chiricahua Mountains on March 16th to scatter his ashes. We were the only family Roger recognized, and the only family we knew he had.

It was a pleasantly warm southern Arizona day. The sky was clear blue like expensive turquoise, and there wasn't a cloud as far as I could see in any direction. Some of us met at a friend's house to carpool to the Chiricahuas. When I arrived one of my friends gave me a small Guatemalan change purse and said, "We set these aside for you from Roger's effects."

We were all like family and had known each other more than half our lives. The little

purse of stones was like my share of our inheritance from him. Stones were chosen for me probably because, like Roger, I had used stones in healing treatments for a very long time.

While I was inspecting the little treasures in the pouch, another old friend came out of the house with a tall woman and a boy and introduced me. She was supplying the van in which we were carpooling. Her seven year old son hobbled on arthritic knees.

I had met her briefly at her priestess initiation ceremony in early December. I had gone to support a friend, one of the six women who were being ordained into a local Celtic priestess circle.

We all piled into her van and, while one of the others drove, she and I talked almost non-stop to Cave Creek. She said she had never met Roger, but he had sent her medicinal oils and astrological interpretations for herself and her children. He had predicted her son's knee problems years before any symptoms had become evident, and he had said she and her now-estranged husband should never have been living together. I had heard that comment before, and I was suspicious of Roger's motivations.

We were the first to arrive at the West Fork campground in the Chiricahuas. About an hour later a couple arrived from Phoenix. They were driving a large old van that had Styrofoam oozing out of its many rusty cankers. They had left their high paying jobs in New York City three years earlier, giving up everything to live in the solitude of the desert and study with Roger. I was told Roger wouldn't work with them if they remained in a committed relationship. They said he had told them they should never have been living together. It wasn't long after the couple moved to Columbus that the woman had started sleeping with Roger.

We stood around waiting for the others to arrive and enjoyed the beautiful warm sunny day and admired the sheer, red cliffs. The sycamores hadn't budded yet, but their silver bark shone in the sun. The cottonwoods, sacred to the Tohono O'odham for their rain-drawing power, had just leafed and were flickering yellow-green in the afternoon sun. I collected juniper sprigs to burn for an offering during the ceremony. The junipers reminded me of how often Roger used the berries in his many herbal concoctions. He said they were purifying and antibiotic. His home always seemed to wear their antiseptic smell which steamed from large

porcelain pots that usually simmered on his stove.

Anna, Jackson and Elizabeth arrived with Roger's ashes an hour later. The twelve of us set out on the trail immediately. I had been puzzling over Roger's condition ever since I had heard about it. I knew he wasn't a user of injectable drugs, although he performed acupuncture on himself regularly; so I asked one of the men I had known as long as I had known Roger, "Hey Jackson. Where did Roger get hepatitis?"

Jackson is from Minnesota, so he starts each sentence slowly with "Oh" or "Well" and an upward inflection. "Oh, he got it at Healing Waters."

Healing Waters was a hippie commune we were all involved with in the mid to late '70s. It was at an abandoned hot spring resort built in the 20's in the desert just north of Safford. The community was dedicated to natural healing. I bailed out early on because there was too much pot-headed spaciness and hot-headed disagreement about which diet was the right diet. Roger hung in until poor sanitation caused an outbreak of hepatitis, then the whole thing went down the tubes.

It didn't make any sense to me; so I said, "But that was twenty years ago. He wouldn't have perfect health for twenty years with hepatitis lingering in his system and then just fall apart."

"Well, he deteriorated over the last two years with edema in his lower limbs and a palsy in his hands. He was taking a lot of tinctures to treat the condition, but it won out."

Anna said, "Makes you wonder how much faith we should put into all this natural healing we've been studying all these years."

Silence followed her observation. I had seen too many chronic ailments turned around with properly administered natural healing techniques to lose faith, but I had my own tragic failures to ponder to make a return comment. It was the death of my son that caused me to re-think what I wanted to do for a living, but not my commitment to natural healthy living. Accidents happen, hospitals lose babies too, but I knew I didn't want the responsibility for treating other people's medical conditions. Within months of my son's death I stopped seeing clients and got a job making orthopedic devices which eventually turned into working in

isolation in non-medical research labs.

We stopped where the path crossed the creek and took a sharp turn uphill just in front of a rock-lined pool and past a rock overhang. We sat in a circle in the warm sun just before it fell in a blaze of glory behind a rock jutting out from the far cliffs, as Anna put it, “like a finger pointing to heaven.” The rock formation reminded me of a fire agate I use in healing rituals. The box with Roger’s ashes sat in the center of the circle, and we talked about times with him, and remembered people who couldn’t make it.

I told them about visiting him when he lived in downtown San Francisco in the late ’70s. My wife and I were expecting our first child, and we stopped by to see him pretty regularly. For a while he lived on the sixth floor of a ten story apartment building. It was unusual to see him living in the big city, because I had met him in Tucson, where he and I were born. It was a lot smaller town back then. He had camped out in Cochise’s Stronghold and the Dragoons more than he had lived in his University-neighborhood cottage.

In the apartment building we took the elevator up to the sixth floor and walked down a white hallway with thin gray carpet and a seemingly endless line of white doors with progressively ascending numbers. After we knocked on his door, his voice would boom from within “Come in,” without a hint of city dweller fear. When we opened the unlocked door we moved from big city apartment building reality to a shaman’s shack in the Himalayas. We walked past a large pile of uncut crystals and minerals that together must have weighed several hundred pounds. Next to the pile of rocks Roger’s futon rested on the floor. It was covered with a Nogales serape and he always sat in the middle with astrology and healing books surrounding him, and someone’s chart in his lap. His shaved head would be bowed over a book which sat on top of the chart. His full gray beard rested on his lean chest and he would be in deep concentration.

The apartment’s white walls were covered with prints of Tibetan tankas, and drying in the corners of the room herbs hung upside down in bundles. Chaparral and juniper berries often simmered on the stove in a big porcelain pot. My wife and I sat on the only other piece of furniture in the room, which was another serape lying in the middle of the floor. It was

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where he did his treatments.

Roger's turquoise eyes would look up in a few minutes and pierce mine while he filled me in on the previous night's channelings from various planetary systems. The interplanetary community of spiritual seekers known in the occult world as the Great White Brotherhood (no reference to race) was always displeased with how we humans had been running things on this puny little planet, and soon they'd be coming to sterilize it and start over again with new fresh stock.

What Roger and I had in common was our spirit world traveling. But, to Roger, the spirit world was a battle ground where beings representing whole species vied for dominance over solar systems in a kind of Star Wars fashion. This is where we parted ways. To me the spirit world isn't a battle ground but a song and a dance that changed tempo on a scale like music. In the lower domains what appeared to be aggression I saw simply a loving embrace higher up the scale. Where Roger drew lines and created battled grounds, I simply flew high enough over to see the beauty. Roger's intent was to make himself powerful, but I could only see with the same hands I pushed something away, I held it to me. I saw transparency was the only defense against psychic attack.

After about an hour of nonstop messages from deep space, I usually managed to draw his attention to a mundane herbal or acupuncture problem that I had been working on, or to discuss a recent demon attack. Because it is the work of a shaman to gain control over our dreams, we call demon attacks what the rest of the world calls nightmares. What we call spirit world travel or out-of-the-body experiences dream researchers call lucid dreaming. He would answer my questions, then often follow with his own questions on my out-of-the-body experiences, or one of the natural healing systems about which I was more knowledgeable than he.

After about an hour of reminiscing in the warm sun and quiet of Cave Creek a silence descended upon us. Elizabeth opened the white cardboard box with "Roger Davis" scrawled

diagonally across one side in blue ball-point pen. She opened a clear plastic bag that contained his ashes, and rolled it down to expose them. Anna pulled out a piece of white sage and Jackson lit it. They blessed each one of us as we took the smoke in our hands and blessed ourselves by spreading it over our heads and down our arms. When it was my turn, I took the smoke and dabbed below each eye to bless the tears. Jackson blessed the box and the ashes. I made a bed of the juniper boughs, and Elizabeth laid the box on it. Then I asked permission to do a ceremony.

I placed my deerskin before the box, and set out my stones and crystals and the stones given to me from Roger's effects. We started to chant his favorite mantra, OM Mane Padme Hum (OM is the jewel that dwells in the lotus of the heart), then, as Roger taught me, I moved the energy with my hands and used stones for energy channeling. This went on for about a half hour until I took a long clear crystal in my right hand and my favorite fire agate in my left. I dipped the tip of the crystal in the ash and placed it below each eye at the acupuncture point called "the Well of Tears." The mantra that I continued to chant had been galvanized inside of me for some time by contact with the spirit world, and I became even more charged. I put the agate to my chest and pointed the crystal into the sky to bring down an energy flux. I made contact with the ray and went into silence. I began to sweat and shake from the intensity of the charge. I remained blissfully frozen there in communion for another half hour, while the others continued to chant.

Eventually I heard Anna say, "Look at the birds."

The man from New York said, "Look at all the swallows."

Elizabeth said, "They're flying in circles around us."

Then rain drops began to fall from, what had been before the ceremony, a clear blue sky over all of southern Arizona. The boy started to whine about being tired, cold and hungry. Jackson placed his hand gently on my back to let me know it was time to end the ceremony.

It was difficult to unplug myself from the intensity of that sacred moment, but with effort I drew my hands out of their fine alignment, which caused the energy to drop enough for me to get up, and put my medicine bundle away. I looked up and saw a gray sky, and the black

clouds of an approaching storm. A light rain fell about us, while each one of us took handfuls of Roger's ash, and with private prayers we spread them in the four directions. Then we gathered our things and headed back down the trail. One of the men carried the boy the whole way on his shoulders. Half way back, I noticed a large whitetail doe cross our path.

I kept up a brisk pace to get back to the van before the storm broke. I remained silent and focused on the pleasant sensations of the after-glow that surrounds me following a ceremony. When I had reached the parking lot. I wrapped myself in the deerskin for warmth and enjoyed the company of such old friends who were nearer and dearer than family.

Roger was the older and 'wiser' brother in our 'family.' I was the youngest and in the early days he tolerated me for my impudence for treating him as a peer. I gathered that we had similar mothers in some respect. He once referred to his mother as a witch. In the context of the conversation, I took it to mean she practiced sorcery and as a child he feared her.

The irony is, his condition may have been caused by his obsession with physical cleansing programs to detoxify his body for which he habitually used creosote and juniper berries. They are powerful herbal healers, but their over use may have eventually broken down his liver and precipitated in causing his death. I often thought his obsession for purification may have come from something his mother did to him that he could never speak of.

It was still raining lightly when the others caught up to us in the Cave Creek parking lot. With what looked like a major storm on our heels, we headed back to Tucson. On the way back, we stopped at the general store in Portal for road snacks. I bought Almond Joys for everyone. Toward the end of his life, Roger called them a "perfect food" to make the obvious joke that he knew they were junk food, but they were too good to avoid. When we hit the road on the long flat playa outside of Portal, we looked back to see the Chiricahuas covered with dark clouds, and the gray streaking mist of a downpour outlining the canyon we had spent the afternoon in. The setting sun tinged pink the edges of the storm and the rest of the sky was bright blue.