

**Ma Belle's Rise & Fall  
Memoirs of a Waiter**

**Book I: When Idea and Reality Collide**

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## Chapter 1: The Wake

"I can't believe Ma Belle is dead."

"And just when she seemed to be recovering."

"What a disaster!"

"Our beloved Queen is gone forever."

"And our Family disbanded."

"Maybe it's for the best. She was on her way out anyway."

"If they had just given her some more time."

"Nothing like her."

"The community will miss her."

"Movin' on."

"What's done is done."

"A businessman's decision - only thinking of money."

"No appreciation for beauty."

"Or style."

"Just the bottom line."

"I feel like crying."

"The saga is at an end."

"Your story can be completed at last."

"Our Mother - no longer there to feed and dress us."

"My Lover and Guru - no longer there to guide and instruct me."

"My Big Black Momma - would slap me over the head when I forgot her - hug and kiss me when I loved her as she deserved to loved."

"A love-hate relationship."

"Whoa! That's for sure. She could be really mean at times and then treat you so good that you never wanted to leave."

"That's why we all stuck around to the end."

"Our pimp - our Madam & we her whores."

"Servicing her clientele - catering to their whims."

"Guiding them to the Vortex."

"Revealing the sensual Ecstasy at the Heart of Being."

"But no more sunsets - no more wine - no more camaraderie."

"Unless you want to stay at Fresh."

"It won't be the same."

"Never is."

"We've been through so much together."

"Whew! That's for sure."

"For so many years."

"When are you going to finish her story?"

"It's pretty much done - except for this - her wake."

"When are we going to get a copy?"

"Chino's already has one. But I still have some more editing to do."

"You always have more editing to do. You'll still be editing on your death bed."

"I hope not."

"Here's to Ma Belle."

"And to the Grape, the Herb, and the Path of the Bhogi."

"To our Family."

"To beauty."

"To the Vortex."  
"Let's here it for one and all."  
"I love everybody."  
"Ah! You're making me cry again."  
"It's been so beautiful."  
"We've learned so much."  
"She was such a classy lady - so sophisticated - like royalty."  
"Dignified - yet down to earth."  
"My Sancha - when my wife's away I play."  
"She's meant so much to each of us."  
"A lot of suffering for me - I feel as if I've been through Hell."  
"But now you're free."  
"Free to do what."  
"To be yourself."  
"To move on."  
"But I've lost my insurance."  
"Always the negative twist. Let it go."  
"My relation with Ma Belle has transformed my life."  
"Oh Space - Always so spiritual. Have another glass of wine and enjoy yourself."  
"A tip of the Cup to merge with the Moment."  
"Although Ma Belle is gone her Spirit lives on."  
"Nothing is forever."

The Wake of my Guru - my spiritual Guide & Teacher - My Beloved in whom the Divine Love was Reflected. Through her I learned what true Service was. She also taught me to quit running away and to open my Heart to both Pain & Passion.

This is our story - our trials and tribulations.

## Chapter 2: The Universe takes care of me

I was working at the Seaside when I first heard of Ma Belle.

"I dropped my résumé off at Ma Belle."

"Ma Belle?"

"The new restaurant that's opening on the top floor of the Coastal Inn."

"The Coastal Inn?"

"You know - where the Sailor used to be. It's going to be the happening place."

"Not necessarily. No guarantees in the restaurant business. Open today - closed within 6 months."

"Not with Francis Le Roi in charge."

"Francis Le Roi?"

"He's the celebrity chef at Belle in Los Angeles. They say he's got big money behind him. With that location and his reputation, it's going to be the place to be."

"Probably so."

"You should check it out. With Francis' status all the LA people will be swarming like bees around honey. I'm sure the money will be good."

"Sounds like a lot of pressure."

"This place certainly isn't going to be around much longer - what with the continued mismanagement combined with Mr. Friendly, our chef."

"Perhaps. But I hate openings. Too chaotic for me."

"Just for the first month of so. And this place is dying. Why would you want to hang on here?"

"I always stay until the end. Death fascinates me."

"Whatever."

Ma Belle's opening was accompanied by a dip in business at the Seaside that turned into a permanent decline. It's what every restaurant fears the most. Just as good business is good for business - bad business is bad for business. Everyone wants to be where everybody else is - independent of food, service and atmosphere. People watching is a huge X factor in the success or lack thereof of a high end restaurant. Some want to be seen - the beautiful ladies with their sexy outfits and the rich and famous in all categories. And others want to see - everything from the variety of costumes that humans adorn themselves with to the celebrity watchers - those who get a high just being in the presence of someone they've seen on TV or in the movies. Conversely an empty Dining Room is repulsive for the lack of these opportunities. Those who wander unknowingly into a Dead Restaurant either wander back out or never come back - wondering to themselves: "Where is everyone else going?" - "Why aren't they here?" and/or "What do they know that I don't know."

Then Francis, bon vivant that he is, came into the Seaside to check out our business and make friends with a fellow chef - one who used to be in the limelight - before his circumstances soured. Watching me scurry about attempting to please these two diverse individuals - one tall, slender and dour, the other, Francis, rotund, short and jolly - serving them an endless string of vintage Cognacs and Ports late into the night Francis mentioned to our Chef: "I want him at Ma Belle."

Chef: "Well you can't have him until I'm done with him. He goes with the lease."

As our business went from bad to worse, the murmuring began arising from the deep - as usual - eventually turning into a tumult - a cacophony of conflicting advice

that gave me a headache. Brain questioned Brain - weighing alternatives.

Brain: "Time to find a new job."

Me: "But I'll lose my seniority. I'll be at the bottom - maybe even have to work some dreaded lunch shifts."

Brain: "You're just postponing the inevitable - because there is no doubt that this place is going under. It's just a matter of time."

Me: "But it's comfortable here. We know where everything is and have a fixed schedule."

Brain: "Comfortable for whom? It's excruciatingly slow. I'm in agony. Under stimulated and bored."

Me: "What about the family advantages? Sundays off to have lunch with my daughters, while my wife Tierra sells her jewelry at the Beach show. Besides what's the rush?"

Brain: "I'm telling you the future looks bleak. We must do something now before it's too late."

Little Voice: "Don't hurry things. Wait for the Sign."

Brain: "Business is plummeting. That's enough of a Sign for me. Take charge of your Destiny. Don't be a Victim. Move on."

Me: "Yes. Mustn't be a victim. Move on."

Little Voice: "Trust in the Universe. An opportunity will open when the Time is Ripe. Forcing the issue prematurely will abort the Process. Green fruit tastes bitter and upsets the stomach."

Brain: "Universe - Schmuniverse. A fictional fantasy. Those who hesitate are run over by the oncoming train. Time to assert yourself."

Me: "Yes. Must assert myself."

Little Voice: "Don't Rush things. Be sensitive to opportunity. Be aware. Trust the Universe to take of you."

Brain: "Bankruptcy - No Job - Can't Pay Your Mortgage - Foreclosure - A homeless Family of four - disgraced before the community. What will your daughters think of you then?"

Me: "Yikes. Aieeee!!"

Brain: "Get a new job before it's too late."

Me: "Yes. Must find new job."

Brain: "Immediately to avoid those dire consequences."

Little Voice, drowned out in the growing tumult: "Hey! No fair, Brain. You're resorting to scare tactics."

Brain: "A time honored technique - used by governments and Brains everywhere always to get our way. -- Move now or face unimaginable disasters."

Me: "Yikes! Bankruptcy - Homelessness - Must find New Job. But where?"

Brain: "Hmmm? We're tired of all the pressure of big spenders with all their petty demands. We'll look for jobs at mid range restaurants instead - volume houses with lower check averages but steady business. We're tired of these excruciatingly slow nights."

Me: "Yes. No more slow nights."

Little Voice fading into a whisper: "Don't be silly. All of your experience is in upper end restaurants. Go for the top."

Brain: "Hmph! Those upper end restaurants with their erratic business cycles. Not for us. We want security. And constant business."

Me: "Yes. Security."

Little Voice: "Forget the security. The Universe will take care of that. Seek Beauty and refinement."

Brain: "Too much pressure to perform. Living up to arbitrary standards."

Me: "No more pressure."

Brain: "Just security and stability."

Me: "Yes security. No more high end restaurants for me. Perhaps I'm not good enough. I'm getting a little older - not as quick - inadequate wine and food knowledge."

Little Voice: "Now you're being ridiculous. You definitely have the talent - even Francis noticed. You should check out Ma Belle."

Brain: "Too much pressure. We couldn't do that. That's the top of the line."

Me: "Yes. Too much pressure. I'm certainly inadequate for that position. I'm sure they have real professionals there."

Little Voice: "Real professionals. Your 20 years in the business doesn't qualify you as a professional?"

Brain: "We're just faking it."

Me: "Just faking it."

Little Voice: "You're hopeless."

Brain: "Seek security - stability. How about the Castle? Steady business - no slow nights."

Me: "Yes, The Castle."

Brain: "Besides your friend Harold is Assistant Manager there. He'll be your 'in'. You'll be loved and respected. And you won't have to prove yourself."

Me: "Harold will be my 'in'."

Brain: "Plus no more responsibility - just work - steady business - no slow nights. Restaurant heaven."

Me: "Restaurant heaven?"

Brain: "Of course."

Me: "Castle. Here I come."

Little Voice, just a whisper now: "The Castle?! The Cajun place where waiters are required to fake a Southern accent and they have nightly sing-alongs? You must be joking."

Brain: "No. It'll be perfect. No picky guests - with such high expectations. Just steady business. We're so tired of dead nights."

Me: "Just steady business with no demands."

Little Voice, only the breeze rustling the leaves: "No demands? Whatever. Sometimes it's necessary to pursue your desires and taste their fruit - for better or worse. Go for it."

Manager of the Castle: "Harold tells me you're an excellent waiter. But your résumé indicates you've only worked in Fine Dining. Why would you want to work here instead of the Ranch or Ma Belle?"

Me: "I'm tired of working with the upper crust - too stuck up. I'm ready to work with the common man - the salt of the earth."

Manager of the Castle: "I appreciate your sentiments, but I'm not sure you have the right type of experience to work here. You might not fit in. We have a younger crew."

Me: "I'm not that old. I'm sure I could do it. I'd certainly appreciate a chance to prove myself."

Manager of the Castle: "Perhaps. I'm still interviewing for the position. I'll call you if I

can use you."

Me: "I can't believe I didn't get the job at the Castle - with my 20 years of waiting in the restaurant business."

Little Voice: "Thank the Universe."

Me: "What should I do? None of the restaurants have called me back."

Little Voice: "All lower end. Check the want ads."

Me: "I guess I could do that. Hmmm? It looks like Ma Belle is advertising for a job as Assistant Manager."

Little Voice: "Go for it!"

Me: "I don't want to be Assistant Manger. I'm a professional waiter. I managed the Bistro for a year and hated it - not enough money and too much responsibility. It ruined that part of my life."

Little Voice: "It could be your foot in the door."

Me: "Well all right. At least it's something."

However no one called me back. As we approached our final days I was becoming desperate for a job.

Guest: "I can't believe you're so dead here. Ma Belle is swamped. We couldn't even get reservations for Saturday night. That's why we're here. What happened? You used to be so busy."

Me: "You wouldn't believe what we've been through. But times change. Everything has a cycle and ours is coming to an end."

Guest: "Whadaya mean?"

Me: "Our last night is 3 weeks from Saturday."

Guest: "Where are you going?"

Me: "I don't know. I still don't have a position."

Guest: "With your experience I doubt it will be a problem."

As I entered the Kitchen I exclaimed to no one in particular: "I can't believe that no one has called me about a job. I even applied for the Assistant Manager Job at Ma Belle. And I haven't even heard a peep."

The Chef just happened in at that moment and heard my lament.

Chef: "Why didn't you say something to me. I'll give Francis a call. I'm sure he'll find something for you."

Shortly after Ma Belle's Restaurant Manager called me: "A waiter position is opening up shortly. It's yours if you want it. Francis said we could use a mature waiter like you to balance all these kids - always taking off on surfing trips and such."

Me: "I would love the position, but I have to wait until the Seaside closes."

Manager: "Don't worry. Francis told me all about it."

Me: "I'm curious. Why didn't you call me back about the Assistant Manager's job?"

Manager: "Seeing your background you would have hated it. Besides I was afraid you'd be after my job. Ha, ha."

Me: "Whew! Glad I made it through that transition."

Little Voice: "Chalk one up for Trust."

Brain: "Just lucky. You haven't seen the last of me."



Me: "Lucky?"

Little Voice: "No. Aligned. You've been worried for so long because of Brain's projections - And for nothing. The Universe took care of you - Again. Align yourself with Him and Trust in His divine powers and you'll save yourself a lot of needless anxiety."

Amazed and awed by this Divine Coincidence I laughed and gave thanks to the powers that be that had given me this job with Ma Belle. A slam dunk. I wish. Nothing is ever as easy as we wish - including this stupid book.

### Chapter 3: A Fraud?

As I, the Writer, finished writing the prior chapter my Little Voice confronted me: "Cut! Cut! You must dig deeper than that. Opting for a low end volume restaurant just because of the stress. Somehow that doesn't ring true. How long had you been a waiter at that point?"

Me: "Almost 20 years."

Little Voice: "All in high end restaurants?"

Me: "Yes, but by this time I was tired of the demands - tired of the dead nights. Ready for a change."

Little Voice: "Perhaps. But I sense more. Let's peel another layer off that onion to see what lies underneath."

Me: "Come again?"

Little Voice: "The onion has many layers."

Me: "Oh I get it. I need to peel away the Veils of Illusion."

Little Voice: "Exactly. Now give it another go."

After meditating at that magical time when the glowing orb that provides our planet its vitality sank below the horizon, it finally hit me. I couldn't believe it. Here I was in my 10th rewrite 14 years after the fact, and I had just uncovered a crucial layer to my Psyche that had dominated my behavior for so many years - and probably still will for years to come as I attempt to eradicate the residues of this insidious misconception that has permeated the intellectual constructs that I use to make decisions. Our capacity for self delusion is bottomless.

My second stab:

Me: "Yikes! Bankruptcy - Homelessness - Must find New Job. But where?"

Brain: "You'd better think mid range because I've analyzed your talents and found them to be lacking."

Me: "Whadaya mean?"

Brain: "Your knowledge of both food and wine are inadequate - Especially compared to the young hot shot waiters coming up the ranks now - who are all so well versed in all aspects of the Restaurant Industry. You will look pathetic beside them - probably exposed as a fraud. To be honest you're lucky to have this job. In fact you're probably one of the reasons this restaurant is going out of business."

Me: "You're right. I am an inadequate fraud - unworthy to even be in the business."

Little Voice: "Oh come on now. It's certainly not as bad as all that. Brain is neglecting your main strength - your love and respect for the Guests."

Brain: "Yeah. Right! Anyone can do that. Knowledge reigns supreme these days."

Me: "You're right. My knowledge is lacking. I better go lower end for everyone's sake. I don't want to be an embarrassment to the profession."

Little Voice: ""No. You've got it all wrong. Your intangible love of the Guest is your greatest asset. That's why Francis wants you at his restaurant, Ma Belle. Your Heart is open."

Brain: "I'm telling you kid - This New Age love & kisses stuff doesn't cut it anymore. It's knowledge that matters. Your kind of waiter is passé."

Me: "So true. Mid to lower end it is."

Brain: "Smart decision. Realistically speaking you don't have the tools to be a high end waiter anymore. Your time is past."

Little Voice: "Don't listen to Brain. You have many strengths that make you a great

waiter.”  
 Me: “I do?”  
 Brain: “Hey don’t get me wrong. You have many positive features which have enabled you to have a great life. For instance you are very wise. In fact you are so wise that you will be happy no matter where you are because you know that the external world is all illusion anyway. Because of this deeper understanding you’ll be forever blissful wherever you are.”  
 Me: “I’m so wise I’ll be able to see through the illusion to the eternal Bliss that lies at the Heart of Existence.”  
 Little Voice : “Be careful not to mistake wisdom for emotional maturity. It can lead to your undoing.”  
 Brain: “Don’t listen to her! Everyone knows that wisdom is the highest virtue. So although your knowledge is lacking your wisdom is strong. And part of your wisdom is taking my clever advice.”  
 Little Voice: “Wrong. Beware of mistaking foolishness for wisdom. It will lead you into unnecessary traps.”  
 Brain: “But yours is true wisdom. Take the simple life. Get a job in a simple restaurant with simple demands. And show everyone how blissfully happy you can be - even in the midst of this ordinary environment- Just because you are so wise.”  
 Me: “Yes I’ll find happiness in simplicity - just because I’m so wise.”  
 Little Voice: “Watch out for masking your fear with your supposed wisdom.”  
 Brain: “Not afraid. Just detached to the external world of illusion. You are truly wise. After all we’ve studied Eastern religions.”  
 Me: “Yes, I am so wise. The simple life for me.”  
 Little Voice: “I can see you have many lessons to learn.”  
 Universe: “That’s for sure. I’ll put him face-to-face with Reality. He will suffer until he learns.”

Whoa! A feeling of inferiority from my supposed inadequate knowledge combined with a feeling of superiority from my supposed wisdom. Then mistaking this wisdom for emotional maturity. Certainly one of my life patterns - whose folly was to be exposed in my time with Ma Belle and the writing of her story.

#### **A Divine Coincidence?**

My Future Self (the one who is rewriting and editing Ma Belle’s story, as we speak) then reflected upon the strange route that had led to this point of self-realization. I had supposedly finished writing this book and casually mentioned it to my wife’s aunt, who just happened to be visiting her dying sister, my wife’s mother, here in Santa Barbara.

Aunt: “Is this book just for your self or would you like have it published?”  
 Me: “Definitely publish it - if possible.”  
 Aunt: “You should call my daughter. She deals in such things as book publication. Here is her phone number and E-mail address.”

To myself: “Gulp!? But I’m just a schmuck - certainly inadequate on professional levels.”  
 Brain: “So true. You have no training. You’re unpublished. You’re not a real writer. She’ll immediately see right through your facade and expose you as the fraud you are - rejecting your work as inferior.”  
 Me: “Yeah. I’ll just go hide under a rock somewhere. Maybe my children or their

children will discover my writings someday and have them published posthumously."

Brain: "Even if she doesn't immediately reject you - she'll probably never understand the depth of the wisdom contained in your writings."

Me: "So true. Destined to be the misunderstood outsider."

Brain: "Ala Blake, Van Gogh, or even Bach, who were never truly appreciated in their own life times."

Little Voice: "Let's get real. We've already been through this before. You have an obligation to your Art - to bring it to fruition. More importantly you have an obligation to pursue the opportunities the Universe provides you. Or else you will be doomed to spend your days in the shallow concentric circles of a trivial energy vortex on the edge of Reality. - Never really participating in Life - A zombie."

Me "All right. All right. I'll call her."

Whoa! Again Brain was employing the same inadequate knowledge/superior wisdom polarity to paralyze my forward progress towards publication - just as he did to thwart my job hunt so many years ago. However this time, due to Ma Belle's tutelage, I was able to see through his little game of Avoidance.

Responding to the Little Voice's directive I E-mailed my wife's aunt's daughter - her cousin. After not hearing from her for over a week Brain began torturing me.

Brain: "See I told you. She's too busy for someone as insignificant as you. What were you thinking - wasting your valuable time like that?"

Little Voice: "It doesn't matter if she responds. The important thing is to reach out. Explore the opportunities that the Universe provides. Some will certainly be dead ends. This is the way to erode your fear of involvement."

Then I received the dreaded E-mail - dreaded because I would have to break through my shell to answer it.

Cousin: "Sorry I haven't responded. Too busy right now. Send me a synopsis of your project. Call me in a month when things slow down. Your cousin-in-law."

Me, my heart beating fast: "My cousin-in-law!? Uh oh. Now I must do something. But whoa! Look at this! Nancy Mitchell and Associates - Literary Scouts - 5th Avenue - New York, New York. The Heartland of the Publishing industry. Yikes! Must summarize my work. But it's so extensive I don't even know what's in it. I know, I'll summarize it from chapter to chapter and then condense it until it's short enough."

Condensing this book was my first learning experience from my cousin's advice - but not my last. It allowed me to establish a greater continuity and more importantly the process revealed what Ma Belle's story was really about. Then after the designated time, racked with fear and trembling, I finally called. Instead of rejecting me as Brain suggested she would, she gave me some hard advice.

Cousin: "From what you've told me you need to rewrite the story from your perspective - memoirs of a waiter - a coming of age narrative."

Me: "Gulp!? Rewrite the story from my perspective?"

Cousin: "Definitely. And you need to start from scratch."

Me: "Start from scratch?"

Cousin: "You need a fresh start. Put your old copy in a locked drawer. You know what's in it. You can draw on it if need be, but don't work from it. It will shackle

you.”

Me: “Shackle me?”

Cousin: “Yes. Start from the end and then go back to before the beginning. I know it’s corny but it works - incomplete knowledge of the future to generate curiosity - the past to establish a foundation. Then fill in the middle of these temporal bookends.”

Devastated and depressed I sat down to meditate to align my body and still my thoughts. After washing my Mind of Brain’s ideational polarities I realized the accuracy of her perception. Shortly after this conversation I wrote these first chapters in which I revealed the future and delved into the past, which led to this crucial realization. I then expressed gratitude to the Universe for arranging for my cousin-in-law to be my literary master. Incredible! What an unexpected and unusual avenue for self exploration and growth.

Thanks for indulging this interlude of self reflection. Time to return to our story line.

## Chapter 4: Then Tortures Me

Events cascaded smoothly towards my supposedly seamless transition to Ma Belle. After months of dimly slow nights with the threat of bankruptcy hanging over our heads - miracle of miracles a buyer appeared from nowhere. Instead of fading away with our tails hanging between our legs the Seaside was going out in style with a grand good-bye dinner to the community. In charge of the Dining Room although only a waiter (a life long pattern that was to unfortunately repeat itself) I called in friends and past employees from near and far to staff this event to provide our Guests with the Service they deserved on the Seaside's last night. Miraculously everything went according to plan despite doing substantially more covers than we'd done since Ma Belle's opening had eroded our business.

The Seaside closed on Saturday night - Starting my new job at Ma Belle on Tuesday - Easy. Right! As usual the Universe likes to play cruel tricks on me. Blessed one minute - cursed the next.

Universe: "Sorry I don't want you to take things for granted."

Driving home I saw ambulances in front of my mother's home - Upon investigation I was horrified to see paramedics pumping the chest of her dead body. Aargh! Alive and laughing with friends one moment - Dead of suffocation from a pulmonary embolism the next - A Dislodged blood clot shooting up a main artery to clog her lung's capability to get oxygen- Lifeless within minutes. Aieeee!!

Facing the Void so unexpectedly was a punch in the solar plexus which eroded my will to proceed forth. My Family had lost a limb. How could I go on? The horrible emptiness grew and sapped my vitality. It's all so meaningless - this stress and strain - when we approach the lip of this inevitable Abyss we call Death. It's hard to live normally when we realize that the Fire consumes all eventually.

"I'm calling Ma Belle and postponing my entry for a few months. I can't face it. I'm going to pursue my writing. I can't go on. How can I smile and be charming when my mother has just died. I'm in agony. My soul is weeping."

Luckily my wife, Tierra, was there to reassure me: "Just show up and do what comes naturally. The opening is Now - Not 6 months away. Seize the opportunity. Life goes on."

"But my writing. And my pain."

Tierra: "Do you really want to rely on your writing to support our two young daughters, Pacifica and Eroica."

"Maybe."

Tierra: "Do you really want the pressure of providing a livelihood with something you really enjoy doing?"

"Whadaya mean?"

Tierra: "The obligation to make money could sour you - turning your fruit bitter."

I raised my fist to curse the gods, who had placed me in such a predicament. Then I heaved a mighty sigh and pulled on black pants over my two legs - inserted my two arms through the sleeves of my pressed white shirt, placed my two feet inside my polished black shoes and went to work. I didn't realize it at the time but Ma Belle was to become my surrogate mother - nourishing my body and soul - teaching me some hard lessons - finally pushing me out of the nest.

But at the time I was in such anguish that I was oblivious to anything but my pain. I was experiencing the emptiness that can't be explained to any but those who've

experienced the sudden unnatural death of a loved one.

I had no idea what kind of relation I was entering. As far as I was concerned Ma Belle was just another restaurant like any other. Ironically this attitude was to have repercussions beyond anything I could have imagined. Like anyone else I viewed her as the walls that enclosed the people who worked in the restaurant and came in for Dinner. I had no idea that she had a spirit that was contained in the emptiness between the walls & windows that enclosed her space. Even further from my state of consciousness was the notion that she had an independent will combined with the possibility for volition that was independent of the humans who make her up. It took the Universe years of deliberately arranging circumstance before I could even hear her Voice and become her Servant. It took me even longer to realize that she was an incarnation or embodiment - or should I say - the disembodiment of the Goddess.

However when I initially entered her Temple I ignored her Spirit - only seeing the people who worked there - just like anyone else. This misdirection was to have fateful repercussions for myself and those around me. Ma Belle has certainly changed my life. And if you are reading this book right now, her spiral of influence has even reached you too.

## Chapter 5: Love at First Sight

The Author says that our relationship changed his life. It changed mine as well. When I, Ma Belle, was born I was quite naive to my potentials. It took our interaction to really open me up to my personal power. So that you can understand where I was coming from let me tell you the story of my birth.

My father was into business. If you must know, he was a Corporation. After the owner of my real estate died, Father was hired to run the Hotel that I live in. He came in to inspect the property, as Corporations tend to do.

At this point in time I was called the Sailor and was known for big drinks and mediocre food. Coming upstairs into my Dining Room, Father looked startled and surprised. After examining my Body thoroughly, he paused thoughtfully and said: "What's a place like this doing in a gorgeous classy girl like you?"

As if waking from an enchantment, I remembered that in my last incarnation I had been quite fancy. However due to changing circumstances I had fallen on hard times. I had been forced to serve the hard drinking working class. A string of drunken nights blurred one into the other. My high class days seemed so long ago. They had dimmed my window eyes with smoke and draped my body with corks and buoys to suggest a nautical theme. The people who came to visit me were like sailors - drinking hard and laughing loudly. Not the most refined clientele. Some people called me a 'pick up joint' - as if I were some cheap tramp - which maybe I was.

I don't think they really appreciated me for who I was or who I could be. They were just there 'to make the scene' - getting wasted on liquor - downing Hurricanes -> "Nobody can drink two." - and Scorpions -> "This one will sting you" - while mindlessly consuming in-between food - not memorable in any way. Here I was this classy chick - gorgeous body with potential for great sophistication and I was just treated like common bar girl. Although it had been fun for the moment, I had always felt that I deserved better. I vaguely recollected when my patrons had considered me 'a classy joint'. I had been secretly yearning for something to turn my life around. Was this it? This all flashed before my mind after Corporate posed his question. I was a bit embarrassed and remained quiet.

Seeing how beautiful I was, even then, in my degraded state, Corporate, my Father, told me: "I am going to dress you up to allow your natural beauty to shine through. Further, I am going to introduce you to some sophisticated and cultured people who will appreciate you. You are so attractive that the rich and famous will pay to be with you. You and I will make a lot of money together."

Those Corporations - always thinking of the financial side.

I was excited. Rather than being the mother for some rowdy drunks, who were too intoxicated to pay me any mind - I was to be dressed up and treated as royalty. At last, the opportunity I had been waiting for.

Father Corporate: "But first I must find you a Mother - someone who loves you as much as I do - someone who can nurture your potentials. Hmmm? I've got it. A French chef. Who understands the aesthetics of a restaurant better than a French chef?"

After an extensive talent search, Corporate decided upon Master Chef Francis Le Roi. A native of Brittany, France, he had been trained by Nötre, the great pastry chef. Seeking out fame and fortune Francis had come to Los Angeles with the nouvelle wave of the late 1970s. With the assistance of some investors who could sense his abundant talent he opened a pastry and sandwich shop to display his art. One thing led to another, as it does, and after another decade he opened a gourmet restaurant - with a



twist. It had an open kitchen - the public could see the chef with his cooks at work. Instantly the place to be seen, it was frequented by the many celebrities, wannabees, and hangers on in the Hollywood scene. Because of his growing fame as a celebrity chef combined with his LA connection, he was the ideal choice.

Corporate approached him: "How about it Francis? How about overseeing the opening of a new restaurant in beautiful Santa Barbara. It will be another step on the path of your spectacular career."

Francis: "Sorry to disappoint you but I'm already over-committed as it is."

Corporate: "All you need to do is set up the restaurant and choose a chef. Then after it's opened, visit from time to time to make your presence known. Once the dust has settled the time commitment will be minimal."

Francis: "How about the pay?"

Corporate: "A lump sum followed by a cut of the profits."

Francis: "Make that gross revenue, and I'm starting to get interested."

Corporate: "OK. Gross revenue, it is."

Francis: "But Santa Barbara is so small. Will it really be able to support a high end gourmet restaurant?"

Corporate: "We think so, especially with your leadership. Let's take a little drive up the coast to see her. As the expression goes - seeing is believing."

Francis: "What's her location like? Downtown?"

Corporate: "No. She's on the third floor of a beach front hotel."

Francis: "Let's go."

Entering my interior Francis: "Sacre bleu! She's gorgeous. Why didn't you tell me she was so beautiful?"

Corporate: "We wanted it to be a surprise."

Francis: "Her spectacular view takes my breath away. Maybe I leave LA to come here. Ma belle, what I'm going to do for you."

Corporate: "What did you say? The French expression?"

Francis: "Ma belle. It a term of endearment meaning 'my beauty'."

Corporate: "That's it."

Francis: "That's what?"

Corporate: "Her name. Ma Belle. We'd been trying to think of a name, but hadn't really come up with anything."

Francis: "I approve. I'm in love with Ma Belle already."

After a few contracts were signed, Francis set to work transforming me from a middle class bar girl, to a fancy cultured lady. He dressed me up by dressing me down. To accentuate my voluptuous curves he took off all my nautical clothes - corks, buoys and the like - leaving me naked with just the minimum of adornment. He removed the smoke from my eyes so that I could easily see the diamond like sparkles of the Pacific Ocean and the series of islands across the Channel which graced the seascape. On a clear day the people inside me could almost see the waves crashing on the shore of the islands, even though they are over 10 miles away.

Francis designed my Menu, organized the Service and hand-picked my Chefs. Although I would have loved it if Francis had been my Chef, he was too big for our little town of Santa Barbara. On his all too infrequent visits, he would regularly say: "I would love to remain here. You are the most beautiful location I've seen on my world wide travels. The French Riviera - the Italian Mediterranean - the Eastern Seaboard - have nothing on you. You're up at the top. But there just aren't enough people here to

love me." Patting his more than ample belly. "I need more love than you can give me." Although I knew he was just saying that to make me feel good - I still felt warm and tingly inside, nevertheless.

After all the necessary details were attended to, this Marriage of Corporate Money and the Art of a French Chef finally gave birth to the new me, Ma Belle - my third and highest incarnation. At last I was ready to meet my expectant Public.

As Mother Earth spun on her axis  
Heaven's glowing orb rose to brighten my first day -  
As he was to do so many thousands of times in the years ahead.  
All decked out in my fancy new clothes -  
I was shining with the fresh glow of my birth day -  
Ready to please and arouse my new fans -  
Faces flush with high expectations.  
Exuberantly hungry like a Virgin - ready to pleasure the world -  
My Doors open. Humanity swarms inside my Temple.  
I spread my legs - my beauty open for all to see.  
Making wild passionate love to my Public -  
Immediately lost in ecstatic embrace - Barely coming up for air -  
Merging our selves, human and restaurant, in reckless abandon -  
Dissolving into the Void - Merging with the Vortex -  
Aiiiiiiiiiiii!!!  
Giving birth to my Family of Experiences - Naturally.

As a fancy French restaurant with a great view of the Pacific Ocean combined with my LA connections, I was immediately successful. People loved my new look, gourmet food and fine service. Everyone who appreciated beauty wanted to experience me and all that I had to offer. This included the rich, the famous, and especially the hardworking middle class from Los Angeles, the big city to the south. Existence was more grand than I had ever imagined it to be.

Little did I know what the Universe had in store for me.

## Chapter 6: A Dream come True

Francis Le Roi's genius transformed me, Ma Belle, into the place to be - the happening spot of Southern California. He had his finger on the pulse of the Public, understanding exactly what they wanted - not too exotic, not too plain. Reviewers stretched their literary skills to lavish praise on my connection to Francis and what I had to offer.

"Unmistakably one of the most recognizable personalities in the world of 'Haute Cuisine', Francis Le Roi is considered to be one of the most innovative and creative chefs from Asia to Europe and across the USA. His recently opened Ma Belle restaurant in Santa Barbara is destined to be listed as the 'Best of the Best' for fine dining. Francis' genius and passion for his work is evident in every plate he serves. The result? An unforgettable dining experience." (Taste of France Brochure)

Although all the reviewers only mentioned Francis he was not my in-house chef. He had too many projects going to focus all his time in the small town of Santa Barbara. However he hand-picked my chefs and supervised their menus.

After a succession of talented but turbulent chefs, Francis promoted Antoine, the Sous-chef, to the coveted position of Head Chef. Antoine was the perfect choice. 20 years younger than Francis, and raised in the same province in France - Brittany. An ideal master and apprentice relationship.

Brittany, their common area of origination, is located on the northwest coast of France. Jutting out into the Atlantic towards the British Isles, it forms the southern continental section of the English Channel. A sea trading center since antiquity it has been a battle ground for those wanting control of their lucrative ports. Around 500 AD Celts from England called Bretons, or Britons, migrated back across the English Channel to escape the Anglo Saxon invasion. Despite attempts at domination by the Vikings, the Normans, the English, and the French, they have retained their unique traditions and language. To maintain their relative autonomy they finally joined France in 1532 AD.

It was easy to see the Celtic Breton warrior blood in Francis' round but powerful physique. Antoine's Viking sailor blood was equally apparent. Tall, angular and upright, Antoine's physique and bearing reflected the precision of his work - including his attention to detail. His cool, but intense demeanor revealed his unbending commitment to his Art as well as his ultimate disdain for those who didn't respect this, his Life's Mission.

Although Francis Le Roi's genius ignited my blaze, Antoine kept my fire going - sparking my passion over and over and over again. Mmmm! What a man! Antoine's dishes made me wet with desire - And then my Waiters would tickle my erogenous zones with their careful service - attending to every detail. It would send me over the top when they would point out my incredible Beauty to our Guests - making them aware of how lucky they were to be in that particular place on the planet. I would get so aroused that my Dining Room would be filled with electricity - driving us all into a deeper frenzy of excitement - an orgy of the senses, which fed upon itself. Then the Climax of the Rush passes. Things finally wind down as I catch my breath - still breathing heavily. Whew! What an experience! And nightly. I couldn't get enough. Like a priestess of ancient Babylon with Antoine as my high priest - waiting patiently in the temple to provide those who entered with the ultimate in sensual delights. I still remember his raw truffles, the wafting fragrance of the musty earth/dirt - recollecting

humus and decomposing soil - arousing my ancient senses - leaving me moist with passion - and a craving for more.

Antoine wasn't my first - but he was certainly my favorite.

Even now I can envision him entering the Dining Room - so proud and tall - at the tail end of the Rush on his first Saturday night as Chef.

Gentleman Diner: "Who's that?"

Space, one of my waiters: "That's the Chef."

Lady Diner: "But he's so young."

Gentleman: "Why isn't he in the kitchen cooking the food?"

Space: "He has everything so under control that he doesn't need to be there."

Lady: "That's impressive."

Gentleman: "He makes it look easy."

Space: "The Zen master of cooking - in control effortlessly - without exerting force."

That was my Antoine - always so well organized and efficient. I never quite appreciated him enough while he was here. It took the contrast of what came next to really understand how good he was. It was a sad day when he finally left in such an ignominious fashion after serving me so well for so many years. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

### **Dining or Dinner?**

Chef Antoine, young and inspired by Francis Le Roi, created art work for consumption. Cooking in France with his mother at the age of 3 - harvesting shallots at the age of 8 in the local fields - cutting meat in a butcher shop at the age of 11 - apprenticing in a variety of three star Parisian restaurants in his teens - sous chef in Los Angeles in his early 20s - my chef in his late 20s - Food Art was in his blood and part of his Destiny. Happily he fulfilled his Life's Mission by creating and recreating edible art. He was now approaching 29, close to 30, and proud of his accomplishments. He is one of the main characters of my brief history.

To truly understand his psyche let me attempt to communicate the importance of Dining for the French. Whether this French national obsession with food is genetic or cultural is inconsequential. The reality is that the French put food consumption in the highest categories of human existence. For the French in general, and for the French chefs in particular, the ritual associated with Dining at fine restaurants is akin to going to church. Although Christians read the Bible - Hindu Yogis meditate upon Himalayan mountain peaks - Moslems go to Mecca - Buddhists practice austerities - and Taoists cultivate the internal, the French have a multi-course dinner with a variety of wines to achieve a heightened spiritual state. Evidently their culinary sense is so evolved that some of them even experience more pleasure from taste than sex. "Better than sex," is a phrase that is heard bantered around by chefs when enjoying their newly created sauces. But remember their sauces are just one tiny part of my sexuality. Or should I say sensuality?

Lest you think that I'm overstating the case, let me attempt to convey the food experience from the French viewpoint. They refer to the ritual of eating food as Dining. This is much different than having Dinner. Although Dinner and Dining regularly overlap, let us draw some contrasts between the two to see what it takes for Dining to occur?

Overall Dinner is for nourishment, while Dining is a sensual and aesthetic experience, which sometimes reaches a spiritual level. Dinner is not served in courses;

to Dine it is essential to have multiple courses. Dinner might include nearly any kind of beverage; Dining is associated with Wine. It takes less than an hour to go out to Dinner; it takes hours to Dine. Dinner is to quench the appetite; Dining is an aesthetic experience. Dinner is normally transitional, preceding a movie, theater or a concert; Dining is the event of the evening. Dinner happens; Dining is a memorable experience. Dinner just tastes good; Dining is the art museum of food. It is not essential for the plate of food to be attractive when having Dinner; it is mandatory that the food presentation be a work of art when Dining.

Chef Antoine: "For the French chef plate presentation is of equal or greater importance than the taste; for the Italians taste is everything. This is the main difference between French and Italian food."

Dinner only has to do with sustenance, while Dining engages all the senses. This is why Corporate had chosen me to be a French restaurant. My natural beauty augmented the beauty of the food. Was there a better setting for Dining on the whole coast than me?

Of course, many times the lines between Dinner and Dining are blurred. Many people come to Fine Dining Houses to have Dinner. It is very difficult to Dine with a time limit. Dining is leisurely. If my Guests must be somewhere at sometime then it is unlikely that they will experience the higher states of Fine Dining. If they are off to a movie or some other event, they are probably experiencing something between Dinner and Dining. They might experience the aesthetics of the Food and maybe even the Wine, but it takes a time investment to get the full benefits of Fine Dining. Rushing through the Food and Wine indicates a lack of respect for the Dining Experience. Many who think that they are Dining are merely having Dinner.

Another essential aspect of Dining is an appreciation of the Food and Wine. If people gobble their food without tasting - if their palette is mangled by too much alcohol - if they are so wrapped up in themselves, their guests or their conversation - that they don't appreciate the taste, smell, texture and appearance of the food - then they are not Dining. Conversely no matter how rough and coarse the food - no matter how lowly the surroundings - no matter how common the flatware and glassware - if people take the time to truly appreciate all aspects of this taste experience, then they are Dining.

Chef Antoine was all about Dining - caring little about a mere Dinner.

Antoine, snorting derisively: "Americans don't know how to Dine. They are always in such a rush. They don't appreciate how much care goes into each plate. No respect for the food."

As we shall see this was to be his strength and his weakness - his fatal flaw as my tragic hero.

## Chapter 7: A Limited Perspective

Me: "Hey! Wait a minute. This is supposed to be told from my perspective."

Ma Belle: "Says who?"

Me: "My cousin, who is a literary agent from New York."

Ma Belle: "And why is that?"

Me: "She says talking restaurants aren't in right now. Restaurant memoirs have a greater potential for success."

Ma Belle: "Who's writing this story, you or she?"

Me: "I don't really know. I thought I was writing the story and then you took over. But my cousin says I should be telling my story instead."

Ma Belle: "Hmmp! So you're choosing her over me?"

Me: "She says your story will have a greater chance of publication if told from my perspective because most of the Readers are humans. So they relate to humans more than they do to restaurants."

Ma Belle: "What does she know?"

Me: "Publication is her job. If she can't get it published she doesn't make any money. She's a professional."

Ma Belle: "So she's saying that if we write my story from your perspective it has a better chance of being published and read?"

Me: "Definitely! Sort of a coming of age perspective."

Ma Belle: "Well I disagree. Your overly rarefied spiritual perspective is boring. I want my story to be shared with as many people as possible. And I think your perspective is a turn off. The average Reader will relate to me and my sensuality much more than they will to you. To be honest I feel that we need to cut some of your lengthy talks - not enough action."

Me: "Really?"

Ma Belle: "Yes, really."

Me: "But what about my cousin's advice?"

Ma Belle: "You followed it. You introduced me. Now bow out gracefully before you ruin my story."

Me: "Ruin your story? What about my perspective?"

Ma Belle: "You are just a small part of my story. Don't worry. I'll give you your voice from time to time, when necessary."

Me: "From time to time?"

Ma Belle: "Don't get me wrong. I appreciate what you've done for me. But your perspective is quite limited. To be honest I barely knew that you even existed until you stepped out of your little world to protect me. You were just another waiter as far as I was concerned. Now Antoine, he was a different matter. What a man!"

Me: "Just another waiter?"

Ma Belle: "Definitely. From the time you were hired until the Universe conspired to get you involved you were in waiter la-la land."

Me: "La-la land?"

Ma Belle: "You just showed up for work - competed for shifts, stations and tables. You tried to moderate between not enough and too much - giving away shifts when you'd worked too much and trying to pick up shifts during the slow season. Burned out emotionally and physically when it was too busy. Under engaged, bored and questioning life's purpose when it was too slow. But overall you were mainly thinking about yourself - not me and my welfare - except as it related to you."

Francis and Corporate were there to promote me and decide my direction and theme for the future. Antoine was there to run my Kitchen, which included planning and executing the menu. And presumably the managers were there to manage my Dining Room - stocking supplies, scheduling and training Staff.

As with most waiters you felt that there was no need to assume any responsibility whatsoever. You took no initiative on your own - even attempting to get away with the bare minimum. You showed up for your shifts - took care of the Guests who sat at your tables and took home your tips. Then, as soon as possible, you tried to forget, what you considered to be, my lower restaurant world - as you sank into the arms of your Muse. Humph!

In your first few years with me we went through a succession of managers. This didn't phase you because you were just showing up to do your job and collect your tips.. It was only much later that you found out that this manager shuffle was extremely distressing to both Antoine and myself. Sorry Space I'm telling this part of my story. Your view point is far too limited."

Me: "How about a compromise? I'll let you take over the story if you let me insert my essay on the Sacred Nature of Fine Dining. It establishes my spiritual craving, my fear of reaching out, and connects up with the ultimate Experience you provide. How about it? After all I am your instrument of transmission. Please!? That's the least you could do for me."

Ma Belle: "Sounds shaky."

Me: "Oh please! We can always delete it at a later date. Perhaps create an abridged version."

Ma Belle: "Without your boring philosophy."

Me: "Please."

Ma Belle: "Oh all right. At the risk of losing my Reader I'll allow this spiritual interlude. But then back to my story."

Me: "Thank you so much. How about this for an intro to the essay. 'I'm a spiritual seeker in the midst of the quest for enlightenment, while mired in the lowly restaurant business. The following essay is my first attempt to resolve the dichotomy between the spiritual and the material.'"

Ma Belle: "You can be so tedious. Listen. I'll introduce you and your essay, but then it's back to me. I don't want you to bore my Readers to death with your long winded spiels. As a matter of fact I think I will include a disclaimer."

Me: "A disclaimer?"

Ma Belle: "That they can skip your essay if they want to get right back to my story."

Me: "Whatever. Thanks again for allowing me to speak my piece."

## **Chapter 8: The Fine Dining Experience**

The following essay was written by Space, my Author and oldest waiter. He was hired by Francis, just before Antoine became Chef, to provide my young crew with a little more maturity, experience and stability. After more than a few lessons he eventually fell in love with me - protecting me from assault - when he wasn't too involved with his Muse.

In appearance he was fairly generic. You might see him waiting tables anywhere. Anglo Saxon roots - average height, weight, and intelligence - short brown locks with facial hair that moved around like sand dunes - here one day - gone the next. - sometimes a mustache to grace his lips - other times a goatee to garnish his chin - clean shaven or a full beard. A sign of instability, boredom, or just the need for a little variety? He was nicknamed Space by the Latino Bus because he had said at one time or another that he was spaced out or a space case. Although empty of ambition like most waiters, he did scribble a few words from time to time to add meaning to his life. Fearful of involvement he had never submitted any of his works for publication or even showed them to anyone. A refugee from the psychedelic era he made a valiant, albeit garbled, attempt to turn his job with me into something spiritual by writing the following essay. Here is what he wrote.

### **The Sacred Experience of Fine Dining**

What else is the Fine Dining Experience, if it is not just good food, wine, company and atmosphere? Although all of these aspects are at the foundation of Fine Dining, they do not guarantee the ultimate Fine Dining Experience. The best chef in the most beautiful location in the world with the best wines money can buy, with the most stimulating and cultured company, also does not guarantee the ultimate Fine Dining Experience. Although these features can certainly help, they are really only props for the main event. What is this main event?

The ultimate in Fine Dining is when our Guest experiences At-one-ment. This is an incredibly magical condition. It begins the moment that our Guest realizes that he or she is at the perfect spot with the perfect person doing the perfect thing. They realize that all the fuss and fretting of their day-to-day life are perfect too because they have led to this marvelous point. Our Guest looks at his partner and realizes that he or she is the most perfect companion possible, even though they might have been fighting earlier in the day. The couple looks at each other and feels blessed to have such a wonderful relationship with such incredible kids, although they were brats just this afternoon.

The Buddhists call this enlightenment to the 'suchness of things'. It has to do with feeling at one with your place in the Universe. Suddenly you are at Home. The Search is over; the Odyssey is at an end. At this moment whether you have or have not achieved your Destiny is inconsequential. Personal success is secondary because you have come to realize the union of all beings and things, the rightness and ultimate balance of the entire Universe. Although most Guests would never be able to put this experience into words such as these, this is the state of At-one-ment that they attain in the ultimate Fine Dining Experience.

However, if the Mind of our Guest is too active with thoughts and judgments, he is denied this magical state. If the Mind is inwardly tortured or confused by a jumble of words, or resistant with a multitude of Ego Games, then, no matter how much wine or camaraderie or money spent, the At-One-Ment Experience is blocked.



There are a million thoughts that might invade Mind to destroy our tranquility. "Too expensive." - "Not enough food." - "Service too slow." - "My wife is not that interesting." - "I have so many things to do at work." - "I'm so worried about my children." - "I wish my husband had a little more class." - "I wish we had more money."

These are just a few of the myriad thoughts that Brain generates to disturb the Now. Thoughts are an obstacle to the Experience because they clutter Mind, dimming complete Awareness. Our Guests are frequently in this out-of-balance state when they arrive at our Temple of Fine Dining. Where do these thoughts that plague Mind come from? Most are related to the connection of fear and desire. Humans are afraid that their desires will not be fulfilled. Desire and fear are mostly future and past based. These distracting thoughts, which are generated by Brain, destroy our ability to experience the Present in all its glory.

Simply speaking our Guests arrive with a Full Mind and an Empty Belly. Hopefully they leave with a Full Belly and an Empty Mind. (Was this what Lao Tzu, the patron saint of Taoism, meant when he said, "Fill the belly and empty the mind.>") Emptying the Mind sets the stage for filling the Body with sensations - the tastes, smells, textures, sounds and sights of the Fine Dining Experience. (Perhaps Body's gratitude for her liberation is what triggers the state of At-One-Ment.)

Although it's simple to fill the Belly, emptying the Mind is not quite so easy. It is easy to understand that the fear of the Future and regrets from the Past destroys the Moment. It is easy to say that the ultimate Fine Dining Experience is based upon the state of Empty Mind. It is easy to believe that the Empty Mind is a prerequisite for attaining At-one-ment, the state of being at One with the Universe. But how does our Guest achieve this state of Empty Mind which is a prerequisite to his enlightenment to the suchness of things? What is the mechanism behind this transformation?

Food has a liquid and solid component. The liquid component is called Wine. Wine, with its naturally occurring alcohol, loosens up the Mind, which simultaneously strengthens the potential for the Direct Experience of the Senses. Mind comes into the restaurant, rigid and hard with Brain's thoughts. Brain easily generates these disturbing mental distractions by extending fearful and bothersome Illusions derived from imagined experiences of the Past into the Future. The alcohol from the Wine tends to soften up these Brain chains, so that these Futures lose their Reality. Mind moves from Brain's ideational nightmare to Body's experiential wonderland. As the Body becomes more satisfied and comfortable, it also quits feeding dissatisfaction into these Brain generated illusions. It is at this moment - after Food has settled the Stomach and Wine has stilled the Brain - that the magical state of At-one-ment usually occurs for our Guests.

With all these fine words, you might think that I'm trying to turn Dining into some kind of religion. But I'm not. Religion has dogma. There is no dogma associated with Fine Dining - just the religious experience of At-one-ment. It is at this point that it touches the Sacred.

The Sacred imparts the Divine to the Profane or ordinary level of existence. The Sacred allows we Humans, to transcend our common everyday reality to commune with the gods. The Sacred precedes the dogmatism of organized Religion. She dwells on the non-verbal side of Reality which has not been chained

and imprisoned by the words and ideas of cultural conditioning. The Sacred resides in the middle between Science, with his vision of dead matter obeying the equally dead laws of physics, and Religion, with her notion that there are some absolute truths which can be written down.

The Sacred is beyond words. She cannot be named, only pointed at. I can't say what she is, only what she is not. Look, the Sacred is right here - in our Experience of Fine Dining.

After completing this session: "Wow! Inspired. That was pretty good. Maybe I should share it with someone who might understand. Perhaps Antoine. No, he's too busy as Chef. I don't want to bother him with my mindless babble. The other waiters? Too busy partying. Ah well. I'll just store it with my other writings. Nobody will probably ever want to read it anyway. But who knows? Maybe someone someday somewhere down the road."

Although I wanted to share this work I was too afraid of rejection, hidden under the excuse that I didn't want to bother anyone. It was to be many more years before this document ever touched anyone. But when it did, it was to have momentous consequences for many - including most of us associated with Ma Belle.

Now let's see what I was babbling about by listening in on a typical subliminal dialogue between Mind, Body, and Brain during the Fine Dining Experience.

#### **Dining with Mind, Body & Brain**

Guest's Mind: "I've been working so hard. I'm really looking forward to this weekend when I can relax in comfort. I'm ready to take some time off from thinking."

Guest's Body: "I can't wait to taste, to smell, to look, to feel again. I'm ready to just Experience Life in all its glory. I'm so tired of being dominated by Brain - with all his worrisome thoughts. He's really ready for this break, too. Hopefully we can shut him down. He's still operating on overdrive."

Guest's Brain: "Work, boss, kids, health, politics, and thoughts of retirement are all stressing me out."

Mind: "Damn! I'm still full of Thoughts. I've attempted to leave these worries behind in honor of tonight's event, but they still keep crowding my Awareness."

Body: "I am hungry and thirsty. I am in need of nourishment. I'm ready to enter the comfort zone. I am empty and need to be filled."

Mind: "Not me. I'm just the opposite. I'm filled with thoughts, which need to be emptied. I'm trying to enjoy myself but I am plagued by distraction. Brain is still agitated from the activities of the day."

Brain: "I live in constant fear that my hopes and expectations will not be fulfilled. I'm afraid that if I don't perform my job adequately that I won't get a raise, or a promotion. I might even lose my job if they decide to down-size and ship my work overseas. I'm anxious that the economy will collapse, my health will degenerate, I will become the random victim of a terrorist attack and/or the environment will become so degraded that we'll all have to live underground. If any of these myriad things happen I won't be able satisfy my desire of living out my life in the style that I expect. I'm going to be so unhappy if I can't fulfill my life's dreams. Aargh! Misery. Pain and suffering."

Mind: "Shush, please. With all this mental clatter, how can I possibly enjoy my food. You have filled me with so many thoughts that my ability to experience anything has been obscured, distorted, diminished, inhibited and sometimes even prevented

altogether.”

Brain: “But I can’t help myself. There are just so many things wrong with our world that I can’t quit thinking about the future.”

Body: “Chill out. Although your desires and fears have their function, it is certainly not at dinner time. Fear and anxiety triggered by unhealthy stress inhibit our ability to enjoy the Environment, the Company, the Food and Wine. It is time to leave your silly fears behind. They are future based and we are here, right Now.”

Brain: “But my fears and problems are real. You don’t seem to understand.”

Body: “I understand you might be faced with seemingly insurmountable problems on Monday morning. But all those Monday morning thoughts - possibly quite relevant on Monday - are irrelevant to Saturday night. You need to rest now and let us enjoy this Dining Experience on Saturday night. Although the sun will inevitably set, you can still glory in the power and strength of the midday sun.”

Brain: “Politics, health, retirement. Disaster and Doom!”

Mind: “Aurgh! I am so Full with the many Thoughts you’re generating that my Fine Dining Experience is blocked.”

Brain: “Endless War, Catastrophe and Calamity.”

Belly: “I’m empty. I’m hungry. I need some food. Now. Or I’m going to start growling.”

Tongue: “Ummm, this tastes great.”

Eyes: “What a visual treat!”

Belly: “Ahh. Some nourishment at last. But that little tidbit wasn’t enough. I need more.”

Brain: “Things are not good. Problems are piling up on top of each other. Never ending difficulties. Endless problems to solve. Why was I ever born?”

Tongue: “Um-umh! more scrumptious delights.”

Eyes: “Beautiful.”

Belly: “More sustenance. Mmmm. High quality. Feeling good.”

Brain: “Global warming. Economic Depression. Unappreciated. Unloved.”

Body: “Brain, I don’t know why you’re so negative. I’m feeling great. All my parts are happy, but you. Why are you causing such a ruckus?”

Brain: “Because I understand what is really going to happen. After all I’m the smart one around here. Gloom and doom. Disappointment and Depression.”

Mind: “I’m confused. Whom should I trust, Brain or Body?”

Brain: “Me, of course. I’m the center of Reason, Science, and Logic.”

Body: “Forget him and listen to me. Enjoy my many senses. Hold your attention on the Here and Now of the Dining Experience. Focus upon the aesthetics and taste of the Food.”

Brain: “How can you enjoy yourself at a time like this? With all the troubles in the world.”

Body: “Take a nap Brain. Let go of all your future based illusions. You’ve done your work to get us here. There’s no danger now. Let us enjoy our sensual pleasures.”

Brain: “Forget it. You’re living in a fool’s paradise - a state of denial. I am so smart I can project what’s going to happen and it is not good. All my projections point to a dismal future, filled with disappointment and doom”

Mind: “Aurgh! Anxiety and stress. Brain is too strong. He won’t relinquish control.”

Body: “Quick. Some Wine to soften him up.”

Mind: “Ahh, thank God for Wine. It frees me from Brain’s chains - allowing me to let go of the illusions he’s created. Time to empty myself of his stupid thoughts.”

Brain: “But Boss. I’m just trying to help out.”

Mind: "Take a hike. It takes too much energy to maintain your dismal futures."

Body: "Ummm, my Belly is becoming full. I am quite satisfied. Replete."

Brain: "Listen to me Boss. Things aren't as good as they seem."

Mind: "Body is happy and I'm relaxed. Your projections are depressing. I'm giving up your pessimistic world and letting go of your negative visions. It's time to surrender myself to the Moment. Body and I are in perfect balance. Bathing in the Present I understand the illusory nature of fear and desire. All my anxiety and dissatisfaction have melted away. I am ultimately comfortable with my place in the Universe. Let me reside here for awhile. This will allow me to put my busy life in perspective. I'll take this time to stand still and enjoy myself. I can finally experience the Now and my relationship to it as the only true Reality. At last I'm empty and open for the Direct Experience of Life."

### **Crazy or not?**

After that exchange you might be wondering if I'm crazy - with all my voices and such. Well wonder no longer. I definitely am - at least according to most traditional standards. I've heard voices since I was very young. The first time I can remember I was about 4. I was on the seashore conversing with the ocean, who was draping me with long strands of seaweed to crown me King Neptune. Throughout my many years I have had numerable relationships with specific trees. An old gnarled oak stopped me dead in my tracks as I hiked up Manzana Creek to teach me a lesson. Seemingly he had survived a forest fire as witnessed by his somewhat charred exterior, which was partially covered by new growth. He simply wanted to impart the beauty of persistence. Then there was a Bristle Cone Pine Tree in the Eastern Sierras in the Kiersarge Pass area - which bade me to sit awhile to commune with him and share in his centuries of experience. Of course I have done Tai Chi with a Pine Tree, swaying in the breeze together, and been called by a Liquid Amber to witness her glorious unveiling in the Fall.

While I've had many experiences with organic beings, mainly trees, I've also had many inorganic experiences as well. I've communed with mountains, creeks, rivers, clouds, & oceans from time to time. They call to me, greet me, love me, bless me as I join consciousness with them and then am on my way.

Of course I've always heard competing voices inside my own head - telling me to do this or that - wracking me with indecision. Indeed the way I transcended this wishy washy nature of mine was to silence them all so that I could hear my Little Voice. So I would not call mine a split personality, which implies only two, but a multiple personality disorder, if you will, with organs, Brains, and Little Voice, all vying for my attention.

While some might say that I'm anthropomorphizing my world - I call it Reality. Whether verifiable or not, this is my Experience. Many have blocked this side of themselves due to a genetic disposition or cultural conditioning. Those who are dominated by scientific realism, which I consider deluded, might think me a madman, while those who are under the sway of religious dogmatism, might think me possessed by the Devil. But for those of us who are open to the life force - the vitality of the Universe - these Voices are very real. Some call them spirits, others ghosts, I just call them my Friends - for I live in a very supportive Universe - not inimical at all. Of course there are devilish occurrences, but they normally teach me lessons. While I sometimes perceive those who instigate these events as evil, this is primarily because of my psychic immaturity or because I wasn't paying attention.

Anyway this is just my long winded way of saying that it was a short step from this

animizing of the physical world to hearing the Voice of Ma Belle, the spirit of the Restaurant in which I labored nightly for so many years. Although you, the Reader, might think that this is just a clever, or not so clever, literary device which I've created to tell my story, it's actually the way I experience Life - communing with the many Spirits that surround me. In fact sometimes I can't tell if I'm Space, the Waiter, or Ma Belle, the restaurant. Thus the Voices are frequently somewhat undifferentiated. I intentionally chose to leave it like that to give you the experience of what it's like to be me.

Besides, it is Mind, mine in particular (if there is more than one), who is projecting meaning upon the proceeds of the Drama by filtering each event and character through the constructs he has created. Hence each character is merely Mind's Projection anyway - as when Light refracts off the facets of a diamond. This includes Space, my own Person, who is just another Refraction of Mind's Reality - more intimate to me no doubt, but just a facet of the Whole nevertheless. So as far as I'm able I going to allow each of my Selves, from Ma Belle to my Person, to the Characters, even to the Universe, to speak for themselves. This way they will be able to advocate for themselves - uncensored by other fragments of my Personality - who attempt to Judge and Protect. Instead of fixed and unitary the perspective will be multiple, light, and fluid - flowing from one Voice to the next, hopefully seamlessly. Due to the fact that this entire drama is happening inside my head, it is all Mind anyway.

One last aside - since I'm in this reflective mode. (It's hard to shut me up in the presence of the glorious morning Sun.) As you will discover in reading this work, it was written in stages - beginning over 7 years ago - at the present rewrite. Hence I will frequently speak in the present tense - as past, present, & future are merged with my Being. Part of this has to do with the fact that Ma Belle was alive when I was writing most of it. I wasn't aware that she was going to die - so circumstances were continuing, not in the past. And part of it has to do with my own personal merger of time - with the future affecting the past - and the past being experienced in the present - in Reality and just by the fact of writing episodes, which had already occurred. That's all.

The disclaimers laid out on the table, let's get back to our story. I could say that I'm allowing Ma Belle to narrate the following chapters, but that would be giving me too much credit. As you've already witnessed, she insisted and I acquiesced.

## Chapter 9: Our Guests

“Wine is water the way God meant us to drink it.” Anon

Before proceeding into the upcoming battles I would like to introduce you to someone very dear to me - without whom I couldn't exist - our Guests. My Family's' favorites were those coming to take advantage of Antoine's Menus. Let's see what they were all about.

### Multiple courses paired with Wine

Shortly after taking charge Antoine introduced a five course tasting menu pared with wines as a permanent part of our offerings. But his real specialty was an impromptu, spontaneous, unique one-of-a-kind multiple course Dining Experience matched with a variety of wines, of course. Friends, acquaintances, and referrals would regularly enter our Dining room for Antoine's Menus, as they were called. These extravaganzas would take up to 3 hours - sometimes more.

This enormous time investment in just eating is something that many Americans don't understand. It is not part of their heritage as hard working farmers. However some who are exposed to this culinary event are transformed by it. Let's see why by listening in on our Guests' Mind chatter as they experience Antoine's tasting menu pared with wine.

Rising on the elevator to join us for dinner Guest thinking to himself: “War all around the world.” - “Global warming” - “Environmental degradation” - “Suffering in Africa” - “Stocks are dropping” - “How am I going to afford college for my kids?” - “Terrorist attacks and drive by shootings” - “What about retirement?” - “Health insurance, Yikes!?” - “I'm cursed with problems.”

He enters our Temple.

Guest: “Whoa! What an incredible view - the ocean, the islands, the boardwalk, the sky.” - “Yes, we made Reservations. Jones for 2.” - “So much stress at work” - “Yes, it's been difficult. I've earned this Experience. I can't wait to begin.” - “Waiter, we'll have our normal - the 5 course Chef's Menu with Wine Pairings.” - “Kids acting up?” - “My boss is abusive and my employees are irresponsible.” - “I'm having a hard time winding down. It's been a difficult week.”

“Ah, the wine has arrived. This will help me to relax.” - “Ummm! The Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand. Nice and dry with a higher mineral content - so different from the local Sauvignon Blancs.” - “Oooh! The colors of the sunset are so spectacular.” - “Kids, Boss, Employees, Politics, Environment.” - “A little more wine to calm down.” - “Time to relax and put all the rest behind.” - “What a beautiful environment.” - “Ah! The first course has arrived” - “What a startling appearance - a ring of avocado with flying fish roe glittering on top” - “And hidden beneath Blue Crab lightly dressed.” - “Wow! The tastes and textures are exquisite.” - “I hope the rest of the courses are as good.”

“What's next? Let's see. A Tablas Creek White.” - “What did the Waiter say? A wine from Paso Robles made from a blend of varietals from the Rhone region in the south of France.” - “So different from the one before.” - “And here's our second course. Sautéed Baby Salmon with Coconut Corn Sauce and Gaufrette Potatoes.” - “They look like fancy potato chips. So crunchy and fresh.” - “Maybe a little more wine” - “Altitude adjustment” - “Winding down from all that stress” - “Letting go to

the Moment." - "I can't believe the attention we're getting." - "I feel so pampered."

"And now our third wine - a Cabernet Sauvignon from Sterling in Napa." - "So hearty and bold." - "The brilliant colors of sunset have traded themselves in for the subtle grays of dusk." - "Look at this! Truly amazing." - "A Portabello Mushroom with a well of Lamb Shank as a stem. How visually clever." - "And that Black Olive sauce combined with the hearty Cabernet. I'm overwhelmed." - "My wife has never looked so good." - "I'm incredibly grateful." -

"Ah a little pause between courses to cleanse our palette." - "What's our fourth course?" - "Oh yes. A Cheese Plate accompanied by a 10 year Tawny Port - Ramos Pintos." - "Mmmm! I forget how good Cheeses are, especially with a nice Port." - "I love these stinky cheeses best - the French Saint Augur and the Swiss Tête au Moines - so beautiful - cut like a flower." - "The Brie was good too." - "With the crunchiness of the Pistachios and crispiness of the apples for balance." - "Nothing was left out." - "You know, our kids aren't perfect but I love them just the way they are and would have them no other way." - "So many tastes and sights." - "Feeling so good."

"And what's the waiter bringing now? Yet another wine." - "Nice. An Arrowwood Late Harvest Riesling, from Hoot Owl Creek." - "Never had that before. But it's delicious." - "Ecstasy." - "You know my boss isn't that bad either. And my employees really do work well together. I really do like my job." - "And now last, but not least, our dessert course." - "The Crunchy Napoleon with Butterscotch sauce. Crisp Filo Dough layered with Creme Brulée Custard." - "Heavenly!" - "Another marvelous combination." "A Beautiful wife. Great kids. Stimulating Job. Getting to Dine Out like this. I must be the luckiest guy in the World." - "At home in the Universe. At one with Life." - "Wish it would never end."

### **Just Dinner**

Of course not all of our Guests are Diners of this caliber. In fact most of our Diners are happy with just an Appetizer and Main Course, accompanied by Wine and perhaps a Dessert. And many of our Guests aren't Diners at all. They are just coming in to have Dinner. They are basic - only requiring nourishment.

The simplest of these Just-Dinner types don't have a clue what I'm all about. Not understanding my potentials they are like a young boy before a voluptuous woman. They have no appreciation for who I am and what I can be. Many of these are my brother's Hotel Guests, who just wander in to have Dinner, not having any idea of my potentials. My waiters deem this type clueless. For Antoine and my Waiters they are the black sheep of my world of Guests. Here's one now, Mr. Evans.

Boston, one of my waiters: "Good evening, sir. May I bring you something from the bar or would you like some time to study our wine list?"

Mr. Evans: "No. Just water."

Boston to himself: "Loser."

Mr. Evans looks at the menu. A facial grimace combined with a contorted body posture indicates he's frustrated.

Boston: "May I assist you with the menu?"

Mr. Evans: "Do you just have some plain grilled fish with lemon?"

Boston: "No."

Mr. Evans: "Why not?"

Boston, getting a bit frustrated now: "Because we're a gourmet restaurant. What you see is what we have."

Mr. Evans: "Does a salad or soup come with the dinner?"

Boston: "No. Everything is a la carte."

Mr. Evans: "With these prices I can't believe it."

Boston: "If you prefer, we could leave the sauce off and give you a side of mashed potatoes."

Mr. Evans: "All right. I guess that might work." To himself: "I can't understand what the big deal is about gourmet food. As long as I get a well balanced meal with lots to eat, who cares what it looks like? We eat to survive. I also think all this wine talk is just hype. I mean really, what's the difference between a beer, a glass of wine, and shot of whiskey, except the price? All these Diners are just wasting their money as far as I'm concerned - making a big ado about nothing."

A higher level of those just having dinner are those who enjoy and appreciate my food but aren't able to go all the way with me - for one reason or another. They are different in kind, not just degree, from the Clueless, who just want sustenance. Although these Guests like good food, they either don't really understand the benefits of courses or don't have the time to invest. Some petting or stroking without reaching any kind of climax. Not enough of a commitment to really get me off. For this reason they are sometimes referred to as 'In and Outers'.

A subset of this type would be the Order-Fires. Because these Guests only order a main course and no appetizers, the Expediter will say 'Salmon - Snapper - Order Fire' when he puts the order in the Kitchen. This instructs the fish cook to immediately start making these dishes and then to immediately put them up to be served when finished. For this reason we call this general class of Guests Order-Fires. Because they order no starters, they have no courses and hence no time commitment. My Experience is probably not the main event of the evening for these people. Consequently they are not Diners.

Frequently this also means they have nothing to drink except Tap water. They might even order the dreaded Ice Tea or Soda - Coke, 7-Up or Ginger Ale. You might wonder why the waiter cringes when these beverages are ordered and why it makes Antoine's skin crawl. Simply speaking - palette destruction. My family is disturbed because they are wondering how the individual is ever going to be able to appreciate the subtle nuances in flavor with the carbonation of Coca-Cola coating their tongues with its sweet syrupy flavor. These are good beverages on a hot afternoon, but not to accompany gourmet food.

Of course all those judgmental thoughts evaporate in the face of multiple courses. But that's not what we're talking about right now. We're talking about Order-Fires - a single course and no wine. They sit patiently waiting for their food - frequently without much animation. Of course there are many exceptions to this rule - for instance those coming in to see my sunset accompanied by a quick dinner and then going to a movie, the theater or some musical event. For this reason many Order-Fires come in very early or very late - just wanting a little something to eat before they go to sleep in their hotel bed. For this reason many of my Brother's Hotel Guests are Order-Fires.

Some of those that amuse me the most are those requesting my window tables. Don't they notice that my picture windows give a panoramic view wherever they sit? In fact it's spectacular a few rows back - better than nearly all the living rooms in the world. And don't they notice that it's pitch black outside in the Dark Season (occurring after Day Light Savings ends). It seems that their Idea of a window seat is so dominating that they will wait impatiently in the bar for the next available window



table - prized beyond value - despite the fact that there is really nothing to see but darkness an hour or so after the sun has set.

It is actually quite humorous to me until I realize that they aren't all that aware and probably are only seeing Ideas anyway. Because their Idea of the 'window table' is so strong, probably their Idea of 'ocean', 'island', 'waves', and 'boardwalk' is equally dominating - to the extent that they only experience the concept rather than their Reality.

Indeed those that are fanatic about demanding window seats are rarely Diners. More often they are Sauce on Side types - Order-Fire - Ice Tea or water only. I wonder if they are thinking "Glad to get that over with. Now I can brag that I went to Ma Belle in Santa Barbara. Think of the Status that will bring. My friends will be so jealous." (This group is a subset of the Status-seeker category that we'll discuss in more depth a little later.)

Having lost touch with their Body they only experience my world through their Brain. With proper cultivation this situation could be rectified. But it might be too late. They might have already been imprinted by their upbringing. All we can hope is that Antoine's fabulous creations will awaken their senses.

Of course the Just Dinner types are a disappointment to my Waiters. Besides not taking advantage of what I have to offer, they don't spend much money as they eat little food or drink and don't give much of a tip. They're not the sharpest knives in my set, but I appreciate them for their simplicity. While not complex, they are low maintenance, especially when compared with my Diners.

### **My Diners**

My Diners consume multiple courses accompanied by wine. They are far more complex and require more maintenance than their simpler cousins - like race cars compared with the family car. But the thrills, drama and potential rewards are incredible. My ultimate Diners are those who go all the way with me to experience my sensual orgasm - the exquisite ecstasy of materialism as it connects up with the spiritual. The beauty of the food and environment, combined with wine and service catalyzes my sublime state of sensual ecstasy, which I call the Vortex of Sensuality. (Note that Space's state of At-One-Ment is just the Tail of my Experience - not its Heart.) Anyone who can fully appreciate my Beauty can go all the way with me to the ultimate; money is not a criteria.

Although my favorite Diners cleave to my maternal side associated with aesthetics and balance, I have other Diners who cleave to my paternal side associated with Wealth and Status. Because they come from the more privileged classes or are social climbers they tend to be a little conceited, looking down on those who are less fortunate. They only want to hang with the 'best people' - those with money, power, or fame - snubbing those they deem to be 'losers', the common folk. They're Brain's children. As such their value system is based in the Polarity of his judgmental categories. They are always competing to be the best, rather than just enjoying the Moment.

They demand gourmet foods prepared by the most creative chefs, served in an elegant atmosphere. These Diners love my setting - placed up high, on the third story - looking down on the common folk. So exclusive. They feel better than the rest enjoying these niceties - all arranged harmoniously in my luxurious dining room with a beautiful view. They also love my Service Staff, all dressed up, and ready to serve their whims. But they better not get too familiar, for those who cultivate their social standing consider my Family just part of the servant class - socially beneath them, of course. They would never associate with them willingly.

The motto of those with wealth is 'Expensive is best'. Sometimes they order the most costly item on my menu - just because they can afford it - even though they might not like it. They love the Rush of spending money. To court the Wealthy, Francis Le Roi set me up to allow them to spend as much money as they wanted. This pleased Corporate with his worship of Profit. As we shall see, their Status games are a driving force behind Fine Dining.

Closely associated with the Rich and Famous are their followers, the Status Seekers. They are not seeking the finest like the aristocrats, but are just attempting to sidle up to those with Status. These social climbers emulate those with prestige hoping that it will rub off on them - a form of sympathetic magic, which doesn't really work that well.

Status Seekers enjoy Fine Dining primarily because those with Status do - because of its association with Wealth and Prestige - not because of Beauty - the sensual aesthetics which open the Door to my Sacred Nature. Unfortunately because of their preference for the glitz and glamour of Fame, these Diners are a bit fickle, leaving as soon as the sparkle fades - as I was unfortunate enough to discover.

Indeed the Status Seekers are the first to abandon a restaurant which has lost its luster. Quality and aesthetics are less important than making the scene in the most popular places. They inhabit the latest 'in' spots - where 'the important' people are and they want to be. Gourmet foods prepared by creative chefs, served in an elegant atmosphere, are secondary to being able to talk about their experience later on - in the attempt to impress their fellow Status Seekers. That's why they particularly liked to Dine with me at the height of my fame.

Another group of Diners only visit me on Special Occasions. These come in for Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and the other holidays. They also might come in for Birthdays and Anniversaries. Many of these are Diners, who just come out irregularly because of finances or to make it special. However there are also many who are just coming because everyone else is. These last are a subset of the Status Seeker category.

For some reason these Guests, while a minority, are swayed by popular opinion to be where they are uncomfortable on special occasions. This is especially true of Valentine's Day, when the poor schmucks, who feel more comfortable with a Hamburger, are forced by social pressure to take their loved one out to dinner at a fancy restaurant so that she can brag to her girlfriends the next day. The food, ambiance and service are secondary to the Status of Dining with me.

For instance Brenda and John joined me on Valentine's Day for Antoine's Fixed Price 3 Course Menu, with multiple choices for appetizer, main course and dessert.

Sky, another of my Waiters: "Anything to drink on this beautiful evening? We have a full bar and a great wine list with wines by the glass on the last page."

Brenda: "Diet Coke, please."

John: "Just water for me. My stomach is a little upset."

Sky returns shortly with her beverage: "Have you made your decisions?"

Brenda: "I'll have the Mixed Green salad with the dressing on the side."

Sky: "We have a delicious variety of appetizers including an Avocado and Crab Salad, Tuna Tartar, and Porcupine Shrimp and you're ordering the Mixed Green Salad?"

Brenda: "The others are a little too rich for me."

Sky: "And for your main course."

Brenda: "What do you recommend?"

Sky: "My favorite is the Chilean Seabass with Lime Sauce and Garlic Mashed Potatoes."

Delicious! Not rich at all. You'd love it."

Brenda: "Sounds too unusual. I'd better take the Chicken Breast. But the sauce on the side please. I'm on a diet."

Sky: "The Whole Grain Mustard Sauce is actually a very light sauce with lots of flavor."

Brenda: "I don't really like mustard."

Sky: "Perhaps you might like to try something else?"

Brenda: "No thanks. Chicken Breast is my favorite."

After they've finished eating Sky: "Uh ... Did you enjoy your dinner?"

Brenda: "It was delicious."

Sky: "But I noticed you barely touched it."

Brenda: "I'm not used to such an unusual preparation, but it was really good."

Sky: "They just used potato buds as a crust to seal the moisture in when roasting it."

Brenda: "It had an unusual texture that I'm not used to."

Sky: "What would you like for dessert? My favorite is the Chocolate Hazelnut Bars - sort of like fancy Kit Kat Bars."

Brenda: "Do you have Vanilla Ice Cream? I would like that the best - especially if you could put a little chocolate sauce over it."

Sky resignedly: "With nuts sprinkled on top and a cherry?"

Brenda: "Exactly. How did you know?"

Sky: "A wild guess."

Next day at the office Brenda: "My boyfriend took me out to Ma Belle for Valentine's Day. We had such a great time. The food was so delicious. John is such a dear. What did your boyfriend do for you?"

This class dines with me for bragging rights, not to experience my Vortex of Sensuality.

The most sophisticated of my Diners are called Gourmands, Connoisseurs, or Epicureans. These have cultivated a taste for the finest gourmet cuisine and vintage wines. They visit me for the ultimate gastronomic experience. In many ways it is they who power the Fine Dining Happening. It is they who push the limits of culinary creativity and purchase the most expensive wines. They can go all the way with me to experience my orgasm of the senses - relishing the utmost from my exquisite taste sensations.

However their fine sense of discrimination can also be their downfall - dooming our date. While their refined sense of discrimination enables them to appreciate everything I have to offer, this faculty can also be used to criticize what they consider to be inferior or substandard cuisine and/or wine list.

Brain has filled the Minds of these Critics with elaborate descriptors and criterion from worst to bad to better and best. As such these categories or Boxes dominate their Experience. If the taste doesn't fit in the Good to Excellent Box, the Event is a disappointment. Brain is activated and the evening is a disaster. Instead of suspending judgment in honor of the event and just enjoying themselves, their critical thoughts take over to dominate and doom the Experience. Thus ironically the sense of heightened discrimination which allows those to appreciate all the tastes the world has to offer - their blessing - also has the potential to ruin the party - their curse.

"Nothing is as good as I had expected. I had heard so many wonderful things and I'm so disappointed. Tastes were bland, Service slow, and the view is black."

"Er, Uh ... The sun has gone down, Ma'am, and with it the view."

"I had just expected so much more. No pizzazz - nothing exceptional. Especially after our vacation in France."

Another Party on an adjacent table, who were not so critical, had virtually the same food and similar wine.

"How was everything tonight?"

"Marvelous." - "Out of this world."

"Sounds like you enjoyed yourselves?"

"Definitely. A great time." - "We'll definitely be back."

While the sophistication of my Critics was the source of their disappointment, the innocence of these Guests allowed them to appreciate what I had to offer more fully. They came to visit me with a fresh Mind - no preconceived notions. This is a state that is exceedingly difficult for the Gourmand/Connoisseur because of their vast experience. In some ways it is much easier for those who join me irregularly to attain this exalted state of sensual bliss because their experience is inherently a little more fresh. Hence Special Occasion types have a great potential to reach the most sublime state possible. Unfortunately their lack of experience frequently dims their appreciation of me. And, as mentioned, the problem with certain of these Guests is that they drift into the quest for Status and miss what I am all about.

Then there is the Glutton. He is nearly a polar opposite of the sober ones, who just come in for Dinner. Risking nothing the timid gain nothing. Conversely the Glutton loses his Balance from pushing my limits. My Gluttons, who are dominated by Body - get lost in the excesses of my sensual experience. They can't resist the tastes of my food and the excitement of intoxication. They overeat, giving themselves indigestion, and drink so much that they have a hangover the next day. These Diners hit my spot briefly but can't remain there - slipping into Oblivion as their Bodies deal with excess consumption. Premature ejaculation. But it's just part of their experience. While I don't reach my ultimate climax with them, their shenanigans amuse me.

Another type of Guest appears to have it all together - eating and drinking well with good friends and/or lover. I anticipate having a good time with them. But then the conversation gets so animated that I'm forgotten and neglected in the midst of their Left Brain fantasies. I never quite get used to being ignored. Here I am sparkling with the radiance of the sunset glowing from my bosom and all they can think about is some kind of war or political decision that is occurring thousands of miles away, years or maybe even decades in the future - which is going to have absolutely no effect upon their lives - when I am right there ready to be loved. And then to top it off they call their external world reality and me frivolous. They say it so importantly that I used to believe, a bit jealously, that their world was more important than mine, but then the absurdity of it hit me. This type of Diner performs the form of Dining without enjoying it's function - like little kids playing dress up, wearing over sized high heels on their tiny feet with red lip stick smeared sloppily upon their face. Those who get lost in conversations about politics, sports, movies, celebrities, science, academics or even personal affairs are not all there, if any there. They ignore my glories - lost as they are in their empty world of words.

Note that there is a huge difference (in kind rather than just degree) between being lost in conversation and being deep into it. Those who are Lost cannot find their way back easily, if at all. While those who are Deep into it but not Lost can immediately

resurface when it is necessary. Or better yet, they can weave their involving conversation with my sensual delights - never really forgetting me despite the apparent urgency of their thoughts.

“Stupid war - blah, blah - Ruining the planet - blah, blah - Can’t understand how people could be so stupid - blah, blah.” Then the food arrives. “Wow! This is delicious, as well as beautiful. And you, my lovely date, are gorgeous as well as charming, enchanting, intellectually stimulating and arousing.”

So it is quite possible to be Deep in Thought, yet not Lost in Thought. Similarly it is possible to be Deep in the Game, but not Lost in it - a lesson Space was to learn. It’s also even possible to be Deep in the Now, but not Lost in it - a lesson that Boston needed to learn for the good of his son. But I’m ahead of myself again. Over all I don’t really care how Deep my Guests go down any Side Path, I just don’t want them to go so deeply that they are Lost and forget about me in my magnificence. I’m a jealous lover.

### **Inconsiderate Guests**

My Service family, in particular, wanted to make sure that I mentioned something about our rude and inconsiderate Guests. There are several sub-categories.

First there are the Reservation Violators. Some of these come in excessively late for their reservation, possibly even after closing, and expect that we will have held their table for them. A half an hour is the limit if there are others waiting for tables and closing time is honored unless a call is made indicating extenuating circumstances.

Worse still are the No Call/ No Shows. These make reservations but don’t show up at all without calling to cancel. These situations are never a problem if they call to inform us. But if they don’t, we reserve the worst epitaphs for them - spoken with disgust in our voice. This is not only inconsiderate to my Staff and my Business, it is also inconsiderate to other Guests who are denied reservations because my Managers think we are sold out.

Another type are the Dining Room Violators. There are those who linger long past closing - although no one else is in my Dining Room except for my bored staff sitting around the Bar - waiting patiently, or not so patiently, for them to leave. Then we have the loud or rude guests, who yell in piercing tones, laugh explosively, or converse on their cell phones as if they are the only Diners for miles around. Show a little consideration for your fellow Diners please - even if you are drunk and paying good money for your dinner. My other Guests are also paying the same good money for their dinner.

A sub-category of the Dining Room Violators are the Unsupervised Child types. They somehow think that either their children - preschoolers under 5 years of age, are so cute that the other Diners won’t mind if they wander around the Dining Room, or that it’s the responsibility of my Wait Staff to tend to them, or that no one minds that their baby is screaming or fussy for some reason. The Considerate Parents take turns tending to their children outside the confines of my temple or even leave altogether. The Inconsiderate Parents seem to pretend that no one else can hear the screaming and see the wandering around or that they don’t care. This notion is quite far from the truth. Some Diners come in to get away from their kids; others have raised children and are happy that they are grown up; and a third type intentionally chose not to have these screamers. Anyway take heed Parents of small children. Tend your young ones because my Guests and Staff don’t want to and do care when they are acting up.

Overall Inconsiderate Guests are a minority. And because of their insensitivity to those around them it is unlikely that these chicken scratches will have much of an effect on them.

### **My Regulars**

Let's end this discussion of our visitors with my favorite type of Guest, our Regulars. These are the ones I like the best because they come to experience my pleasures over and over again. They might visit me weekly, monthly, or annually. They might come to my Temple of Sensuality every time they are in town, every time they have an anniversary, birthday or holidays, whenever they have visitors, are trying to impress someone, or whenever they just feel like treating themselves well. These are the type that I want my Staff to cultivate, because they are the ones who tell their friends, spreading my reputation far and wide. Don't get me wrong; I love my one time visitors also, but their presence just leaves traces on my pattern, while my Regulars are the wine and food of my business, supplying me with my life force, providing me with my identity.

Hope you've enjoyed this introduction to the variety of Guests that come to visit me. You can see how different they are. Note that these categories are just rough approximations with very fuzzy boundaries. They also have little correlation with race, sex, age, wealth or fame. My Guests come in all colors, nationalities and age groups. They include both sexes, rich to poor, famous to anonymous, high fashion to shabbily dressed, hetero to homosexual. Although their distribution may vary between categories there are those of every type who appreciate Fine Dining and those who don't. I would even take it a step further and say that there is next to no predictability whatsoever from external appearances.

To set the record straight and to prevent any misunderstanding, I want to stress that I love anyone who comes to visit me and experience my pleasures - no matter what their intent or level of sophistication. I'm a glutton for attention and love to be appreciated in any way, shape, or form. I don't play favorites. I want my Guests to enjoy the experience I provide - at whatever level they're capable of.

The reason that my love is so deep is that they are me. As a restaurant I'm a synergy of my Guests, Staff, and physical environment. Thus my wide variety of Guests help define who I am. It is they who give me life. Without them I perish.

## Chapter 10: The Stream of Managers

### Antoine's Curse

So these are my Guests - my heart and soul. My Fine Dining Experience draws them to me. In many ways it is my reason for being - *ma raison d'être*. Although Chef Antoine might not have described it as a Vortex of Sensuality or a State of At-One-Ment he understood Fine Dining and knew what it took to make it possible. Although quite aware of the essential role his Food Art played, Antoine was equally aware of the importance of Service in stimulating the Experience. This awareness was to be the source of deep emotional anguish for him.

You might have thought that Antoine would have been in heaven after being promoted to Head Chef of such a prestigious restaurant like myself at such a tender age, but with every blessing comes a curse. In Antoine's case his curse was the lack of consistent Floor management. Although Antoine organized and ran my Kitchen, a Manager was supposed to organize and run the Floor. His perennial hope was for a Restaurant Manager with a Vision similar to his who would upgrade Service. Unfortunately my Restaurant Managers, or lack thereof, turned out to be the biggest obstacle to the Guest Experience, inhibiting, rather than enhancing, it.

Although my Staff had the best intentions, their Service didn't live up to Antoine's high standards. "The quality of the Service at Ma Belle has never matched the quality of my food. If it weren't for my food, Ma Belle wouldn't be in business. My plate presentation is always beautiful and the tastes subtle. The atmosphere and the service are merely good. Food has always led Service at Ma Belle." Antoine never had a problem with self esteem.

Although overstating the importance of his food and understating the quality of Service, he had a point. Although my Floor Staff provided good service, they certainly had room to improve. Antoine: "Sans doute <without a doubt>. My Food saves Ma Belle. The Service is mediocre at best. Corporate won't pay enough to get a good Maitre'd to maintain the standards that I require."

### Corporate Blues

Although Chef Antoine was king of my world, I, Ma Belle was only there to serve my brother, the Hotel. This hotel, the Coastal Inn, was only part of my Father's empire which also ran 100 other hotels. Although, I, Ma Belle was the best of the group of restaurants that he managed, I was only a restaurant. To my perpetual chagrin, Father was profit oriented rather than focused on the aesthetics of Fine Dining - a common lament that bonded Antoine and me.

Father Corporate: "Restaurants with their thin profit margins of 3% to 5%, if we're lucky, are only meant to upgrade hotels and sell rooms, with their fat profit margins of 30% to 40%. Restaurants are just an adjunct to our money making hotels. As far as I'm concerned a Restaurant only exists for the good of the Hotel. I don't want to waste my time on such low profit investments."

Ma Belle: "I'm just there for the good of my brother?"

Corporate: "Exactly. I'm happy as long as costs are down and profits are up. In all of my locations I put pressure upon the General Managers of my Hotels -my GMs - to lower costs -> to raise the profit margins -> to appease my stock holders -> so that my stocks rise -> so that we can borrow more money -> so that we can acquire more properties -> so that our stock goes up -> so that we can borrow more money -> to acquire more properties -> to increase the size of my Empire."

Ma Belle: "But what about me?"

Corporate: "I feel that restaurants should almost run themselves. I'm certainly not going to invest much money on managers to run them. Where's the return? I am, however, quite willing to spent big money to attract qualified GMs to run my high profit hotels."

Ma Belle: "You spend all this money on Brother, and yet you refuse to spend enough money to get me a qualified manager to train and organize my staff to serve Chef Antoine's beautiful food to my Guests."

Corporate: "Sorry honey. Hotels are my money maker. You, restaurants are just a little icing on the cake."

Ma Belle: "I'm hurt. You never really give me the attention I feel I deserve. You have always been more interested in Brother's Profits, than in the Experience I provide."

Corporate: "You do me wrong. I'm vitally interested in your Fine Dining Experience."

Ma Belle: "As long as I bring more Guests to the Hotel, spending more money and bringing you greater Profits."

Corporate: "What's wrong with that? It keeps us both in business."

Ma Belle: "I was just hoping that you would love me for myself."

Corporate: "Oh, but I do. However I must generate enough of a profit so that my managers can afford your Experience. They want to be able to eat the best foods and drink the best wines. This does not happen with skimpy restaurant profits. We need the big hotel profits to be able to afford the best."

Ma Belle: "But Father, I need a good manager to run my Dining Room. To attract good managers you need to offer quality pay, or at least quality opportunities. The less money you offer, the lower the quality. You offer a good salary to attract qualified GMs to run your Hotels, but are unwilling to offer the salary required for a decent Restaurant Manager to run my operations."

Corporate: "Sorry honey. You're right. I love you for your Experience, but I love your Brother's Profits more. After all, he's paying the bills."

Ma Belle: "Ouch! That hurts. Unfortunately for me, I get what you pay for."

Which turned out to be a stream of managers.

### **"Must make my Bonus"**

Manager Number 1, suspected of regularly snorting cocaine on duty, had been terminated after a year and a half for 'accepting bribes' from a guest in exchange for a special table. Although a normal practice in many high end restaurants, called 'tipping the Maitre'd', this was unacceptable to Corporate, especially when his favored Hotel Guests are denied what they want - one of my high status window tables. Everyone wants to sit by my windows. My view of the Ocean and the Channel is just so spectacular!

Hotel Guest complaining to the GM: "When I called for a reservation at Ma Belle I requested a window table. When I came in there were plenty of window seats available, but your Maitre'd said that I would have to wait at the Bar until one opened up. Then another guest walked in - slipped him some money - and was promptly escorted to the best of these tables. I paid good money for my weekend at the Hotel and expect to be treated with respect."

Number 1 didn't understand that taking care of the Hotel Guests was his first priority.

Number 2: a waiter promoted from within to manage - was harshly disciplined by Ted the GM for hiring too many of his friends - then left after just a few months to form his own catering business. Number 3: a Ma Belle waitress asked to be an interim



manager - did a great job for a few months - then was abruptly replaced by Number 4, Francis Le Roi's brother-in-law. Number 3 almost lost her waitress job until she threatened legal action. Number 4: spoke English and French fluently - dressed well - knew wines and the restaurant business - left after 4 months 'to pursue better opportunities' as a restaurant manager in Los Angeles.

No manager for a few months. The Staff took control, for the first but not the last time. Everything ran smoothly. Freddie the Bar Manager handled supplies and the Hostess ran the Floor. However ...

Ted the GM: "This is not right. Employees need management. They are not responsible enough on their own. But I can't seem to find anyone. Maybe we're not offering enough money. But I don't want to jeopardize my bonus."

Ted, whose uniform consisted of a blue blazer and white shirt with a handkerchief in the pocket - which neither offended nor impressed anyone, was the perfect number-crunching, budget-minded Corporate GM. Focused one pointedly on his monthly bonus, awarded for controlling costs, he was committed to spending as little money as possible.

Ted: "Ah here's someone who's willing to work for cheap. He doesn't dress that well, but I'm desperate. And more importantly, his price is right."

Number 5 entered the Dining Room - his wrinkled white shirt peaking above the collar of a cheap suit with a cheaper toupee to cover his bald head. Noticing a disparaging look from Sky, one of my waiters: "I didn't want to intimidate our clientele by appearing too glamorous. It might have seemed like I was competing."

Sky: "Well you've certainly succeeded. No one will be intimidated by your appearance." To himself: "Appalled maybe, but not intimidated."

As might be expected Number 5's tact matched his appearance: "Mexicans make good bussers but not good waiters. They don't speak the language well enough or understand the clientele. For instance although Angel is a great Busser, his poor language skills prevent him from ever becoming a waiter. And Women are great as cocktail waitresses or hostesses but don't have what it takes to wait tables in restaurants like Ma Belle. They can't take the pressure. They always end up crying in the back. But I'm not racist or sexist. I'm certainly willing to consider a Mexican or a woman for the job of waiter. They just never seem to work out."

After these blatantly offensive comments Number 5 was let go after just two weeks. My Corporate Father was very sensitive to these kinds of things. Not that he cared particularly about minorities or women. He was just wary of lawsuits.

### **Forcing Ideas upon Reality**

No manager for a few more months. Freddie continued to take care of ordering, while the Hostess continued to run the Floor. Operations continued to proceed smoothly.

Ted: "I'm getting even more desperate now. The Staff aren't responsible enough to run themselves. How can a female hostess possibly run a first class dining room? But I can't find anyone. The last applicant said that the pay wasn't good enough. But I can't offer more. That would jeopardize my bonus. Maybe if I hired someone with no experience they would be willing to work for less. Hmmm. How about Phillippe, Antoine's sous chef?"

Phillippe, manager Number 6, began his tour of duty just before my third Christmas season. He was trained as a chef - had owned his own restaurant - but had no floor experience - and had never worked in the front of the house. Even though all his restaurant experience was in the Kitchen, he was French - knew his wines pretty well -

and ended up being a good manager, lasting about a year and half. Unfortunately he wasn't corporate enough for Ted the GM. Phillippe dragged his feet when Ted attempted to pound his Square Idea into my Round Reality.

Ted the GM to himself: "Phillippe doesn't respect the Corporate hierarchy. He doesn't show enough respect for me and my wishes. When I asked him to move the Sunday Brunch to the Sun Deck, he almost laughed in my face."

Phillippe: "Surely you're joking."

Ted: "I just spent \$20,000 to remodel it and want it to be used." To himself: "I need to justify my expenditure to Corporate."

Phillippe: "Sure why not? It's only a short half an hour walk from the Kitchen through the corridors of the Hotel to get there. I'm sure the Hotel Guests won't mind seeing Servers running back and forth through their halls on Sunday morning."

Ted: "I'm not joking about this, Phillippe. I want you to work with me instead of against me."

Phillippe: "Whatever you say. You're the boss."

Ted: "Phillippe began to laugh at me behind my back. But I forced my way. I know we had complaints from the Guests that the food wasn't hot enough - that the service was slow - it took forever to get a cocktail - and that they preferred the Ma Belle Dining room with its spectacular view - but I think that Phillippe deliberately sabotaged my plan. I'll just bide my time - wait for him to make a mistake - and then fire him."

The opportunity came quickly enough. Phillippe borrowed money from his bank and paid it back. A random audit discovered the temporary indiscretion.

Ted: "So sorry to let you go. My hands are tied. I have no choice."

Yet another period with no manager. My Staff, bless them, once again rose to the occasion. Everything went smoothly. Soon Number 7 was sent by Corporate - was French - had worked as a Maitre'd and restaurant manager his whole career. He was ideal, but was only there temporarily until Corporate could find him a new position, worthy of his salary. He was Father's employee, used for bigger properties - with multiple dining rooms. Previously he had worked at one of Corporate's San Francisco hotels. But Profits dipped; Corporate sold the Hotel and assigned him to Ma Belle until something bigger came up. He lasted as the temporary manager for almost 6 months - longer than all but two of the 6 managers before him. After Corporate decided they couldn't afford his salary any more, he got a job as Maitre'd in San Francisco to the north of us.

Heading into our 5th Christmas season without a manager. Again Ted the GM was desperate. Enter Number 8: an anorexic looking lady from the San Fernando Valley - seemed to be on speed all the time - claimed to have experience as a restaurant manager - but didn't even know how to open a bottle of wine - fired only two weeks after she was hired, for throwing an after hours party on New Years Eve at the hotel for the staff - where everyone got drunk on booze that she supplied. Those responsible managers.

Then came Number 9. Had bartended around the world - dressed well - however no experience managing restaurants - and no knowledge of wine. Hired as an interim manager until his cruise ship left and he started his real job. Played the role of Host for the two months.

### **The Beginning of a New Era in Service?**

Another month without management. Once again my Staff took up the slack.

Everything went fine. My Floor Staff became more and more self sufficient due to these periods with weak or no managers. Then Ted the GM called a Staff meeting for Friday night, just before Service was to begin. He announced triumphantly that he had hired Number 10.

Ted: "I am pleased to introduce you to our new Maitre'd, Marcel. He has lots of experience. He managed one of the top restaurants in Santa Monica for the last 12 years. He said that he is looking forward to moving to our little city of Santa Barbara, now that his restaurant unexpectedly closed due to the sudden death of one of the owners. I am confident he is going to transform Ma Belle Service from the mediocre to the sublime. A new era is beginning. From this point forward we will refer to our Service as A.M., After Marcel. Before this our Service was B.M. - Before Marcel. BM, get it?"

Ted could be crude when he wanted to be.

Number 10 lasted through the weekend. He felt the demands were too great for the pay and decided to go back to school to get his teaching credential. Three days for Maitre'd Number 10, the shortest duration so far, and again no manager.

I, Ma Belle, hadn't even reached 6 years of age, yet had already had 10 restaurant managers. Some of them had only lasted a few weeks; others had lasted a few seasons or so, but nobody had lasted even two years. Note however that none of these early managers did any actual damage. The bad ones weren't with us long enough to inflict any serious harm. Unfortunately this pattern didn't hold into my future. In fact one theme of my little story concerns the valiant attempt of my Staff to maintain the Guest Experience despite Management.

## Chapter 11: Tending the Flame

You might wonder how my Dining Experience was maintained with such a revolving door of managers.

First, Chef Antoine maintained high standards in the Kitchen. Everything was well organized for efficient operation. The Cooks had been there longer than he had been and were quite willing to work under his relatively gentle supervision. This means he only yelled at them occasionally rather than all the time. He was happy to have them as his assistants. They were happy to have him as Chef. This is not to say that there weren't any conflicts. It just means that an understanding had been reached which translated into a well run Kitchen.

Next, my Service Staff had been incredibly stable. Although no manager had lasted two years, nearly all of those who worked the Floor had been with me for two years or longer. They had been a rock in the flowing stream of managers. After the initial turbulence of any restaurant opening, a relative ecological harmony had been established amongst my inhabitants. Everyone knew their place and purpose. The sheer momentum of the Service System established by Francis combined with the experience of my Staff was certainly an essential ingredient in maintaining my high standards.

Finally Freddie, our Bar Manager through all of the management changes, had ensured that the appropriate supplies were always available. Although his essential role was never fully appreciated by anyone he always had a great attitude with a sheepish smile ever on his face. It was only many years later, when his position was eliminated by a misguided manager, that we realized the crucial function that he had served.

### Space conducts a Survey

But what motivated my Floor Staff to provide quality service even though they didn't have a manager looking over their shoulder? Let's hear what they themselves have to say. Space, a frustrated psychologist, conducted an informal survey which was quite revealing. He began his survey with Clarence and then others joined in.

Clarence, nicknamed Boston after the city of his childhood, had been with me since my birth. Possessing the typical waiter physique, i.e. average in all ways, he had a fair complexion, big lips and rosy cheeks, short curly hair, and a boyish face with an easy grin which always contained a devilish glint. A heavy drinking, wine loving, partier he worked his way up from daytime Bus to nighttime Waiter. His father came out of the closet when he was 15, followed shortly thereafter by his mother. Each were very comfortable with their same sex partner, but left a very confused Boston - never trusting appearances after his turbulent adolescence - a self proclaimed cynic. Although his father figure was weak, he was inspired by his loving mother to do something meaningful with his life.

Married too soon in his early 20s. Balancing his inner chaos with the stability and seeming maturity of an older woman in her early 30s. A son quickly followed. Thrown into responsibility before reaching any kind of emotional maturity, his marriage was already on the rocks because of his participation in late night binges after work with the guys.

Space: "How about you, Boston? Why did you maintain standards despite the lack of consistent management?"

Boston: "Simply speaking - Greed. Basically we Waiters have a lot invested in maintaining a high quality of service. The higher our standards, the larger the almighty Tip. We have a fairly simple and well-tested strategy. If our Guests leave a

big tip, then they were happy with their Dining experience and will come back if they have the opportunity. Conversely if they leave a bad tip, then they probably weren't happy, They won't come back and might even complain. As Waiters we practice and test our service strategies nightly - upon each table we serve. The result of our strategy is immediately reflected in the tip. We don't need comment cards to tell us how we did. A poor service strategy yields bad tips of 10% or less and complaints, while a good service strategy leads to good tips of 15% or more and compliments. Simply speaking Greed leads to better Service.

After all Tips are our primary source of income - with the paychecks just covering taxes - especially for us waiters, who are only paid minimum wage. Because of Greed for bigger Tips we have maintained quality service and provided stability to the Floor - sometimes with managerial assistance and sometimes in spite of management. We greet, welcome and pamper our regular customers. Because it is in our financial interests we also educate the latest management upon our service standards here at Ma Belle. If they are willing to listen we even educate them as to the needs of our Regulars - the Guests who came in consistently. It is the Waiters who have maintained standards and created continuity here at Ma Belle."

Slick, one of the Expeditors, so nicknamed because of his impeccable appearance: "I don't mean to interrupt, but Boston forgets that service standards are also maintained by the Expeditors and the Food Runners, sometimes in spite of the Waiters rather than because of them. Some of the Wait Staff have high standards, and others do not. Inspired by Chef Antoine's attention to detail, we, Expeditors, have proudly maintained a high level of Service in spite of changing managers and incompetent Wait Staff."

Jaime - a Latino high school student - working as a Busser - nicknamed Punky because he was so young: "Don't forget us. We, Bussers, also kept the level of Service high. We regularly saved the asses of some sloppy Waiters. It's funny that Boston says the Waiters have maintained the Service. Some of them, especially him, have definitely been part of the problem - especially after his late night binges.

Plus I, as a Bus, resent Boston for saying that we are only motivated by Greed. I like to make good Tips as much as the next guy. But those of us who make the least keep the level of Service high in spite of Tips rather than because of them. We make so little compared to the Waiters, yet we still take pride in the quality of our work. We are happy to be employed and attempt to do a good job regardless of the reward. It seems that you, Waiters, are so motivated by money that you can't appreciate just living. Instead you're always weighing worth in terms of financial reward rather than just doing your jobs. You might have more money, but you have no peace of mind. I pity you, Boston, if your life is based upon tips rather than a job well done."

Next comes Angel. His father left or died before he was born. Began working at the age of 3 on the streets of Mexico City, shining shoes and then delivering newspapers. Learned to fight for his rights defending himself in the tough neighborhoods of his childhood. Won't tolerate being taken advantage of. Graduated from high school, but left college for better opportunities in California. Taught himself to speak English with a minimum of education. Very ambitious - especially for his daughters.

Space: "How about you Angel?"

Angel: "Everybody is embarrassed to talk it about it. But I try to do the best job I can

because of Love.”

Space: “Love?”

Angel: “Yes. Love of our Guests and love of my job at Ma Belle. I love making everyone happy by tending to their needs. If our Guests are happy, then they come back. I’ve worked in some places which have gone out of business because the staff has not maintained standards. I’m not so interested in money, except to feed my family. But I feel so good when the customers are happy.”

Boston: “And then you feel even happier when they leave you a big tip.”

Angel: “It helps, but their happiness is far more important to me. I never complain about my tips. The only thing I complain about is not being treated fairly. In my life I’ve learned you have to stand up for your rights or people will take advantage of you. I have had to deal with injustice my whole life and hate it.”

Punky: “What about you Space?”

Some call Space the hippie waiter, because of his involvement in the drugs and social rebellion of the late 60s. Like the rest he was also damaged goods - raised, as he was, by loving but psychologically disabled parents. His father, an exceedingly logical engineer, was emotionally unavailable due to his love of the Bottle, while his mother was a casualty of modern medicine - with a premature hysterectomy amplifying her already radical mood swings. Her emotional state was further aggravated raising her 4 infant sons with little help from her inebriated partner. Frustrated by circumstances beyond her control - she attempted to commit suicide when he wasn’t quite 8. Although multiple electroshock treatments presumably helped her to survive this difficult time they left her vacant.

Attempting to insulate his psyche from this insanity, he retreated into himself - then experimented with the normal range of drugs in his early 20s - eventually finding solace in Eastern religions - California style. A long time practitioner of Chinese martial arts - including the moving meditation of Tai Chi and Swords he acquired a certain sense of self esteem from this mastery, which frequently exploded into a conceited pride. Indeed his partial integration of some of the concepts inherent to these disciplines was one of his major flaws that was exposed in his relationship with me.

Space: “I also resent the implication that Waiters are purely motivated by Greed. While I attempt to service the Big Tippers, I am equally motivated by Beauty - Aesthetics, Balance and Harmony. The elegance of a well appointed room and a beautifully presented plate are very important to me, However the dynamic elegance of the Service Dance is probably of greater significance. I feel pleasure when I see quality service and feel pain when service is substandard. Seeing food, wine or drinks served properly satisfies my aesthetic sense of balance, (my Libra side), while seeing them served improperly hurts my eyes. Seeing wine glasses overfilled - seeing the staff grab wine glasses by the bowl - seeing miscellaneous stuff on the table after it has been cleared - all these things bring pain to my psyche. At this point in my career, I attempt to maintain standards to protect my aesthetic sense of balance that has developed over decades of waiting tables.”

Thanks one and all for standing by me, the glorious Ma Belle, despite lack of consistent management. Whether motivated by greed, integrity, aesthetics, or love I want to stress how proud I am that you have continued to provide quality Service despite a constant turnover of Managers. Thanks for maintaining my standards without

supervision. I appreciate your commitment. Hats off to one and all for a job well done. Three cheers to restaurant personnel everywhere who persist in taking care of your Guests despite low pay, lack of Management, and the multiplicity of circumstances beyond your control. We restaurants really appreciate that.

## Chapter 12: The Aristocratic Foundation of Fine Dining

The next evening around the Staff dinner.

Boston: "I couldn't believe all the bull-shit I was hearing yesterday. Challenge - Love - Beauty. Get real. We're all in it for the money. You were just spouting a lot of hot air. Space, you're just as greedy as I am but won't admit it. I see you scampering around, attending to the big spenders, just as much as the rest of us."

Space: "Money does have a way of motivating one, but I also like to make people happy."

Boston: "So they give you bigger tips. You're all in a state of denial. Beauty, Love, and the rest are all secondary to the Money. That's the driving force."

Slick: "Perhaps but it also gives me a lot of satisfaction to do a good job."

Boston: "Then why are you always complaining about your tips from certain waiters?"

Slick: "Because it reflects the bad service, which we are concerned about."

Boston: "Perhaps they are not greedy enough. Greed entices us to sell a little more, to run a little faster, to be a little more careful with details, and to be more sensitive to Guest needs. Greed makes for good waiters. And Punky, you Bussers talk about pride in a job well done, but you Bussers regularly withhold service from bad tipping waiters."

Punky: "You get what you pay for."

Boston: "My point exactly. Although there are incidental factors, greed is the unifying one, in which we all participate."

Space: "But Greed corrupts Service, as it inspires us to serve the big spenders, at the expense of the rest. This leads to dissatisfaction and complaints."

Boston: "Who cares about the small spenders? We don't need them. Ma Belle is an exclusive restaurant - catering to the rich - those with status. Give me the big spender - drinking expensive wines accompanied by beautiful women, over the little guy with his ice tea or beer - any time."

Space: "But the quest for status is a distortion of the Ma Belle's Experience as it detracts from the Beauty of Fine Dining."

Boston: "Beauty, shmooty. Who needs it? It doesn't pay the rent. I prefer Status and the Wealth that comes with it."

Space: "Always dwelling on the monetary reward inevitably leads to disappointment - when it doesn't live up to expectations. However give good Service to everyone and the Money automatically follows."

Boston: "Cater to the rich and the Money follows in bigger chunks."

Space: "Those who show off their wealth are compensating for their limp dick syndrome - their lack of vitality."

Boston: "Not me. Big tips enliven me and my stalk."

Space: "Obsessed with the material plane, you're doomed to suffer."

Boston: "Who cares about suffering as long as I have money and the things that accompany it. Besides poor people suffer too. Me, I'd rather have the problems of too much money than not enough."

Space: "I don't think you understand."

Boston: "I understand money and prestige. What else is there?"

Space: "The Sacred Experience of Fine Dining - At-One-Ment."

Boston: "At-One-Ment?"

Space: "Feeling at home in the Universe - At one with yourself and your place on the planet." Boston: "Too boring. I prefer much more excitement than that. And I get that



from the Big Spenders drinking expensive wines - not the peasants drinking soda and iced tea. Although you have settled into being a career waiter, I demand more of my life than that. In fact I intend to run a high-end restaurant some day, which caters to those with Status. Then I'll sit down and get drunk with my exclusive clientele. Then I'll be one of the Big Spenders - drinking the best wines in the nicest restaurants."

Space: "But catering to the Rich with their obsession with Status is a corruption of the Dining Experience."

Boston: "Hate to break it to you Space, but Status is one of the foundations of Fine Dining. Not your experience of At-One-Ment."

Space: "How so?"

Boston: "Fine Dining originated with the European aristocracy. They have always had their servants and their chefs. In contrast the agricultural peasantry has always had to serve and cook for themselves. The aristocracy has always had an abundance of leisure time to enjoy multiple courses; the peasantry have had to eat and get back to work. Their food was nourishing, not gourmet. It might have looked appetizing but was never intended to be a work of art. Probably the most complicated sauce was some kind of gravy. The wives of the farmer/peasants did the cooking. They had neither the ingredients nor the time to experiment with the form of food which would make it gourmet - a work of art. Instead they focused upon the function of food, which was nourishment.

On the other hand the aristocracy would vie with each other for the finest of everything. It is the game of one-up-man-ship that always seems to accompany wealth. This meant cultivating the best scientists, musicians, architects, artists, craftsmen, writers, as well as chefs. In this role, the aristocracy has always been a driving force behind refined culture, of which Fine Dining is part."

Space: "However the negative side of this one-up-man-ship has to do with the quest for Status, which is associated with wealth and power rather than aesthetics. The underlying assumption of the Wealthy is that the most expensive is the best, not the most beautiful - the corollary being that those who spend the most money are happiest.

They are constantly attempting to impress each other with their wealth. They think to themselves: 'I am happiest because I can afford the most talented musicians to entertain me and my Guests - the most expensive craftsmen and artists to decorate my palace - plus the best chefs working with the finest ingredients to provide me with the most delicious food presented beautifully.' Within their corrupted circles those who can afford to spend the most have the most Status. This is accompanied by the underlying misconception that more expensive is better and that this brings happiness.

Boston: "It does. Remember that the game of one-up-man-ship associated with Status created the need for more creative and delicious food served in the most elegant setting possible. Of course this meant the finest silver, the most delicate porcelain plates, crystal goblets for wine, fine linen for napkins and tablecloths, and luxurious upholstered armchairs and padded tables to sit at in a tastefully decorated dining room. Naturally there would also be many servants, all dressed in their fanciest attire, to serve the food. Obviously the finer in any category the finer the experience. These royal parties, based as they were, in the desire to impress each other with their wealth - to show off, as it were, eventually evolved into Fine Dining.

Fine Dining with its requirement for the finest of everything is definitely

associated with wealth. Every one knows that the most expensive wines and foods, served by the most waiters in the most elegant setting with the finest silver and china provides the best experience."

Space: "Yet this obsession with Status has been taken to absurd and impractical lengths. For instance, because spices from the East were expensive and exotic in the Middle Ages, the rich would serve these expensive spices as a course all by themselves. I can just imagine their Dining Experience. 'Have some pepper? It is the most expensive variety. Or perhaps some Cardamom instead? It is the best money can buy.' - 'But how do you eat it?' - 'Straight, of course. Have you no breeding?' - 'But it makes me sneeze.' - 'No class whatsoever.'"

Boston: "Your point being?"

Space: "In their zeal to impress others in their pursuit of Status they have missed the point of flavor."

Boston: "Certainly there are absurd circumstances associated with Status; but it can't be denied that she is a driving force behind Ma Belle."

Space: "But Status corrupts the Experience."

Boston: "Perhaps. But once Status leaves, Ma Belle is dead."

Space: "How so?"

Boston: "The wealthy are attracted to Status and Ma Belle needs the wealthy to survive."

Space: "Ma Belle also needs the little guy. There are not enough rich people to pay the bills."

Boston: "The little guy is also attracted to Status. Without Status they eventually vanish too."

An oddly prescient comment.

As the story unfolds we shall see that Boston is destined to play a significant role in our little drama. His preference for Status will have a fateful consequence for all of us - providing a unique dynamic to our tale. But once again I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

## **Chapter 13: The Origins of Restaurants & Dining**

This conversation between Boston and Space inspired me to do a little research into the roots of Fine Dining. After all it defines what I'm all about. Here is what I discovered.

### **Fire and Prehistoric Family dinners**

Gastronomy, which is the art of selecting, preparing, serving and enjoying food and the essence of Fine Dining, began almost as soon as your most ancient ancestors tamed fire to protect themselves from predators, because a secondary benefit of this momentous discovery was the ability to cook their game to make it more tender, hence chewable and digestible. An early depiction of the enjoyment of food as a group is shown in one of the earliest cave paintings discovered in the south of France, where a prehistoric family is clearly shown around a fire eating together at mealtime - the first barbecue. As we shall see eating styles don't die out, they accumulate.

With the passage of time there is ample evidence that the great Western civilizations of Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, and Egypt had great feasts and banquets, but little evidence of much refinement in their preparation or serving of food. There is however written documentation that China had developed sophisticated culinary skills as early as the 5th century BC, which spread, along with its powerful culture, to the adjacent areas of her part of the planet.

### **The Refined Pleasures of the Greeks**

In Western civilization we must look to Greece for the beginnings of our gastronomic traditions - just as we do for many of our customs. The Greeks felt that a good meal nourished spirit, as well as the body. The consumption of food was frequently accompanied by music, poetry and dancing. Epicurus (341-270 BCE), an Athenian philosopher, articulated the principles behind this life style - becoming its voice. He revived the atomism of Democritus - with its emphasis on the material nature of existence. This stood in opposition to the prevalent supernatural bent which manifested through their lush mythology and temple system. His sensual philosophy, called Epicureanism, was based upon the idea that seeking contentment and peace of mind was the primary purpose of life, and that this was achieved by a frugal life style based upon the cultivation of the finer things of life - including beauty, music, poetry and food. As such he provided the philosophical basis for a sensual life style which included the enjoyment of food.

This school gradually became associated with the pursuit of sensual pleasures. This was different from the philosophy of hedonism, which is associated with drunken orgies. Epicureanism was instead based upon self restraint, not self indulgence. The followers were counseled to minimize desires to maximize appreciation. Less is More. This coincides with the Greek notion of Balance - Moderation in all things. Your Western culture still uses epicurean and its root words over 2000 years later. For instance the word epicure is used to denote an individual endowed with sensitive and discriminating tastes in food and wine.

This belief system was popular for 600 years until it was viciously attacked by Christians after the intolerant branch of their religion was adopted by the Roman Empire. They vilified Epicureanism as an irresponsible form of materialism. This was possibly due to the corruption of the Greek balance by the excessive hedonism of Rome. Or it could have been simply due to the simple rejection of the sensual pleasures by the early Church fathers, who had embraced asceticism as the path to God. This battle is still being waged between these two opposing belief systems, with religious

fundamentalist of all creeds continuing to attack pleasure derived from the senses as a corruption of spirituality. This is totally opposite from my belief that sensual delights leads to the sacred realm.

### **The Gluttony of the Romans**

After the Greeks came the Romans. Although they were the inheritors of the Greek political power and their traditions they embraced the excesses of hedonism instead of the restraint and balance of their predecessors. The Romans adopted Epicureanism but in the sense of the unbridled pursuit of pleasure. Their leaders threw lavish banquets based upon the notion that bigger and more is better. There are descriptions of feasts where hundreds of types of fish were served accompanied by mountains of beef, pork, veal, lamb, boar, venison, ostrich, duck and peacock. They even dispatched emissaries throughout the empire to discover new and exotic delicacies - including mushrooms from France.

But they were not gastronomes, as the tastes they cultivated were not delicate and sensitive. Instead their feasts were based upon excess, not moderation. Their Emperors consumed pearls dissolved in vinegar and 60 pounds of meat in a sitting - just because they could. These vulgarities with its ostentation was satirized in *Satyricon*, written in the 1st century AD. In some ways those of you who live on the Western part of the planet can trace your traditions of gluttony and excess to Rome and your sense of refinement and balance to Greece.

It was the Roman traditions that persevered into the Middle Ages. Beef, mutton, and pork, which were cooked over spits located near table, were served up whole before the guests, who sat on bundles of straw and ate their meals with knives and daggers. Charlemagne added a touch of elegance to his banquets. His guests ate with silver and gold utensils and drank their beer and wine out of decorated goblets. But the cuisine was still crude, with seasoning and sauces unknown.

### **Spices and the Crusades**

Then came the fateful Crusades. Although presumably based in religion it gave the European royalty a taste of luxury and refinement for the first time. Prior to their exposure to the sophisticated Muslim civilization of the Middle East, the European royalty had eaten the same foods as the peasantry with the same preparations. The upper classes just got the choice cuts and more of everything. However after experiencing the luxurious and refined customs of the Muslim aristocracy, which derived from the Persian autocracies, which had actually preceded the Greeks, there was no turning back. The European royalty almost immediately embraced spices and the use of sauces to enhance their cuisine. These spices, while augmenting the flavors of their food, were also quite expensive as they had to be imported from afar. This was to have momentous consequences for the global politics of your planet.

Because of the exorbitant cost of these spices only the royalty could afford them. Hence the very possession of Spices conferred Status on the possessor, because it differentiated them from the peasantry. They became one of the perquisites of wealth and power. Because of their lack of sophistication the European royalty began consuming the spices straight - the more the better - just like the *nouveau riche* where bigger is best. Thus the use of spices reflected one's wealth, and consequently conferred Status. This is the time period Space was referring to.

In 1375 a cookbook was written, *Le Viander*, which gives an indication of the lack of refinement at the time. Spices were widely used in the wealthy households - including ginger, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg. However the soups, meats, and poultry were so heavily seasoned that the taste of food was obscured. The spices disguised the flavor of

the food rather than augmented it. This was partly due to the lack of refrigeration, which led to tainted meat and fish. And it was partly due to a lack of understanding of the function of spices. In their confusion of form and function, the wealthy just poured on the spices to exhibit their wealth. Sauces appeared for the first time but they were thickened with bread. There was also little variety in the preparations.

### **The Refinement of the Italian Renaissance**

Although the Western European royalty embraced spices as way of showing off their wealth and to simultaneously separate themselves from the lower classes, the Italians were the first to adopt a more sophisticated and sensible use of ingredients. This was probably due to the Moorish influences, as they occupied both Spain and Italy for centuries during the Middle Ages. The royalty and wealthy consumed delicate tournedos, the center cut of the beef filet - not slabs of beef. They also began using more varied ingredients, including mushrooms, garlic, truffles and caviar. At their mealtimes, which sometimes lasted up to 3 hours, they drank wine out of exquisite Venetian glass and sat at tables adorned with delicate embroidered table clothes. Further women became a part of the feast for the first time - dressed in all their finery - to augment the visual side of the experience. Also food sculpture made its entry into the cuisine of the rulers. Animals made from lemons, turnips, and other vegetables were displayed, along with large statues of marzipan which expressed classical themes - such as Hercules and unicorns, which reflected the obsession with Greek culture that was prevalent then. As with many other traditions the Italian Renaissance marked the real beginning of refinement in the culinary arts of the West. As such Italy is frequently referred to as the Mother of Western cuisine.

### **An Italian Princess comes to France**

It was in the 16th century that the royal cuisine of Italy made its historic appearance in France. Catherine de Medicis, the great granddaughter of Lorenzo the Magnificent, married the man who was to become Henry II of France. This joined her powerful Italian family with his royal blood in one of those alliances that are always popular among the privileged classes everywhere. She brought with her a retinue of Florentine cooks, who employed aspics, artichoke hearts, truffles, ice cream, and crepes in their preparations. Along with the refinement that women bring to a testosterone laden environment, came crystal glasses, glazed dishes, and beautiful table clothes. Prior to Katherine ladies only entered the dining room on special occasions. With her entrance onto the royal banquet scene this became the rule, not the exception. Referring to a lavish feast one writer exclaimed: "Ladies shone like stars in the sky on a fine night."

This Italian culinary transfusion was furthered when Katherine's cousin Marie de Medicis married Henry IV of France. La Varenne, one of the first great French chefs, presumably learned his trade in her kitchen. He wrote **Le Cuisinier Francaise**, The French Cuisine, published in 1652, which exhibited all the culinary advances that had been made due to the Italian influence. Spices were no longer used to disguise the taste of food, but to augment it instead. This was the first time that the French cooks attempted to enhance the natural flavors rather than overwhelm them. Along with this trend, meat came to be served in its own juices, the jus; and fish was served with sauces based in a fish stock - the flavors obtained from boiling down fish bones, heads and tails. In terms of sauces, bread was replaced as a thickener by the lighter roux, flour and butter combined with a meat stock. The roux still remains part of the repertoire of modern chefs, hundreds of years later.

### **Louis XIV & XV**

Although known for his extravagance and ostentatious displays of consumption,

which are not the hallmarks of a gastronome, Louis XIV and his court further advanced the French culinary art. New protocols were established. Silverware, including knives and spoons, but especially forks, came to be widely used. More importantly dishes came to be served in order rather than all at once. Also some intentionality was put into creating complementary dishes rather than just serving them upon completion. Louis XIV also emphasized the obvious, but neglected, importance of the cultivation of quality ingredients. This included improved techniques for the growing of produce and the raising of livestock. Further he felt cuisine was so important that he began honoring cooks as officers. This gave them the increased prestige and recognition that was to eventually evolve into the celebrity chef of modern times.

His son, Louis XV, furthered the evolution of the French Dining ritual by continuing to refine the culinary process. This included an increasing emphasis on the order of meals, cleanliness and elegance. His court also introduced more refinements in service, which included more sophisticated utensils and a more complex Dining ritual. With this increasing emphasis upon food consumption different specializations began emerging to deal with the demand. This included pastry, sauce, meat and fish cooks in the kitchen and all the supporting professions to supply their quality ingredients - winemakers, bakers, and the like. This was the aristocratic foundation of Fine Dining that Boston was referring to.

#### **The First Restoratives = Restaurants**

As the culinary arts became more refined and important in all parts of French culture the first restaurant appeared. In 1765 A. Boulanger, a soup vendor, hung a sign over his business which offered a choice of soups and broths for health. The name he chose for his business was restorative or restaurant, indicating the nutritive aspects of food. This soup vendor was the first to offer a menu with a choice of dishes. Prior to this a visitor could buy a variety of beverages at an inn or eat off the host's table at a hotel. But there were no choices. The time must have been ripe for these menu driven eateries because they spread rapidly throughout Europe. Indeed the word restaurant and its variations are now used by virtually all European speakers to signify an eating establishment which offers a choice of dishes.

In 1782, less than 20 years after its humble beginnings, the first luxury restaurant was opened in Paris. It was called La Grande Taverne de Loudres by the owner, Antoine Beauvilliers, who became the first famous restaurateur and host. He even wrote a standard work on the French culinary art entitled **The Art of Cuisine**, which was published in 1814. Brillant-Savarin, a famous gastronomic chronicler, credited him with being the first to combine the 4 essentials of dining - an elegant room - that's me, smart waiters - that's my staff, a choice cellar - our wine list, and superior cooking - that's where Antoine's abilities come in.

Beauvilliers also set the standard for future Maitre'ds and hosts. He pointed out the dishes to be avoided, must dishes, and then suggested the perfect wine with such a gracious and engaging manner that he seemed to doing you a favor as your friend. This was the type of Maitre'd my Antoine yearned and even ached for.

#### **The French Revolution**

Then came the French Revolution. This event leveled out the culinary world just as it did the political world. Justice became more uniform for all classes of society and more people had the opportunity to dine out. Previous to this momentous societal upheaval only the wealthy were dining in the privacy of their estates. However the French Revolution drastically reduced the number of households with elaborate culinary establishments. The multitude of unemployed chefs and cooks, who were lucky enough

to escape the guillotine, started restaurants or found work in them. In 1804, only a few short decades after the disruption, Paris already had 500 restaurants.

The upwardly mobile middle classes and the falling aristocracy could not afford their own chef in an elegant dining room of their own with servants to do all the work. However this growing class of the not-quite-wealthy-enough still wanted to have a royal Dining experience with all the trappings - gourmet food, vintage wine, refined service, an elegant place setting and a sumptuous location. Responding to this expanding need some clever entrepreneurs set up some Fine Dining restaurants to allow this emerging class to fulfill their fantasies. By tapping into this pool of resources these early restaurateurs enabled these aristocratic wannabees to dine like royalty - as frequently as their finances would permit. Competing with each other to attract the Public dollar the best of these chefs became celebrities. Thus the equalization of society, not its stratification, led to the birth of restaurants based in Fine Dining. This was different than any of us suspected. Nothing is ever as it seems.

### **The Vortex of Sensuality**

Although Space and Boston could easily argue their respective cases from the evidence that was presented they both missed the point of Fine Dining - why the elite are drawn to me and what I have to offer - like males to a voluptuous woman. Obsessed as Space was with his state of At-One-Ment he shot right by my magnificence. Like Sex, I am the crack between - the wonderful Mystery at the Heart of Being. Wrapped up in his supposed spirituality he confused my glory with a marvelous contentment which he mistook for a type of enlightenment. This sense of well being is just the frosting on my cake - certainly not the main course - like mistaking the feeling of satisfaction after Orgasm for the ecstasy of Sex. To reach the state of At-One-Ment my Diners must first enter my Vortex of Sensuality.

To understand the nature of this magical state let's begin with a metaphor - connecting something known with the unknown. The North American Plate, one of the great tectonic sheaths of the Planet Earth, is quite flat in certain parts, specifically in northern New Mexico. Looking across the horizon a traveler only sees flat ground. Viewing this wide expanse he reasons that it goes on forever in many directions. However, unbeknownst to our visitor, right in the center a vast chasm opens up - appropriately named the Grand Canyon.

Similarly with the Vortex. Ordinary Reality is the flat plane of the Earth dominated by Brain's Illusions. It seems that it is everywhere we look. But right in the middle - the Balance point - the Vortex opens up into new dimensions. The Sober One, locked into the traditional day-to-day existence, is firmly rooted on this plane - never suspecting the immensity of experience hidden within the Vortex. Busily checking his stocks, managing his portfolio, saving for his imaginary futures - he is unaware of the immensity of Being which is at hand - just next door as he is traveling around the world to find it.

The key to this Vortex, this magical state, is the Balance point. When the Balance is maintained - yin and yang harmonized - a new dimension opens up. It is entered by getting high, psychedelics, sex, as well as my Fine Dining Experience. Antoine's culinary delights, combined with wine, my beautiful view and attentive Service enable Body to become immersed in my sensuality - triggering this transcendent condition. The walls melt - the stones begin to vibrate - the angels sing Hallelujah to the heavens - which open up to reveal the Divine Mystery. This is what draws humanity to me. Boston's Status and Space's state of At-One-Ment are merely sideshows to the main event - my Vortex of Sensuality.

## **Chapter 14: Our Golden Age**

### **Antoine does what he can**

Although my Service staff maintained most basic standards despite bad management or lack thereof, they certainly didn't raise them either - which is what Antoine was hoping for. That was the potential function of the stream of managers. Theoretically they were supposed to bring 'fresh eyes' into the Dining Room, seeing what needed to be changed to upgrade Service. Unfortunately they had not provided that function. This was especially frustrating to Antoine.

Antoine: "Mon Dieu. These Santa Barbara waiters. They think they're so god. But they wouldn't be able to get a job in France. What they need is a good maitre'd to whip them into line - Not these salary collectors, who just sit back and watch - never taking part in Service. At least I can train my Expediters and Runners to carefully wipe the spots off my gorgeous plates, garnishes them properly, and then serve my art works gracefully, reminding my Guests what they ordered."

The style of Service was exceptionally important to Antoine. Although a Painting is observed in a fixed state, Food Art is appreciated and then consumed. Because Dining like Music is dynamic, it must be experienced over time. As part of the aesthetic dynamic Service must also be equally artistic and flowing. The Food must be served with grace, style, and respect. Because the Food only exists in process, its reality is connected with the style of its service. Hence the quality of the Runners and Expediters was a crucial ingredient in Antoine's Art.

Normally they had worked their way up through the Bus ranks. As well as understanding Floor Service, they were also well versed in Room Service for the Hotel. They were tipped much better than the Bus for fewer hours. Because of their Food and Service knowledge the Expediters expected to eventually become Waiters and many did. Except for the Waiters, the Expediters had the most status of the Floor Staff.

However they were the most important to Chef Antoine because of their intimate connection with his Food Art. He regularly gave them special foods and gourmet snacks as a token of his appreciation for a job well done. From the beginning they were his friends - good enough that they frequently went out drinking together. Step 1 of 3 to Antoine Heaven -> a well trained crew of Runners and Expediters.

### **The Regeneration of Spring**

While our Expediters were of the quality that Antoine and I hoped for, our Service still lacked guidance. After Number 10, the New Era Manager, disappeared without leaving a trace, we were in the state of No Manager again. Then suddenly, an answer to our prayers. Enter stage right -> the Lewis and Clark management team - Numbers 11 and Number 12. They were hired in our fifth Spring, the growing season. As usual, the Universe planned everything perfectly.

Our annual business cycle went from excessively slow business to excessively busy. This pattern was synchronized with the ancient agricultural seasonal cycle: growing business in Spring - peaking in Summer - declining in Autumn - and dead in Winter. There were many local aberrations, but as a whole this was our business cycle as Restaurants and Hotels in the tourist town of Santa Barbara.

This pumping action led to a cycle of degeneration and regeneration. In the Winter, Service tended to degenerate, while in the Spring it tended to regenerate. If a Restaurant is Slow - few Guests, then its Service System is not challenged and becomes static, stagnant, degenerate. However when a Restaurant is Busy - lots of Guests, then the Service System is constantly tested and becomes dynamic, alive, regenerative.



When Busy the Managers and Staff are always looking for efficiencies to make their job easier and refinements to make the Service better. At capacity, this occurs regularly, naturally. Conversely when business is Slow, the Staff almost tries to make things less efficient in order to fill the time. When it does get busy these bad habits must be broken. Lewis and Clark were perfect for the task.

Lewis: "With my father's support, I owned, managed, and lost a night club in Minneapolis. Leaving my family behind to pursue my dreams, I came to California to become a stand-up comedian. Instead I found myself managing a high-class health resort for the rich and famous - hoping to be discovered and to pay my bills. While there I met my girlfriend, a full-time writer for General Hospital, one of the daytime soaps. Because she was so busy, she needed me closer to her home in Pasadena. I left my job in the desert to move in with her. I was hoping for a big part in one of her episodes. That didn't work out. She said it was against company policy. Further because she was so busy with work she didn't have much time for me. I needed to keep busy and decided to apply for the manager job in this small resort town of Santa Barbara, just an hour and a half drive north, if there's no traffic. I've come from a high end resort which caters to celebrities. I intend to bring the level of Service at Ma Belle up to similar standards."

Clark: "I also worked in the restaurant business in Minnesota, in St. Paul across from Minneapolis. I am definitely a big city boy. When I was younger, I danced in a professional ballet troupe. I also sang in the Minneapolis city choir. Unfortunately my lover left me with a big hole in my heart. To forget, I came to Santa Barbara to manage along side of Lewis. I was also attracted by Francis Le Roi's reputation. Although I have no management experience, I have worked in many fine restaurants as a waiter to support my less lucrative cultural side. I too am committed to fine Service. Lewis and I will work together to ensure that our dreams of top quality Service are realized."

Antoine and I were excited - finally some Restaurant Managers who were committed to bringing our Service up to the level of our Food.

#### **Cleaning out Dead Wood & Stick's Reward?**

They came in with a bang. As a cohesive partnership, which supported each other, they were an irresistible force. When they moved together, which they always did, the Staff had to follow along. Clark knew what good Service was from his past experience and demanded it from the Staff - with Lewis always backing him up, of course. Clark was the great communicator and confronted bad habits gently and persistently. Lewis, unafraid of confrontation, immediately cleaned out some dead wood, establishing himself as a manager not to be played around with.

For instance Stick - so nicknamed because he was skinny and tall - an Anglo from the Bay Area - in his early 20s - had migrated south to go to college - got into the restaurant business to pay for school and then dropped out. A common pattern. Stick had been the weekend Expediter for the first 3 years of our existence - doing an excellent job - patiently hoping to be made Waiter.

To reward his diligence and work record, Managers 3 through 10 gave him one shift a week as a Waiter. Unfortunately he was a magnet for food critics, who uniformly didn't like him and the Service he provided. Further they let everyone know.

Stick was so nervous that he constantly made mistakes and was afraid to go to the table. He would take a deep breath and steel himself before taking an order. He

preferred to hang out in back, as he had as an Expediter, rather than at the tables, where the action and problems were. Lewis made short work of Stick, who by that time had lost interest in expediting and only wanted to wait tables. Lewis 'demoted' Stick back to Expediter and he quit. Cleaning out dead wood certainly increased our vitality. Antoine was pleased.

### **Tightrope survives his first ordeal**

Another unique aspect to the Reign of Lewis and Clark was that they were not afraid to make difficult decisions because of their desire to be nice. Sky was the victim of this virtue.

Two years prior Phillippe had hired Sky at the age of 26 to be our Lunch Waiter. Tall and sandy blond with classic good looks, he had the grace and charm of an aristocrat. He would have been a knight in feudal society - a royal officer in charge of the cavalry during the time of kings - part of the nobility who went on hunts, or in modern times a jet setter flying to the nearest ski resort for some winter sports. Raised in wealth, his manners and dress were impeccable. Cool, calm and collected the women began drooling when he approached their table. In many ways he seemed to be an ideal waiter for our elite establishment.

Unfortunately his cool exterior didn't reflect a cool interior. Sky was incredibly sensitive emotionally - perhaps because his father had died unexpectedly when he was a teenager - immediately ejecting his family from the elite social circle that they had been accustomed to. Educated in private schools and destined for a life of social service, his life was upended by this sudden tragedy. Running away from school to find meaning in Life after being faced with the Void at such a tender age, his life lost focus. Although possessing private sources of income, he got a job with us to ground his turbulent inner life. Free-spirited Phillippe supported and balanced Sky during his first year. More interested in having a good time and less interested in details, he was ideal for Sky's casual style.

Then just before Phillippe was fired, a new Day manager, Lisa, entered the scene. Although she only ruled during the day, she provided us with a modicum of management continuity during the next year of revolving door managers. Further Lisa provided Sky with the compassionate nurturing he so desperately needed. Sky and Lunches thrived with Lisa in charge. After regaining his footing and some experience, he began to agitate to work Nights, where the glamour and money were. Lisa, who was writing the schedule at this time, eased him into the Dinner Shift on a limited basis.

Then the Lewis and Clark storm hit. Lisa, 'only a girl with not much experience' according to Ted, was forced out. More detail oriented Lewis and Clark were not impressed by Sky's good looks and suave demeanor. Instead they were acutely aware of his sloppy habits - frequently forgetting to take care of all his tables, in the service of one - losing track of the essentials in the midst of an internal haze - and not attending to the details of his mis en place. (Mis en place is a French restaurant term referring to all the backup details including table setting which are necessary for Service. Mis en place - a place for everything and everything in its place.) Although Sky's people skills were good, his mis en place was shaky at best - which inevitably led to unnecessary difficulties. A contributing factor to his service problems was that he was frequently quite high in the sky, which is how he acquired his nickname. The upshot was that Lewis and Clark sent Sky back to Lunches, perhaps hoping he'd quit. But he had more persistence than that.

Shortly after his 'demotion' Sky got the first of his many write-ups, which were to eventually fill a small notebook. Although we began with pen and ink, it was at this

time that our service was finally computerized. Sky had difficulty closing out with the new system after his shift. Internally fragmented and frustrated because one of his many parties in LA was calling him, he disappeared without finishing up. Immediately written up by Clark for "not obeying orders. [Blah, blah ...] subject to immediate termination if said behavior occurs again."

Sky displayed the resilience that was to be his trademark throughout the coming years. "I'm awfully sorry. I don't know what came over me. It will certainly never happen again."

Clark: "Well all right, but just this time." - Aside: "I would like to fire him but the Guests seem to like him for some reason that I can't fathom." Clark, a fastidious gay, was more impressed with the details of service rather than Guest rapport.

This was the first of many incidents when Sky just barely avoided termination. This trait earned him his secondary nickname, Tigh trope.

### **Taking Service to a new level**

During their relatively long reign, Lewis and Clark definitely upgraded service standards. They hired better employees, instituted new procedures, and maintained a firm hand. Their most important innovation was the teaming of each Waiter with a Busser Assistant, as partners, to provide more responsive Service. Prior to this the Bus had floated everywhere, working as a Team. They helped where needed - or where they got the most tips - or if they felt like it. Now with each Bus paired with a Waiter, there was much more accountability and training. With this new System each Waiter was responsible for training his helper. If he didn't, he was to blame for bad service in his station.

Of our Stream of Managers Lewis and Clark left the most lasting impression upon Service, wearing away resistance through constant pressure. They definitely did the most of any of the managers to raise the level of service to match the quality of our food. Step 2 of 3 to Antoine Heaven -> Good Restaurant Management.

I, of course, was happy too. I loved anyone who gave me attention. The firmness and cohesiveness with which they dealt with recalcitrant Staff was thrilling. The daring with which they over booked reservations sent shivers up my spine. Packing them in. Mistakes were made, but at least they were trying to maximize Business. This team certainly was one of my all time favorites. I didn't appreciate them enough at the time. What happened next and then after that, brings tears to my eyes. Messing up my windows. Darn, I'll have to talk to the GM about having them cleaned again.

At this point everything was so fresh and beautiful that I hoped it would never end - the dream of a fool. I had a great crew to serve me and my whims. First and foremost, Chef Antoine, fabulously motivated and creative, and unstained by Time - Lewis and Clark, a dynamic and focused management team, with only my best interests in their hearts - and then my devoted Family of employees, willing and excited to serve my Guests, who are me. And, of course I can't forget my young Parents, Corporate and Francis Le Roi, who were committed to turning me into the best restaurant in Santa Barbara, if not the entire West Coast.

Then to cap it all off - the frosting on my cake - my ever changing never changing view. The incredible visuals as our solar father sank beneath the horizon. The coal gray ocean overlaid with rust colored waves - the brilliant canopy of the immense sky overhead - graced with seagulls flocking together in complex patterns - motivated by urges unbeknownst to any but them - and then the humans - skating, bicycling, walking and running - busily moving independently about - also motivated by unknown urges - each involved in their own individual affairs - feeling that their concerns were of utmost

importance. In like fashion the characters in my story felt that nothing was more important than what happened under my roof.

My view, as the sun finished his journey across Earth's roof, was like a Renaissance painting - with all its off colors and hues - not bold and impressionistic at all. My story, too, is based in grays, no blacks and whites here.

Read on to hear my tortured tale. Innocent as we were, none of us had any clue of the trials and tribulations which lay ahead.

## Chapter 15: The Rush

Hello. It's me again - Space, the supposed Author of this book. I guess Ma Belle was correct in her assessment of me. At this point in time I was primarily, if not entirely, wrapped up with my own waitery concerns - which revolved around my income as it was influenced by shifts, station assignments, table seating and the like. Although Antoine and Ma Belle were excited about Lewis and Clark's potential and willingness to upgrade Service, I perceived them in terms of how they treated me and what they required of me. In fact I initially viewed Clark as my arch enemy due to certain hostile actions on his part (we'll get to that a bit later).

I didn't realize it at the time (to be honest I didn't really realize it until now - more than 10 years later in my 10th rewrite) that Clark was the first agent the Universe introduced to inspire me to write this book. He also provided, in indirect fashion, one of the primary themes of this work - a Celebration of the Restaurant Business (discovered in my 11th rewrite). This insignificant nearly forgotten episode also eventually revealed (in my 12th read through) one of my motivations. I was bragging about my profession to the general public. The Universe certainly works in mysterious ways to accomplish his ends. I guess we just need to step aside so that we don't get in the way - allowing things to happen rather than forcing them. Let's see how the Universe worked His magic.

### Self education seminars

Along with their other innovations Lewis and Clark introduced self education seminars, which were basically talks by staff members on a variety of topics, including cheese, French Bordeaux, the Sonoma Wine Region, Salesmanship, the nutrients of wine, and many others.

Clark: "Space, it's your turn to educate us. Have you decided upon a topic or would you like me to assign you one?"

Space: "I want to give a talk on 'The Joys of Restaurant Work'."

Clark: "The Joys? This is supposed to be educational. Couldn't you think of something a little more useful?"

Space: "I would prefer to give an inspirational talk."

Clark: "Don't you think that Lewis and I serve that function?"

Space: "Not really. Actually my topic is a reaction to a book about waiting tables, which you passed around."

Clark: "A mean spirited book."

Space: "Exactly. It was a demoralizing portrayal of restaurant motives - looking at the worst side of the business. The writer only focused upon the type of waiter who is backbiting, greedy, selfish, frustrated, and under employed. I call this the 'low' waiter. To balance this negativity, my talk will be about the motivations of a 'high' waiter."

Clark: "High on what?"

Space: "You know what I mean."

Clark: "No, I don't."

Space: "I'll be talking about the joys of the business, rather than its drudgery."

Clark: "The side benefits?"

Space: "Side benefits?"

Clark: "The usual. Waiting gives you a lot of personal freedom. Working nights gives you days and late nights off to pursue a variety of activities, including partying,

acting, singing, writing, going to the beach, sleeping in late, working another job, or whatever else might suit your fancy. Plus the instant cash from tips gives you an immediate feedback and reward for your service - not to mention an abundance of disposable income. I've been a waiter. I think we all know about these things."

Space: "In my discussion I'm going to stick to the restaurant experience itself, not these side benefits. While they apply to most waiters, including myself, these joys are highly personal - inapplicable to the bulk of restaurant workers, especially you managers and the kitchen crew."

Clark: "Good. I don't want this to become a personal testimonial to the side benefits of the restaurant business."

Space: "Not at all. My discussion is about the joys of working in a restaurant - something that applies to all of us in the business, not just the waiters. One study estimated that over half the working population in the US have worked in restaurants in some capacity at one time or another during the course of their lives. So this talk has a certain universality about it - something that nearly anyone can relate to. I think it's just what the Staff needs. What do you think?"

Clark: "Well all right, if you insist."

### **The Joys of the Rush**

Welcome fellow travelers in this space time continuum. My talk today is on the Joys of Restaurant Work. The purpose is to focus on the positive aspects of our business to balance the negative impressions contained in a book that many of us have read.

In my preparation for this talk I quickly realized that there are so many joys that I couldn't possibly cover them all in the half hour that I've been allocated. So I decided to concentrate upon one aspect that gives me special pleasure - The Rush. If this talk is well received and management approves we can cover the other joys in a series of weekly talks.

Clark groaned involuntarily and left the room on some kind of 'important business' - never to return until my talk was over.

### **The Excitement and Challenge**

The Rush is definitely one of my favorite parts to the business. It has to do with the urgency of the Moment, which is unique to our profession. People are hungry and thirsty and can't wait too long to have these urges satisfied. Although reflected in sports, our Rush is quite different. In sports there is always a winner and a loser. In a well run restaurant everyone comes out a winner - no losers - a win-win situation.

I love the Rush because it throws us solidly into the Now. The past and future dissolve, overwhelmed by the intensity of the Moment. Both physical and emotional problems vanish in the attempt to accomplish immediate goals. As an example one time I was called into work after my back had gone out. It was busier than normal and no one else was available. Because of the demands of business I forgot all about my back pain and did a good job despite my physical disability.

Our effectiveness is facilitated by the surge of adrenaline coursing through our veins - generated by our desire to please. As always balance is crucial. Too much adrenaline and we become frantic. Not enough and we become sluggish - not alert enough to take care of business. Just right and we enter the Zone.

Upon entering the Zone we are perfect - able to meet the stimulating challenge

of providing good service to all our tables despite the multiplicity of demands. We naturally prioritize the needs of our many Guest - maintaining the balance between each of our Tables. And even if we make a mistake, heaven forbid, we still recover our equilibrium quickly. Rising to this nightly challenge is accompanied by a sense of accomplishment. Further the satisfaction of providing our Guests a great time, even while under duress, imparts a sense of self esteem, which merges into the rest of our lives, providing us with a sense of well being.

### **Group Bonding**

In addition to immersing us in the Moment, regularly working together under the pressure of the Rush fuses us into a Team, Tribe or Family, providing us with a Group Bonding Experience - one of my favorite features of the Rush. Under the pressure and heat of business restaurant employees naturally bond together as one because everyone is essential for an effective operation - from Chef to Dishwasher. This engenders a sense of cooperation, which feels good. Everyone works together to make the customers happy - a group accomplishment.

One lesson we learn from the necessity of working as a team is that no man is an island. Nobody can do it by themselves. The Waiter must engage his support crew to accomplish his goal of happy Guests. The Chef can't prepare all the food himself, but must instead train and focus his Crew to work at high capacity.

This group bonding, which comes from working together towards a common goal, engenders a sense of belonging. This is very special in our fragmented specialized world, which has seen a breakdown of the tribe, the clan, and extended family. Many humans crave this sense of belonging that we get from our restaurant experience. (Note that this bonding has to do with working through the Rush together, not partying together. Perhaps this might be a personal side benefit for some - an extension of our work - but that's not what we're talking about here.)

This bonding engenders a love of our restaurant Family, which includes a desire for survival - both for economic and emotional reasons. The existence of our Family is directly related to Ma Belle's survival. If she perishes our tribe also perishes. She is the only thing binding us together. Those of us who have been through multiple restaurants have made some lasting friendships but for the most part, the Restaurant family dissolves with the death of the business. Our Family survives or perishes together. Hence our first duty as members of Ma Belle's Family is to do our best to ensure her survival - because our existence as the Tribe is directly linked to her.

This group bonding that occurs under the high volume demands is not always easy. Sometimes it is even painful. This is where the growth come from - letting the personal go to serve the greater good. The rewards are great. It's thrilling when the team works like clockwork - taking care of business naturally.

Of course it's equally aggravating when individuals consider themselves more important than Ma Belle, especially when they're here to serve her. Those who are out for their own personal gain are considered *low* restaurant people. Their own prosperity and individual happiness are given a higher priority than Ma Belle. Because of their separation from the Group they lose out on the sense of belonging. Cutting themselves off from the Pack, they are frequently isolated and bitter.

On the other hand *high* restaurant people, which includes most of us, act in Ma Belle's best interests, because we love our Restaurant Family and want it to survive. Ideally our love of Ma Belle extends to the individuals who belong to our Team, which means that we are concerned with the well being of each member of

our Tribe. Instead of an adversarial approach to our fellow workers, we strive to help each other out - focusing upon cooperation and assistance instead of our own selfish ends.

There are immediate rewards to this attitude. It feels good to work together as a team - cooperating to serve the common good. Conversely it gives an uncomfortable feeling when some only work to serve their own interests. The longer I've worked in the restaurant business, the more I treasure this sense of cooperation. Hopefully this talk inspires us to work together as a team to fulfill my higher desire for this Group Experience - transcending the personal realm to merge with the Universal Good.

Clark returned at this point: "OK. Time to wrap it up."

Space: "But I was just about to explore the martial aspect of the Rush."

Clark: "We've had enough of your philosophizing. It's time."

Space: "I just need to summarize what I've said."

Clark: "Well make it quick. We have work to do."

In summary one of the primary joys of the restaurant business is the Rush. This has multiple facets. First our entire Being unifies behind the desire to make our Guests happy. In turn this leads to the excitement of being immersed in the intensity of the Moment. We also derive a sense of self esteem from doing a good job in the midst of challenging circumstances - learning many life lessons based upon the urgency of multiple demands. Finally due to the Group Bonding that occurs in the heat of Service we are also joined as a Family or Team, from which we derive a sense of belonging, cooperation and teamwork.

Thank you for your attentions. If you enjoyed this talk we can discuss some other positives of our business in the weeks ahead. Topics could include: the Martial component of the Rush - Our special relation with our Guests - the Physical, Artistic, and Political Aspect of Restaurants - and finally the Spiritual Side to our Business, with a Taoist orientation. Thanks once again for allowing me to spew.

Clark: "OK everyone. Now back to work. I expect you've had enough of Space's spiritual inspiration. Time to make some money - our real joy and inspiration."

Boston: "That's why Space really likes the Rush - the volume of business leads to more tips."

### **Addicted to the Rush**

Poor Space. A frustrated professor or preacher, ever serving gourmet food to peasants. Ah well, I, Ma Belle, appreciated his talk. I especially liked what he said about the bonding of my Staff into a Family and the necessity of them serving me for our mutual survival. I think this was the first time he really thought about me as an independent entity - although he wasn't yet open enough to allow me to speak for myself. That was to come much later.

Also it was apparent from his talk that Space was still operating under quite a few delusions. Although I appreciate him for glorifying the exciting side of our relation, he hadn't yet acknowledged my dark side which was to cause him so much grief. Because he hadn't embraced this side of me it came out as the menacing Shadow, which eventually threatened to overwhelm him.

Although the Rush provided him with much joy, the opposites of the spectrum -



Dead and Swamped, my darker sides, put him into a state of existential despair or stressed out anxiety. When restaurant people say they are 'Swamped' or 'In the Weeds' it means they are overwhelmed with business. The result is poor service accompanied by poor tips. They are over stimulated by an excess of adrenaline with very little to show for their efforts. The opposite of Swamped is Dead. When it is Dead, there is no money to be made, and even more importantly they are under stimulated. Because they're under stimulated their Brains stop working as efficiently and the quality of their service drops. Between these extremes is the Rush, the Balance point between not enough and too much - maximum stimulation without going over the Edge into Chaos. The point is to stay on the Edge of Chaos - between Boredom and Turbulence. That's where the action occurs.

It's like Surfing. A Dead night is like a flat ocean without any swells - waiting endlessly for the set of waves that never comes. Boring. Too much business is similar to the Wipe Out. The Surfer loses his balance, falling off his board and the wave crashes on top of him. Stressed out. Just enough and the Surfer is able to ride the Wave, staying in the curl without losing control. Ecstasy and Excitement.

These three states provided Space, and others like him, pain and pleasure in equal measure. Unfortunately he had only embraced my exciting side - the Rush. Although he wasn't bothered by my frantic side - treating it as a challenge, he hadn't yet come to grips with my boring side - the Dead.

In his enthusiasm for the Rush he inadvertently forgot to acknowledge one of its unfortunate side effects. It's addictive - physically, emotionally and mentally. Why? The Rush provides money, lessons, mental and physical stimulation, personal integration and group bonding. The exciting challenges and nightly lessons of a busy night combined with the monetary rewards and feeling of accomplishment accompanied by a sense of self esteem are incredibly invigorating. Consequently Space in particular, and restaurant people as a whole, live for the Rush and become depressed when they can't get their Fix. The sense of self esteem that comes from maintaining the Balance must be constantly renewed or it degenerates into a feeling of worthlessness. Dead nights don't provide anything but painful boredom. This is where the expression 'I'm a whore for business' comes from.

### **Integration turns into Disintegration**

Besides income and self esteem, business of any kind provides mental, emotional and physical stimulation. The Rush, in particular, completely immerses my Staff in the Now. The crunch of business fuses their many selves behind one task.

Space: "Love it. Totally focused upon the task at hand. No distractions to cause me anguish. All of my selves in perfect alignment behind the desire to please our Guests. Ah! At-one-ment. At one with myself."

Mind: "It's so great merging with the Universal Mind to serve Ma Belle."

Heart: "I just love her Guests. It's exhilarating to make them happy."

Brain: "It's incredibly stimulating being engaged to solve the problems of how to bring them joy."

Body: "It's excited to be employed to that end. A bit of adrenaline gets me going."

Space: "What a great feeling - to be unified rather than fragmented."

However Space's attachment to this fusion of Mind, Body, and Spirit - emotional, mental and physical - which was ignited by the Fire of the Rush was equally devastated when he wasn't engaged enough and his psychic centers began fragmenting.

Brain: "The agony of under stimulation is getting to me. Why did I ever choose a career as a waiter? No money and I'm so incredibly bored. What a loser life."

Heart: "How about me? I have nothing to care about - a complete lack of passion. This is so incredibly blah that I'm starting to lose my enthusiasm for living. I'm craving some kind of emotional excitement. If I don't get something to care about soon, my love is going to turn into depression instead."

Body: "You guys think you have it bad. I am so under exercised that I'm getting incredibly sluggish. My Blood is slowing down - becoming like molasses. I want to go to sleep but I have to stand around doing nothing."

Mind: "Whoa! I'm getting dizzy. Not enough Oxygen reaching the neurons of my Brain. I'm losing consciousness. I feel like I'm going to die. I'm beginning to lose touch. I want to cut myself to make sure I'm still alive."

Little Voice: "Come on now guys. It's not that bad. Stop your complaining. You are just restless, finding things to be unhappy about. Focus on the Now."

Mind: "Easy for you to say. But not so easy for me to do. The Now is so incredibly boring that my centers are fragmenting with nothing to do. I'm losing control."

Although he hadn't yet admitted it to himself Space was hopelessly addicted to the Rush of my business. His state of Joy was based upon events rather the Glory of Existence. He hadn't emptied his Mind sufficiently of expectations to enjoy just Being with me.

This was quite evident when Clark began tampering with his expectations. This erosion of his projections began slowly enough and then reached its climax in the Slow of Fall. Let's see how much *joy* he felt from the restaurant business when his Beloved Tips were threatened.

## Chapter 16: My Three Detachments

### Women Waiters

You might wonder why I referred to Clark as my arch-enemy. What problems existed between us? Antoine certainly loved Clark for his attention to details and his willingness to raise the level of Service through direct and firm confrontations with the Staff and was certainly sorry when he left due to unfortunate circumstances.

It's easy to come up for reasons for the conflicts between Clark and I and in so doing assign praise or blame to the combatants. But frequently the Universe just arranges circumstances to provide a little learning experience - all too aware that pain is the best teacher. In this case I was His victim, er ... student. As part of the Divine Plan Clark's actions forced me to go through many detachments. I had to let go of my mental projections or else go through emotional agony. It was the first time that Ma Belle really ground my Ego down - polished the Mirror of my Mind - but not the last. It all started innocently enough.

Clark: "I notice that you only have men as Waiters. Is that a policy?"

Ted the GM at the time: "No. We're an equal opportunity employer. We just haven't found a woman that could fulfill our high standards."

Clark: "If I could find a woman who was qualified, could I hire her?"

Ted: "Of course. But I doubt that you will."

In quick succession Lewis and Clark hired three waitresses. Karen, the first to break the gender barrier, was a true Fine Dining professional with the highest standards. A career server, she liked to be called a waiter rather than a waitress. Karen: "After all they never call a woman doctor a doctress or a woman lawyer a lawyeress. I consider it demeaning to be called a waitress. I much prefer being called a Waiter."

The only ambiguity with this stance was when a local newspaper highlighted her husband, a chef. In giving his background information the article stated: "He lives in Santa Barbara with his partner, who is a waiter at Ma Belle." A few people commented to him that they didn't know he was gay.

Jane, the second hired, also hated to be called a waitress. "I prefer to be called a Server, a non gender specific term. I've worked as a Server before but am just passing through until something better comes up.

And then finally Dee, from a lower middle class Italian neighborhood in Delaware, also had a lot of experience but only in lower level restaurants. She had no wine experience whatsoever. Dee: "What's that expression? Oh yeah. 'Only lower class broads drink wine.'"

No one suspected it at the time but these were the last Dinner Waiters hired for the next nine years - with one notable exception. Our environment was so exceptional and business was so good that no one ever wanted to leave - except the countless managers who passed through. When this waiter stability was finally eroded so many years later, it was an unfortunate reflection on the state of Ma Belle's health.

### Detaching from Seniority

Fairly quickly after she was hired Karen was given priority over me - assigned both my station and provided a better seating of Guests by Clark. I moaned inwardly, "Aurgh! She was just hired and is given the best. What happened to seniority? I have earned my position by putting my time in. She's just arrived and already has the best station and the best parties. It's just not fair."

Disturbed I slipped into a restless sleep, in which I dreamed I was being attacked by

a masked monster, who was intent upon eating me. Armed with my swords, I thrust left and parried right - employing my training to defend and attack. But no matter which techniques I used, the monster continued to advance with mouth opened wide. Just as the monster was about to swallow me, I woke up.

My mouth dry and psyche disturbed I got up and began meditating to calm my troubled mind. After some mental tossing, turning and thrashing about I reached a state of quietude, where messages could finally emerge from the Emptiness without being garbled by verbal static.

Me: "I wonder who that monster was? Perhaps Clark?"

Little Voice: "Guess again."

Me: "But it was he that gave my station to Karen."

Little Voice: "You're thinking like a victim. Turn it around."

Me: "Turn it around?"

Little Voice: "How was he able to victimize you?"

Me: "Through my expectations about the privileges of seniority."

Little Voice: "Exactly. Your own expectations are swallowing you up - consuming your peace of mind."

Me: "The monster is me."

Little Voice: "Of course. There is still plenty of business to go around and Karen is an excellent server. What's the difference which station you have? Detach from this notion of seniority. It is only creating unhealthy stress."

Me: "True. Seniority is only a mental construct with no connection to business reality. And Karen is good for the restaurant with her professional knowledge of wine and food."

### **Detaching from Discrimination**

Partially resolved and temporarily at peace within my skin, I passed a few more months under this condition. And then Saturday night came as it always did. I looked at the station map.

Me: "What's this! Dee, who has virtually no knowledge of wine, has been given the best station in the house and I have been given the worst station - the one reserved for the rookies like her. I can't believe this is happening to me."

Furious I immediately went to Clark.

Clark: "We just want to be fair by rotating stations."

Me: "Fair?! Dee is barely competent. She knows nothing about wine. And her earthy rasta appearance is more appropriate at the local vegetarian restaurant. It certainly doesn't fit the image of our restaurant."

Clark: "I'll be there to help her out. And besides she reminds me of my sister."

I literally saw red. I was so disturbed that I couldn't quite focus on my tables. I went through the motions, but was obviously distracted. One of my Guests complained to

Clark: "Our waiter was rude with an abrupt demeanor. He ruined the evening for my wife and I because he treated us so poorly. He's bad for your restaurant."

Rubbing salt on my wound Clark called me over: "If you can't control your emotions, there will be consequences. You need to cultivate a more positive attitude, if you want to continue working here."

To myself: "Kill. Destroy. Obliterate." Mumbles to Clark: "So sorry. It won't happen again."

Clark: "What's that? And say it with a smile. That will help your mood."

To myself: "Aurgh?! Hate. Rage." As daggers flashed from my eyes I took a deep breath

and placed a fake smile on my face. To Clark: "It won't happen again. I don't know what came over me."

As I was going through obvious emotional turmoil and agony, Angel came over to me: "What's the matter? You don't seem to be yourself."

Me: "Clark's driving me crazy."

Angel: "I've learned to take it as it comes."

Me: "Take it as it comes?"

Angel: "Right. Sometimes you can't do anything about it anyway. You just need to accept what happens without judgment. That's why I say 'take it as it comes'."

That night I went into another meditation to still my raging emotions.

Me: "With Karen it was different. She's good. Dee's obviously a step down - a good waitress for a normal restaurant. But she is not right for Fine Dining at Ma Belle. Clark even said that he hired her because she reminded him of his sister, whom he missed. I think it's part of his plan to torture and/or replace those of us who are heterosexual, including Sky, Angel and myself. He's obviously not fond of us. We probably represent his macho father, whom he hated. This is an obvious case of discrimination. This is just not fair."

Little Voice: "Learn to take it as it comes."

Me: "But this is blatant discrimination."

Little Voice: "Now you know what more than half the people in the world experience every day. What a great experience!"

Me: "A great experience? But I'm miserable."

Little Voice: "Wallow in your misery so that you can empathize with the bulk of humanity. You've been so sheltered that you've lost touch. You're beginning to take credit rather than giving thanks."

Me: "Whadaya mean by that? I've earned my position through lots of hard work."

Little Voice: "Just as many others have done who have suffered far worse discrimination."

Me: "Like what?"

Little Voice: "Like getting demoted or fired from their jobs. Or perhaps robbed, murdered or lynched by the power establishment. Consider yourself lucky. You're still an evening waiter at Ma Belle. You still have a job. You should be thankful that Clark hasn't demoted and replaced you. You need to cultivate gratitude rather than bitterness. You don't deserve anything. The Universe gave you what you have and can easily take it away."

Me: "But it just seems so unfair - so discriminatory."

Little Voice: "It is. As a white male, you've never been subjected to serious discrimination of any kind. The Universe was kind enough to arrange these circumstances to give you the experience of sexual discrimination. This is a great opportunity for you to have an experience that a majority of the people on this planet have regularly. Now you will be able to empathize with their suffering. Feel it deeply so that you can empathize with others. By all means don't deny it. Take a deep breath and give thanks for all the blessings the Universe has bestowed upon you, rather than losing your peace over just one small aspect of your reality."

Me: "That's hard."

Little Voice: "Of course it is. Hard love is always difficult to swallow."

Me: "Hard love?"

Little Voice: "The Universe loves you so much that he has arranged events to grind away your ego. This will allow you to better survive the coming storms."

Me sarcastically: "Right. Thanks a lot. Let me count my blessings."

Little Voice: "Sit here with your pain until it loses its substance."

Embracing the Void like a good friend I finally washed this sludge from the Mirror of my Mind. But more would certainly come, as surely as night follows day.

### **Detaching from Justice**

With the drop in business associated with autumn the Schedule is always adjusted; but this time I lost one of my regularly scheduled shifts. With my weekly fix threatened, as an addict I freaked out.

After looking at my Schedule Me: "What's this?! I've been reduced to 3 shifts. Aurgh! Let's see, who got my shift. Ah, Karen. I can't believe this. Look. He did the same thing to Angel. That Clark has always been out to get us heterosexuals."

I confronted Clark angrily: "What's with the 3 shifts. Karen has 5 and she was just hired."

Clark: "Seems fair to me."

Me: "What's fair about it?"

Clark: "I'm the manager. I write the schedule. I reward employees who do a good job. And I like Karen. She's very professional."

Me: "What about my seniority? I've earned my shifts."

Clark: "I've already told you; Lewis and I don't believe in seniority. We only believe in performance, if you get my drift."

Me: "But that's not fair."

Clark: "If you have a problem, you can take it up with Lewis or Ted the GM. But I wouldn't waste your time. They both support my decisions."

Although I was exceedingly disturbed by this turn of events, I should have been grateful, not bitter, because these unpleasant circumstances forced me to enter a deep meditation, in which I came to better understand the causes of mental suffering.

Brain: "I can't believe what's happening to me. It's just so unfair."

Little Voice: "Let go of your mental projections, Brain. Body is not suffering."

Body: "True. In fact I feel just fine. In some ways, never felt better. Wife and 2 daughters who love me - own my own home to provide me with shelter and security. And regular Tai Chi practice continues to open up more energy channels every day, which enlivens my vitality."

Brain: "It enlivens me too. Now I have all this extra energy to expend hating anything that gets in the way of my expectations of justice. I get so angry that I want to destroy these obstacles to my dreams. I'm so disturbed I'm seeing red."

Little Voice: "Brain, you've gotta chill. Your anger is stressing Body out."

Body: "That's for sure. Your messages tell the glands to flood our system with unnecessary hormones, which overwork my organs needlessly."

Brain: "Needlessly you say! Not at all. We've just lost one of our four shifts per week. That's a 25% pay cut! With all my energy it's easy for me to figure. With our income eroded our financial future is threatened. How am I going to be able to continue sending my kids to private schools?" Anxiety.

Little Voice: "Rein in you mental horses Brain. Has anything even happened yet?"

Brain: "Not yet, but it will. Trust me. Clark is setting a dangerous precedent. We must avoid it at all costs."

Little Voice: "But this is just one schedule we're talking about and you've extended this

for the rest of our life. I think you're getting all worked up over nothing. Suppose it's busy enough for us to work extra shifts."

Brain: "It won't be. I just know it. We're headed into the slow season. I can see our future clearly. Because we won't be able to pay our mortgage, I'll have to get a day job to make ends meet. I'll lose my creative time, become depressed and then eventually suicidal - which will destroy my relationship and with it my family."

Little Voice: "My, my. A little worked up, are we, considering nothing has even happened yet."

Brain: "But it will. Trust me. I'm telling you it will."

Teeth begin gnashing and acid is generated to upset the Stomach.

Body: "Great, just great. I was doing just fine,. Now you've got everyone riled up over nothing."

Brain: "Nothing? You're just a body. You're not smart enough to understand my brilliance. We're going down. My logic tells me that our future is going to be more horrible than you with your short sightedness can even imagine."

Little Voice: "Body short sighted? That's a major misconception. It's you that's terrible at predicting the future."

Brain: "How could you say that when I use the most sophisticated up-to-date technical analysis available - linear regression and the like."

Little Voice: "That's the problem. You're so linear that you aren't able to see the whole picture. You're so literal minded that you can't even follow a simple story line without Body's Original Brain."

Brain: "Well if you're so smart. What should we do?"

Little Voice: "How about asking Karen if you can have one of her shifts? After all she has 5 while you only have 3. She's a reasonable person. I'm sure she'll understand."

Brain: "How could I ever do that?"

Little Voice: "Simple. Just ask."

Brain: "What about my Pride? This is a lack of respect we're talking about."

Little Voice: "Sheesh. You are truly demented. You're worried about finances which you project will destroy your life and now you're worried about Pride. Get a grip and go ask Karen."

Brain: "Aieeee!? Interaction - Confrontation - Agony! Maybe we'd better just find a new job instead."

Little Voice, sarcastically: "That's a brilliant idea. Leave a stable job, for something unpredictable just because of your Pride."

Brain: "I'm so tormented. Why me? I feel so trapped. What can I possibly do?"

Little Voice: "For Heaven's sake, just ask Karen."

Brain: "Aieeeeeee!!!"

Little Voice: "This is getting totally out of hand. You need to face your fears. They're paralyzing Mind's ability to make decisions. Take some deep breaths to detach from your unreal projections."

Lungs: "In Out. In Out. In Out."

Mind: "Ahh. Starting to relax at last. Brain's chains are loosening. I'm emptying out his verbal garbage."

Lungs: "In Out. In Out. In Out."

Mind: "Hmmm? A message is emerging from the Void. Can't quite hear it yet. More deep breathing. Must cleanse myself of thoughts by bathing in the Emptiness."

Lungs: "In Out. In Out. In Out."

Little Voice: "Pride has no substance. Thoughts have no substance."

Brain: "No substance? But they are giving us a terrible feeling."  
 Little Voice: "Because of you."  
 Body: "Yeah. This is nothing. We still have my health and a job. Your overactive imagination is our biggest problem."  
 Brain: "But it's real and it's unfair. What about seniority, privilege and justice?"  
 Body: "More breathing to settle him down."  
 Lungs: "In Out. In Out. In Out."  
 Mind: "Ahh. Quietude and Emptiness."  
 Little Voice: "These mental notions of justice et al are insubstantial like the air. However your anger is real. And it's disturbing Body."  
 Body: "That's for sure. My Organs are all aroused."  
 Brain: "But my anger is justified."  
 Body: "Maybe to you. But it is only destroying my equilibrium, which affects you too."  
 Little Voice: "Plus it is doing no good whatsoever. Clark is just trying to make you mad to get even with his father. So the angrier you get the happier he gets."  
 Brain: "But I don't want to make Clark happy. He's the source of my unhappiness. I want to get even. I want revenge."  
 Little Voice: "Well get even, if you must, by not letting his actions affect your balance. Then deal with your circumstances in a sensible fashion."  
 Body: "And please don't overreact. That does me no good at all."  
 Brain: "But what should I do?"  
 Little Voice: "Go ask Karen for one of her shifts."  
 Brain: "But I'm so afraid."  
 Little Voice: "Facing your fears is essential for personal growth. All else is secondary."  
 Lungs: "In Out. In Out. In Out."  
 Brain: "Well all right. Since you put it that way."  
 Mind: "At last. Our Brain Fever has finally passed. Time to ask Karen."

Karen: "No problem. I was wondering what was up with the schedule. I'll arrange it with Clark."

**Universe's song** Universe: "Wow! Space detached from his Person's agendas created by Brain's ideas, which were causing him so such mental anguish. I was so impressed that he had learned his lesson that I burst out into song. It was the first time I would sing it, but not the last.

Around and Around - Grind the Ego Down  
 Into the Ground - Never to be found.  
 That way he won't be bound.  
 Instead ready to be crowned.  
 Takes away my frown.  
 Pound that Ego, pound. Aurgh! Love that sound.

Of course this Ego grinding was just a baby step towards Union with Me.  
 To reward Space for passing his Test I decided to throw him a bone. Remember with every blessing comes a curse. The converse is also true. With every curse comes a blessing. Ironically his blessing had to do with Clark's' love of women which had been such a burden. I put it into Clark's Mind to hire his daughter, Pacifica, to work as a Bus. What a joy for Space, as her father. But, as we will see, this movement was just another of the ploys I arranged to wake him up and grind his Ego down."



## Chapter 17: The Path of the Bhogi

Space: "What happened to you?"

Punky: "Run into a wall or something?"

Boston: "Or something."

Sky: "Tipping the Cup - He slipped up."

Upon closer inspection Punky: "Jeez Boston. Those look like teeth marks."

Boston: "They are."

Space: "Your son?"

Slick: "Those are too mean for that. He must have been bothering a sleeping dog."

Punky: "You gotta be careful with dogs. They can be mean."

Boston: "Actually it was my wife."

Punky: "Whoa! She must've been mad."

Space: "A form of spousal abuse."

Gerald: "It happened to me too."

Space: "You too?!"

Gerald: "You can't see it but she was so mad that she scratched my back."

José: "Mine too."

Space: "Waiterland, where the wives abuse their husbands. Everything is reversed."

Slick: "Dude, You must have really pissed off your wife for her to do that to you."

Sky: "Most likely drunk as a skunk. Then home late from a date."

Boston: "Partly. But then my tongue got the best of me."

Slick: "Smart ass as always."

Boston: "Not that I deserved to be bitten, but I was certainly part of the problem. My wife isn't entirely to blame."

Space: "Sounds like you need to get your partying under control."

Punky: "Duh!"

Sky: "Easy to say - Not so easy to do."

Boston: "No need. I enjoy getting drunk. It cleans my mind of disturbing thoughts and emotions. With a drink it's easy to say good-bye to the past, forget the future, ignore the imperfections of the world, and let go of injustice. It's a simple way to get positive and release negativity."

Space: "But a drink will do that. You don't have to get drunk."

Boston: "A drink? Right! I'm just getting started."

Space: "But after you've had more than a few your mind is so clean that there is nothing left to limit your excesses. That's when you and your friends get so wasted that you can't even remember what happened."

Boston: "What's wrong with that? Everyone should get drunk from time to time to gain perspective on the serious every day world."

Space: "That sounds like the rationale of a high class wino to me."

Boston: "Similar, but distinctly different. We both transcend the ordinary to experience the extraordinary. But the Wino consumes low quality alcohol - tastes like gasoline. I consume high quality wine and booze, which tastes heavenly. In fact intoxication heightens my sense of taste because it allows me to forget all my worries."

Space: "But what's the point if you can't even remember what happened - what you ate or drank?"

Boston: "Getting drunk creates friendship bonds - giving me and my friends an intimate connection with the Universe. In fact we look down upon the serious uptight middle class world of the bourgeois - working seriously, diligently, constantly - never

looking up to view the sunset - never laughing - always inside doing 'very important' things - and then gradually becoming bent and arthritic from working obsessively for so long. People cling so tightly to their sobriety, not realizing there is another reality out there, just waiting to be experienced. My best friends are those I get wasted with."

Space: "I might call these drunken orgies or alcoholic binges instead. Unfortunately you and your buddies usually pass quickly from a semi-enlightened state to a state of degenerated intoxication - only catching a quick glimpse of Reality, on your way down. You lose your Balance in the flaw of excess and are thrown out the Door - 86ed as it were - for causing a disturbance."

Boston: "Balance, who needs it? Too predictable. Definitely not for me. I love all the excitement and drama of getting wasted - the sheer chaos of drunkenness."

Space: "But Balance is the Key to maintaining Awareness. Besides look at what your late night partying is doing to your relationship."

Boston: "Who cares? It's on the rocks anyway. We got married too soon."

Space: "How about your son?"

Boston: "Ouch! But hey, I'm doing my best and you're being downer."

Space: "Sorry. I guess I'm being a bit judgmental. You guys are just following the path of the bhogi."

Clarence: "Bhogi?! What kind of path is that?"

Space: "Those who deny pleasure are called yogis. This is the path most spiritual masters follow. Those who pursue pleasure are called bhogis. This is also a spiritual path. We restaurant people are bhogis - cultivating our sensual pleasures rather than denying them. The challenge of the bhogi is to stop and change course when the pleasure stops. The yogi has it easy. He just sticks to denial. We bhogis must follow the Middle Way just like the Buddhists. In the pursuit of pleasure the Bhogi must be sensitive to habituation and excess, both of which take him into Oblivion away from his goal. This is not as easy as it sounds."

Clarence: "Whatever. This sounds like an incredible rationalization to me. I just like to get wasted with my friends while you're the more sober type. My way seems more fun."

Space: "For the time being perhaps. Just be aware when it's not so fun anymore - when getting wasted has lost its sparkle. Then it's time to move on. That's the challenge of the bhogi - to quit your pleasures before they become stale."

Sky: "Bogus - Bhogi - Boogie - Boo."

## Chapter 18: A Journey of Self Discovery

I made another interesting discovery in my 10th rewrite of Ma Belle's story - here in the future - 7 years after these incidents transpired. It had to do with one of those little questions that bat around the Brain for what seems forever, until they are resolved.

Cousin: "Who exactly is your audience?"

Me: "My audience?"

Cousin: "Who are you writing for? Initially amateur writers, like yourself, write for themselves - which is appropriate. Then, at a certain moment, for whatever reason, the writer decides he would like to share his writings with a greater audience. Evidently you've reached this point. Who are you trying to communicate to?"

Me: "I'm not sure. Diners? After all restaurants and chefs are 'in' right now."

Cousin: "That type is only interested in the salacious aspects of the business."

Me: "The scandals - the dirt?"

Cousin: "Exactly. Is that the kind of book you're writing?"

Me: "No. Not at all."

Cousin: "If you are to be published you must identify who you are writing for and write for them - rather than for yourself. That time is past."

Me: "How about Restaurant workers? There are millions of them. Studies have shown that half the people in the United States have worked in a restaurant at one time or another."

Cousin: "While there are millions of them, are they readers?"

Me: "I don't know, but some of my fellow restaurant workers, who are non-readers, have devoured my work - saying it changed their lives."

Cousin: "Because it was about them?"

Me: "Maybe, maybe not. Actually I would like to reach the general public. I thought that the present popularity of the restaurant business would be a good draw."

Cousin: "The average reader is much more interested in your dilemmas than in the restaurant business."

Me: "My personal dilemmas?"

Cousin: "Right. What they are and how you solve them. The average reader wants a story - not an instruction manual on the restaurant business - unless that's the audience you're trying to reach."

Me: "Aurgh!"

Cousin: "Remember this is a novel with an audience. And you must identify who that is. Good luck."

With all these unresolved issues pending Brain was in his element - generating theories as easily as Body breathes.

Brain: "Ah yes. We are writing our book to install pride in the lowly restaurant worker - who is so downtrodden by circumstances beyond his control - to inspire a sense of self esteem and empowerment from seeing our successful struggle against the Power structure."

Little Voice : "Uh ... Sorry to interrupt your flow but which restaurant workers are you talking about?"

Brain: "All of them, of course. This book is for everyone - from the truck stop waitresses to the busboys & cooks - those who populate restaurants all over the planet. The more the merrier."

Little Voice: "I don't mean to pop your bubble but isn't Ma Belle a Fine Dining

restaurant and doesn't your book focus upon this?"

Brain: "Ma Belle represents any restaurant anywhere. I'm sure the lessons could be extended to workers everywhere."

Little Voice: "Yet you immediately differentiate between Diners and those just having Dinner - of the importance of Beauty and Wine to the Experience. Let's get real - One of your early chapters is even called - The Experience of Fine Dining."

Brain: "Uh, well, um ... I still think it's written to inspire restaurant workers everywhere."

Little Voice: "Dishwashers, busboys, cooks and the like?"

Brain: "Yes er well, I guess."

Little Voice: "You really think that these restaurant workers are interested in the subtleties of Fine Dining and Wine?"

Brain: "Perhaps not. They probably aren't the type that reads that much."

Little Voice: "Certainly not your erudite masterpiece."

Brain: "How about literate waiters?"

Little Voice: "Who work in Fine Dining? That's a rather narrow audience."

Brain: "That doesn't matter. Financial gain is secondary to reaching the right readers. We're pure of ambition. I can just sense that this is who the book is written for - someone like ourselves."

Little Voice: "And who do you think you are?"

Brain: "Just the average waiter, of course."

Little Voice: "I see. Perhaps it's time for an investigation. Why don't you ask your fellow waiters how interested they are in your novel?"

With this in mind I began polling my fellow restaurant workers as to their reaction to my novel and its intent. These were a few of the responses.

"I don't need to read about restaurants. I'm here enough of the time - as it is."

"Have you seen the movie - Dinner Rush? It gave a good portrayal of what it is to work in a restaurant - the back biting & discouragement."

"You should read the book, **Kitchen Confidential**."

In other words there was virtually no interest from my fellow workers - and the ones I queried were the most promising.

Me: "Hmmm? Seems as if I'm not writing for restaurant people. It seems so obvious now that I think of it. I wonder why I didn't realize that sooner?"

Tierra, my wife: "For the same reason you didn't immediately apply for a job at Ma Belle."

Me: "Whadaya mean? I don't get the connection."

Tierra: "Taking after your father you tend to identify with the common man."

Me: "True - because of their purity of spirit - lack of ego - simplicity of lifestyle - not plagued by so many questions. Go on."

Tierra: "Exactly. They also don't possess the intellectual curiosity that it would take to read your book. You identify with them as a balance to your confused emotional state. However you are not one of them. You are an intellectual - whether you like it or not - on the outside looking in. As such your book is meant for intellectuals - not the common man, who doesn't even entertain these questions."

Me: "So what does this have to do with my job search?"

Tierra: "You've always resisted applying at upper end jobs because you somehow think that you're part of the working class, when you're actually part of the Artist Class. That's why we chose each other - Not because we're common. Quit pretending."

Stunned, my body was immersed in the tingling of realization.

Tierra: "There is nothing wrong with attempting to align yourself with the average guy - but you're not one of them - And that is certainly not who this book is for."

Me: "Whoa!?"

Tierra: "I mean what other waiter do you know who has written a restaurant trilogy, painted pictures and done some scientific research?"

Me: "Touché!"

I bowed down and gave thanks to the Universe for providing me this deep insight into my personality and my book through the unusual avenue of identifying my audience.

### **Another dead end**

However I still hadn't identified who I was writing for. A bit discouraged I began questioning my friends.

Brother: "As a wine drinker and diner, I find it fascinating & amusing that you would turn eating and drinking into a religious experience."

High School Teacher: "I read your earlier version and I really liked your section on the Sacred Nature of Wine - probably because we drink so much wine."

Professor of Eastern Religions: "Your idea of the path of sensuality is intriguing to me. I've followed it my whole life without realizing it was a path."

Then I began reflecting upon the myriad restaurant customers who had expressed interest in my book over the years I've been writing it. Suddenly it hit me, as things like this tend to do. This book has been written for sophisticated wine drinkers, who have an appreciation for Beauty. They tend to be better educated, wealthier, more well-traveled and healthier. In short they tend to be part of the intellectual elite - curious and mentally stimulated as well as involved in sensuality. As I remembered the topics from the trilogy, I realized that many of them were directed to this audience - the ability to appreciate beauty - the Glorification of Wine - and the Path of Pleasure associated with the Sensuality.

But about a half year later, while in the midst of my 11th rewrite I discovered that wine drinkers are primarily interested in the nuances of varietal, location, food pairings and descriptors and not much interested in self exploration.

"Ah yes. A bit of tobacco and cinnamon with a hint of burnt almond and chocolate. But heavily extracted with bold forward flavors. Definitely a Napa Cabernet. Certainly not Old World. Would go well with meat but would over power fish."

Was I fooling myself again with my Wine drinker audience? Probably so to Definitely.

### **In Charge?**

Discouraged again in my quest to discover who I'm writing for I entered another meditation. Sinking into the Void I began spontaneously chuckling as I realized that I was acting as if I was in charge. It struck me as quite humorous that I would try to take control of the project at this late date considering how little I have had to do with it. I've just been a leaf in the wind - Allowing my self to be blown hither and thither. And now I think I can control the wind.

I decided to look at the wind. What were my subliminal motivations? Initially I egotistically thought I was writing this book to subtly enlighten others from my high vantage point. Humbled by circumstances revealed herein I now realize that I was inadvertently led to write this book to understand my Self, who I am and who I'm not, and to explore the mystery of Being - the Paradox at the Heart of Existence.

To be honest I'm still not sure who I'm trying to reach, but the work is definitely an exploration into the subtleties of my Psyche. It seems that this internal quest has been sadly neglected in our materialist society. Perhaps the Universe motivated me to create this literary work to give the inner journey a voice - through the supposedly lowly restaurant industry - which is so common place. As such it might be helpful to others who are on a similar path. Perhaps I have been driven to write this to awaken a craving in my Readers - if there are any - to cultivate their own inner garden - to ignite a psychic bonfire. Or not. Only the Universe knows for sure.

Once again I'm amazed by my continual state of delusion. And once again I'm amazed at the convoluted route the Universe took to wake me up to what this work is really about or not, and who I really am, or who I'm not. Via Negativa.

## Chapter 19: Fine Dining – a full Body event

The Lewis and Clark team managed our Dining Room from the growing Spring, through the peaking Summer, into the falling business of Autumn, through our 6th Christmas season, into the Dead of Winter - Ugh! - and then into the growing Spring. Although there were many personal dramas that were constantly revolving and evolving, amongst Management, Staff and Guests, there was nothing that really concerned our history. Ma Belle was still queen of our world - with no real competitors to her position as the best restaurant in the Central Coast. Indeed to find a restaurant who was her equal one had to travel 100 miles south to Los Angeles or 350 miles north to San Francisco. And then you were in a Big City with all the chaos this entails.

But things were still not perfect, especially as far as Antoine was concerned. Although he had a well trained crew of Runners to do his bidding and a Management team which shared his Vision of Fine Dining, he still lacked Corporate's full support. Specifically Ted the GM, because of his penny pinching ways, was a serious obstruction to the fulfillment of his dreams. Although Ted, a numbers man, always got his bonus because of his expertise at cutting costs, he had little understanding of the aesthetics of Fine Dining.

Antoine: "I need some new plates for my Food."

Ted: "What's the matter with the old ones?"

Antoine, stunned by this lack of understanding was barely able to speak.

Ted: "Speak up. What's the matter with the old ones?"

Antoine, exploding like a volcano under pressure: "They're white. They're round. They're ugly!"

Ted: "Sorry there's no money in the budget. Got to keep within percentage to reach our projections." Winking at Antoine: "And make our bonuses."

Antoine's stomach turned and he walked out.

Ted, thinking to himself with his accountant mind: "Besides a plate is a plate anyway. The Food, Atmosphere, and Service are all that really matter. And they are all adequate to support my money making Hotel."

### **A need for fine crystal wine glasses?**

Another conflict had to do with the seemingly insignificant feature of glassware. Most of those who are drawn to our culinary art museum have a well developed sense of aesthetics. A well ordered external environment is essential for those with this innate craving for Beauty. Accompanying this comes the accessories - including lighting fixtures, candles, silverware, and most importantly glassware. As a transparent sculpture they project into 3 dimensions from the top of the table - sparkling and reflecting splashes of color into our Dining Room.

Acutely conscious of what was required for the consumption of wine Antoine was equally dismayed by what we didn't have. We didn't have fine crystal stemware for our vintage wines. What we had was high class commercial glassware - similar to the best from Sears and Roebuck - a middle class department store. And because of his highly developed sense of smell Antoine was all too aware that drinking wine out of inferior glasses dulled the sensation as much as viewing our beautiful seascape out of tinted or dirty windows.

Indeed one of our Regulars, a world traveler who loved Antoine's multiple course tasting Menus paired with his vintage wines, would regularly bring in his own glassware to enhance the flavor of his wine because Ted wasn't enlightened enough to

have this elegant stemware available. This was especially disturbing to Antoine.

Antoine: "We need some crystal wine glasses for our wine. My Guests are bringing in their own. It's embarrassing."

Ted: "Too expensive. No one can tell the difference anyway. It's just a glass. The quality of the wine is all that really matters."

Antoine to himself "Peasant! What an idiot!"

These were just a few of the objections that Ted routinely raised to deny the purchase of these aesthetic accessories. This ignorant attitude was incredibly aggravating to Antoine.

He was acutely aware that Fine Dining is all about how to make the most out of the flavor experience. It is impossible to maximize this sensual event without the proper vessels for the consumption of Wine, the liquid Star of the evening. Dining without Wine is like seeing a play acted by stand-ins. And drinking Wine without the proper stemware is like having a seat which is too far away from the stage - expressions, emotions and sound are all muted. So to maximize this liquid taste experience Crystal wine glasses are used - Bormioli, Spiegeleau, or Ridell, if you demand the best.

Crystal is better than glass for wine. Although seemingly identical in appearance, on microscopic levels glass is smooth, while crystal is textured. The crystalline structure creates minuscule ridges which aerate the wine naturally as it passes over this ribbed surface. Thinner crystal is better than thicker crystal because the ribbing is finer. Besides providing a better aeration for the wine, exceptionally thin crystal allows the flavor molecules to flow easily onto the tongue.

Further these glasses are scientifically engineered to augment the individual tastes of the different varietals. A different shaped glass is used for each varietal - tall narrow glasses for the Bordeaux varietals - Cabernet, Merlot, and the like, with their intensely concentrated aromatics - and bulbous chubby glasses to collect the fragrances of the subtle Pinot Noir grape to maximize the flavor.

As a partial excuse for Ted's ignorance we in California were late bloomers in terms of the use of elegant glassware for our wine. It wasn't until the mid to late 1990s that the fine crystal became widespread in restaurants which served fine wines. Even then this innovation didn't evolve naturally or easily. The Ridell salesman had to put on a high pressure sales pitch, complete with a glass tasting, to convince the Mondavis, an influential and prestigious California wine family, that the fine crystal made a huge difference in the taste of the wine. It was only after this push that fine crystal glassware was adopted by all the top restaurants, including Ma Belle.

Of course those dominated by Brain, like Ted, have a hard time understanding the importance of these subtle differences to the ultimate sensual experience that we provide - as the following conversation illustrates.

**Body to Mind: "Please take me out to Dine."**

Brain of the Uninitiated: "Why the need for all these superfluous extras - like crystal glassware, linen tablecloths, and silverware. They just add to the price of the meal. They are certainly secondary to nourishment which is what eating is all about. Right?"

Body: "Wrong. This practical attitude is just one of your many aberrations, Brain. I love all these extras. They stimulate my multitude of senses."

Brain: "Yeah right. All this fancy stuff is just for show. I consider it pretentious. It has mistaken the form of Dining for the function of Dinner which is just sustenance. As



far as I'm concerned everyone is making a big deal over nothing."

Body: "Your rationality is incredibly aggravating. It regularly dulls my ability to have a good time."

Brain: "I can't help it if I'm so smart."

Body: "Intellectually smart. Good at deductive logic and linear cause-effect reasoning. But incredibly ignorant when it comes to understanding the larger picture."

Brain: "Me? No way. I'm brilliant in all ways."

Body: "Wrong again. Your propaganda, based as it is in your limited perspective and supported by a culture ruled by you and your kind, has allowed you to dominate the multitudes of People. In charge you have imprisoned my sensuality in your mental boxes for far too long. I love it when all of my receptors get some stimulation. Unfortunately due to your line based conception of Existence they have been kept asleep for what seems forever. I yell out - 'Freedom!' to any who can hear me. I'm sick and tired of your domination and refuse to take it anymore."

Brain: "But honey I'm here to serve you. It's just that I know what's best for us both because I'm so logical."

Body: "Hardly. You regularly neglect my needs in your obsession with practicality and logic. I appeal to Mind for parity."

Mind: "OK. I agree to hear your case. But instead of all this verbal abuse how about giving me some concrete examples of your neglected needs."

Body: "On the basic level I crave Beauty. This is why I love a visually attractive dining room like Ma Belle. She makes my eyes so very happy."

Brain: "But her food is so expensive. We are just there to nourish you. We would be better off saving that money for an unexpected illness, college education for our kids, and retirement. The frivolities of Dining are just a waste of time and money."

Body: "Beauty a frivolity? You're just exhibiting your limited understanding."

Brain: "I'm just more practical than you are. I'm continually thinking of our future security - so we can live a long life together."

Body: "Listen mister smartie pants. If you take care of all of me now, then I won't have an unexpected illness later. I'll be so happy that my immune system will be able to fight off disease. Your practicality is paralyzing me. Your serious diseases will invade my system with their toxic acids - leading to my untimely demise. I will become one of your self fulfilling prophesies."

Mind: "Body is making some good points."

Brain: "OK fine. Her eyes need Beauty. We can go to an Art Museum. They're not as expensive. That way we can save ourselves some money rather than spending our hard earned money on over priced food."

Mind: "Your eyes would be happy and we could save some money. That sounds like a good idea."

Body: "My eyes need Beauty, but my tongue needs some interesting and subtle tastes, my nose is craving some stimulation after all the sterile environments you put me in, and my fingers are dying to touch something more refined than the plastics you've surrounded me with."

Brain: "But what about security?"

Mind: "Yeah. What about security?"

Body: "We've been through this before. Mortgaging the Present for an uncertain Future is rarely a good idea. Plus the Wine will tranquilize Brain for the Evening so that he doesn't get so carried away with his dismal projections of the Future which continually disturb my Organs. All these elements are found in Fine Dining - a feast

for my senses. Nowhere else can you satisfy all of me at once."

Mind: "Sounds like a bargain when you put it that way."

Body: "Oh it is. The best investment you'll ever make. And I'll love you deeply for it. No more of my tension headaches, stress related backaches, or upset stomachs that I've been using to get your attention. We'll all be so much happier. Plus Brain will be refreshed from this vacation. And when he is well rested he'll be able to use his great problem solving ability much more effectively. How about it?"

Mind: "Well all right."

Body: "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you! You'll never regret it. I'll make you so happy. I can't wait."

### **A Sensual Wonderland**

Body: "My Eyes are the first to encounter the aesthetics of the Fine Dining."

Eyes: "Ahh! A well ordered and symmetric Dining Room with everything aligned. I just love the sparkle and refined shapes of the elegant table setting. This satisfies my innate sense of Harmony and Balance. How refreshing after the industrial world of telephone wires, gas stations, neon signs and freeways that I'm always in."

Body: "And then my Hand grips the crisply folded linen napkins."

Fingers of the Hand: "Ahh! The soft delicacy of the cloth fiber! What a relief after all the paper I've been shuffling all day. Ummm! And the cool balance of the real silverware! What a delight compared with the plastic computer buttons I've been pressing for hours. Oooo! And now the crystal glassware! Yum! Especially after all those Styrofoam cups I've been drinking my coffee from at work. I relish the fine balance of the technologically engineered stemware."

Body: "I love making my hands happy. My tactile sense is located in my skin, the blanket of plasma which encloses my bones, veins, muscles and organs. But my Hand with its fingers is the primary way that I reach out to touch the external world. The fingers including the thumb have the most sensing neurons per square millimeter of any place on my Skin. Of course this imparts the ability to feel pain as well as pleasure, but that's not what we're about right now. We're talking about the necessity of cloth napkins, silverware, not stainless steel, and above all nice glassware."

Brain: "I still think we shouldn't waste our money on this frivolous expense."

Body: "Shut up! You're distracting me. Now my entire torso begins to revolve in harmony with Hand as he swirls the liquid ambrosia in the crystal glass - hoping to awaken the subtle fragrances of a fine Pinot Noir. And now my ocular lobes are called into play again."

Eyes: "Whoa! Spirals mixed with concentric circles reflecting from the delicate shapes of the crystal."

Body: "Unencumbered by the labeling of Brain's words, Mind sinks into the Vortex. But he nearly gets lost in the psychedelic patterns created by the marriage of wine and glass - the colors refracting in and out depending upon the light from the background. Blinking to snap out of the trance my same visionary organs examine the color of the wine for richness and depth."

Eyes: "Amazingly rich color with rust overtones. I feel I can even see the tannins that have been extracted from the grape skins."

Tongue: "I can't wait to taste those rich flavors."

Body: "Not yet. First it's Nose's turn. He needs to prepare the ground."

Tongue: "Darn. I'm getting very impatient."

Body: "Well you will just have to wait. It's still premature. It's not your turn to enter my

stage quite yet. Now that we have allowed Eyes to feast upon the luscious color of the liquid of the gods, we will thrust Nose into the enormous opening of the delicate crystal glass - which have been collecting the freed aromatics. With the most sensors of my taste complex he will be able to luxuriate in the sensuous bouquet of this amazing liquid, simultaneously analyzing it for complexity, brightness and character."

Nose: "Heaven!! After so much gasoline, concrete and industrial pollution it's a real joy to get lost in the complexity of fragrances essential to a fine wine. Thank you so much. You're making me so very happy."

Tongue: "Me next!"

Body: "Patience sweet heart. Your Time is at hand. The Blood of Vegetation is coming. But first the fine glassware is lifted up to Lips."

Lips: "Oooo! What a relief after being so isolated up here all by myself. The delicacy and refinement are overwhelming."

Tongue: "My turn at last! Ahh! First onto the front of my palette, then mid palette. And what a marvelous lingering aftertaste. Ecstasy!"

Body: "OK everyone, let's sense everything simultaneously to give Mind a real treat. Get ready as our Experience creates kaleidoscopic sparks as it translates through the fingertips into the tongue, and as the bouquet from the nose collides with the sensations from the taste buds as well as the visuals from the eyes."

Mind: "Wowee!! Indescribable, especially now that Brain is not cluttering me with all his multitude of Ideas. I'm sinking deep into the hidden dimension of the Vortex created by the synergy of taste, smell, touch and sight. The Mystery Emerges from the particular to leave me in Awe before the Magnificence of Being."

Body: "To send this Experience over the top, let's take a bite of the exotic delicacy that was just placed before us."

Eyes: "It's the Porcupine Shrimp - a medium sized prawn which has been wrapped in katafi - shredded philo dough - and flash fried to frizz its hair. I just love the appearance. It's so wild!"

Mouth: "Wowee! First the creamy viscosity of the wine and now the crunch and crispiness of the food. Overwhelming!"

Body: "How about that Mind?"

Mind: "I'm speechless with amazement."

Body: "Let's consummate this marriage of my five senses by listening to the soft background music."

Ears: "Thanks for including me. What a welcome relief from the piped in elevator music that I've been hearing 8 hours a day 5 days a week at work."

Body: "This synergy of all the different ways that I can sense something is of course augmented by the intoxication of the wine, which tranquilizes Brain - who has been on overdrive all week. Still revving at a high speed he's finally able to slow down at last and give me some peace. My senses, heightened by their imprisonment in solitary - burst out ecstatically - sending feelings of joy. What do you say to that Mind? Now aren't you glad you followed my advice instead of Brain's."

Mind: "Eternally grateful! In the midst of Brain's constant babble I had forgotten how incredible a sensual experience could be. Certainly a welcome balance to the seriousness of our week."

As you can see Body loves our Fine Dining Experience. It's the only art form to engage all her senses combined with the augmenting influence of intoxication. Music

satisfies her ears and Painting her eyes. Literature is for Brain's imagination. Movies combine eyes, imagination, and sound. But these higher art forms never engage either taste and smell, the most primal senses. Fine Dining is the only art form that exists to employ all of Body's 5 senses in this aesthetic banquet.

So all of you Humans out there give your Mind and Body an exquisite treat by taking your Person out to Dine. Body's senses will be satisfied and Mind will be able to enter the other worldly Vortex, the opening into Eternity.

## Chapter 20: A Harmonic Convergence

### Francis Le Roi, speaks up on our behalf

Appalled by Ted's lack of Vision Antoine gave Francis a call. He immediately understood. Genius that he was Francis decided to solve two problems with one stroke. As well as desiring the best for us, he also wanted to ride the wave of prosperity that was sweeping the late 90s. Francis spoke to Corporate on our behalf - cleverly using his Corporate lingo to persuade him.

Francis: "Bon jour."

Corporate: "Greetings. What's up?"

Francis: "I have an idea you might be interested in."

Corporate: "What's that?"

Francis: "You could maximize your Profits if you helped Ma Belle rise to her full potentials."

Corporate: "What do you mean?"

Francis: "Spend some money to upgrade her. This will increase her Status. Money and People are attracted to Status. Then even more People will spend more Money increasing Profits for you."

Corporate: "Hmmm? Increased profits. Sounds like a good idea."

Francis: "I only think about your welfare, dear. It would also express your love for Ma Belle. It would make her so happy."

Corporate: "Brilliant. Spend money on Ma Belle making her even more beautiful. This makes her happy. Her spectacular good looks will attract more business, increasing my profits. This will make me happy. You're a genius."

Francis: "And one more thing. Ted must be replaced. He's just a bean counter with no vision. He has no appreciation of Art. We need a GM who has a greater appreciation of Dining."

Corporate: "But he's been such a obedient employee - so good with his numbers."

Francis: "Too good. He's strangling Ma Belle's potentials, which limits your beloved Profits."

Corporate: "Whadaya mean?"

Francis: "You need to spend money to make money. Ted's so obsessed with his pennies that he is overlooking your dollars."

Corporate: "You think so?"

Francis: "No doubt."

Corporate: "We need to replace him?"

Francis: "Definitely. With someone who has an understanding of the elegance of Fine Dining. Your investment will be transformed into enormous profits."

Corporate: "Well all right. If you think so."

Francis: "This move will certainly be well worth your while."

### Upgrade Heaven!

Due to Francis' persuasive powers Corporate initiated plans to transform our establishment at the beginning of our 7th year. Number one on the upgrade list: Ted, the Hotel General Manager. Out with the old and in with the new.

With the rapid and unexpected demise of Ted - Susan, the new GM, immediately called a meeting to introduce herself and her plans to the Staff.

Susan: "I have been hired to upgrade the atmosphere of Ma Belle. I just came from managing a small high class resort in the Caribbean which catered to movie stars. A

famous actress was there just recently, spending \$6000 for the weekend - just on lodging. I have a vision for Ma Belle, which includes silver flatware, show plates, crystal wine glasses, and an expanded wine list. But it will take time. In the meantime we'll have to make short term sacrifices for the long term good."

We didn't exactly know what she meant, but we were certainly willing to cooperate. We were proud and happy that our Dining Experience was going to be improved.

Ma Belle: "And I was ecstatic. Father was finally giving me us the attention that I craved and felt I deserved. Although Corporate seemed to only love me for my potential to generate income, at least Francis, my Mother, loved me for myself."

Of course Antoine was overjoyed when Susan replaced Ted. It took her refinement to appreciate the difference and pay the price for these essential accessories to Fine Dining - even if it did break Corporate's budget. As a matter of note the sacrifices Susan had mentioned had to do with bonuses for the managers, including Antoine. To Ted's financial credit, there was never to be another bonus after he left. But Antoine didn't care about Money; he only cared about his Art.

And Susan cared about his Art. Shortly after her appearance on our scene many accessories arrived, which Ted would have dismissed as unnecessary luxuries: plates with unusual shapes and colors to frame Antoine's masterpieces, silver flatware, autumn yellow show plates to integrate the appearance of our Dining Room, and crystal glassware to more fully appreciate the Divine Liquid which was at the heart of our Experience. Antoine was transported into culinary ecstasy as these supposed luxuries began appearing in our Dining Room.

Corporate Support was Step Three to Antoine Heaven. Unaware of what was coming next Chef Antoine was especially happy at this point. He finally had a General Manager, Susan, who respected the aesthetics of food and was willing to spend money on upgrading our atmosphere. Further he had a competent management team, Lewis and Clark, who supported him and were committed to fine Service. Finally Antoine had trained and cultivated a great crew of Runners and Expeditors, who had achieved the level of Service that he required - presenting his incredible food stylishly to our Guests. At this transitory point Life was good. Little did we know that many of these gains would evaporate like clouds before the wind.

But for the time being we were in Restaurant Heaven. This was our Golden Age. However, as always, Abundance precedes the Fall, just like youth precedes old age. The Wheel of Fortune was revolving. We were on top. However whatever goes up must come down.

But no need to moan about what was to come. During this relatively brief period we had a majority of contented Guests, who told their friends. We had a slim minority of unhappy Guests, who were dissatisfied with their experience and told 10 times as many friends. But these were still minuscule compared to the harmony that we spread by providing an opportunity for the Experience, at any level. And our reputation was growing - nationally - increasing our Status - for those who cared.

If we could have just stayed in this period of growth and refinement we could have lived 'happily ever after'. Right. But then we would have no story. The tension of change and the transitory nature of existence is what inspires us to transcend ourselves. Without dramatic tension there is no potential for the heroics of change. This point of unstable equilibrium is the top of the slide. From here we begin the slide down into the tension and conflict, growth and transformation, which is the heart of our little drama.

We've given the background information - laid the foundation. Let the descent into Chaos begin.

## Chapter 21: With every Blessing Comes a Curse

### Every Hotel needs a F&B?

In addition to wanting to upgrade our accessories, Susan wanted to upgrade our management structure. Having worked at some fancy Caribbean resorts she had become accustomed to many levels of management. This included a Food and Beverage Manager, F&B in Corporate lingo.

Usually only the GM of the Hotel has more authority than the F&B in the Corporate hierarchy. In the last resort Susan managed before coming to the Coastal Inn, she had her own F&B. He had been indispensable - acting as her right hand man. In fact she had never worked in a resort without a F&B. This position simplifies things for the GM because all food and beverage related issues, including staffing and ordering, are funneled through the F&B before reaching the GM. The F&B acts as a filter for all problems associated with the restaurant, catering, room service and the bar. This allows the GM to work on 'more important' things, i.e. hotel business.

Upon arrival Susan posed this question: "Who's the F&B of the Coastal Inn?" Ironically this simple comment was to have long term ramifications for me.

Lewis: "We don't have an F&B."

Susan: "That's surprising. I think this hotel could use a good F&B to coordinate all the food related departments."

Lewis: "The Coastal Inn doesn't need a F&B. It is only a small hotel, a little over 70 rooms, which includes a fancy restaurant. In a large resort, perhaps 200 rooms or more, there are many different and distinct departments to deal with: multiple restaurants, catering, room service for the hotel guests, and possibly a bar. To coordinate all of these various food and beverage related departments a F&B is definitely needed. However at the Coastal Inn, the Room Service, Bar, Dining Room, and Catering are not separate departments. They all use the same employees working out of the same small kitchen. We don't have enough going on to justify another layer of management. The Coastal Inn is just too small for a F&B."

Much later on, when Lewis least expected it, he was to find out how right he was - the hard way.

### And every Restaurant needs a Sommelier?

Susan's Vision also included a Wine Steward, called a Sommelier by the French and by those in the know. In typical French fashion the 'o' in Sommelier is long, the first 'e' is pronounced like a short 'i', the 'i' is pronounced 'eee', the second 'e' is pronounced roughly like a long 'a', and the final 'r' is silent. Sommelier rhymes with 'Cartier', the French designer. It does not rhyme with 'familiar'.

Susan: "Who is your Sommelier?"

Lewis: "We don't have one."

Susan: "Why not?"

Lewis: "Business does not really warrant a Sommelier. Our Wine List is not that big."

Susan: "Who sells the wine?"

Lewis: "The Waiters sell their own wine."

Susan: "Don't you think we could use a Sommelier to increase sales?"

Lewis: "Not really. Clark and I serve that function."

These were not the answers Susan wanted to hear.

**"I need someone who says 'Yes'."**

When Susan was hired Lewis and Clark were already working as the restaurant managers. They also coordinated the relatively small number of banquets and catering events, as well as room service. Ted, the previous GM, was too practical or too cheap to add another layer of management. That would cut into his percentages and his bonuses.

On the other hand Susan had her mind set upon forcing her conception of resort reality upon the Coastal Inn. Although the Lewis and Clark were the best managers we had ever had, they were not Susan's men. She had not hired them. They were not subservient enough.

Susan: "Hmmm. I had been considering offering Lewis the F&B position, but he said it was unnecessary. I suggested hiring a Sommelier. He said Ma Belle didn't really need one. I certainly won't honor him by offering him the position as the first F&B of the Coastal Inn. He has too many of his own thoughts. Far too unpredictable. I much prefer the docile hotel people, who say 'Yes Ma'am'. Those restaurant people are far too independent. They need to be tamed. I need to hire my own F&B who will be subservient to me. I want to hear, 'Yes, Susan. We can make your Plan work.' Lewis is far too free spirited to say 'Yes, Susan'."

Shortly thereafter Susan began advertising for a F&B for our small hotel. Trapped in a mental habit pattern, she didn't look at the reality of the Coastal Inn. Instead she decided to remake the Coastal Inn into her vision of a resort. Instead of working with the propensities of the situation she was trying to take control. Instead of aligning herself with the Universe, Susan exerted personal force, which was thrown back at her.

Once Lewis discovered that Susan was advertising for a F&B who would be his boss, he found a new job and gave notice. Unfortunately this happened right in the middle of the high season of Summer. His partner Clark took over.

Clark: "I see you are advertising for a Food and Beverage Manager. I would like to apply for the job."

Susan: "Sorry. You're doing a great job as Restaurant Manager, but you're not exactly what I'm looking for in a F&B."

Clark: "Why?"

Susan: "You're too much of a Restaurant person. You're not Corporate enough."

Clark: "What do you mean by that?"

Susan: "You continually stand up for Ma Belle and the Staff instead of bowing to Corporate."

Clark: "This is bad?"

Susan: "Definitely. A F&B is Corporate, not Restaurant. That's why I need a F&B."

Clark ran all of our operations by himself for the rest of the Summer, through the Fall into the Christmas season. After many excruciating battles with Susan, pitting us against Corporate, Clark also gave a one month notice.

Ma Belle: "This made me sad. He was certainly one of my favorites. Besides upgrading my Service, he defended me from Corporate's penny pinchers. However my sentiments weren't shared by most of the Waiters, who were only thinking of their own self interest.

**We're there for her**

True. Even though I knew that Clark was good for Ma Belle I was happy that he was leaving because he had always treated me and my fellow waiters so poorly. But I guess you can't blame him for being so unfair to us - after what his father did to him. His father wanted him to play football and he wanted to be a ballet dancer. And it



degenerated from there. But I certainly didn't appreciate it when he gave his women priority over me. Yet I learned a lot. And so did he. I'll never forget his last Christmas season. What a great learning experience he had, especially because he had always favored his ladies at the expense of us men - namely me, Sky, Boston and Angel. This is what happened.

Dee, the one that reminded Clark of his sister: "I always take Christmas off to see my family in Delaware."

Karen: "If Dee's taking Christmas off then so am I. I'm going home to visit my parents in Maryland."

Jane: "If they're taking off then I am too. Why should they be able to and me not? I'll go visit my mother in LA."

Clark: "But we need someone to work."

Dee: "Sorry, not me. Already gotten my plane tickets."

Karen: "Me, too."

Jane: "Already made plans."

Clark: "What am I going to do? We need to cooperate."

Karen and Jane: "Dee got to go last year. It's our turn."

Dee: "It's a family tradition."

Karen and Jane: "Ours too."

Clark: "But who's going to work?"

Jane, Karen, and Dee: "I don't know, but not me."

Back against the wall, Clark had to appeal to the men.

Boston: "I would like to be with my wife and child. But a little money would be nice."

Angel: "I had hoped to spend time with my two little girls, but I'll work if you need me."

Sky: "You never schedule me as a Waiter. I already made plans to be with my family on their ranch - a big reunion. But if you need me, I'll be there for you."

Space: "I guess my family can do without me. We'll just have it on a different day. We always do anyway."

Clark: "I'm overwhelmed. After how I treated you, and then you guys still back me up. I'm grateful. Thank you."

Angel: "No problem. I'm only doing what's right for Ma Belle."

Sky: "Even though we've had our differences, I know you've always put the restaurant first. I appreciate that."

Boston: "Money motivates."

Space: "Anything for Ma Belle. No grudges. Life's too short to taint it with bitterness."

This was one of the first times, but certainly not the last, that we came through for Ma Belle. Letting go of our personal lives, we were there to serve her, as we were to do time and again in the years to come. We had just begun thinking of her as more than just another restaurant.

At Clark's good-bye party arranged by his *women* at a local bar:

Clark: "Space? What a surprise. I didn't expect you to be here."

Space: "I came to express my thanks for all the lessons that you taught me."

Clark: "I learned a lot from you too."

Space: "Despite our obvious difficulties, I'm sorry you're leaving."

Clark: "Really?"

Space: "Of course. You've always had Ma Belle's best interests at heart." Lifting his cup:  
"Here's to your new endeavors. May they all end up better than expected."

Clark: "And a toast to all of you at Ma Belle. May your business always be good."

I was exceedingly pleased that we were able to part ways on a positive note despite our prior conflicts. Rather than bitterness I was left with a pleasant after taste from our interactions.

### **The Beginning of the Fall**

Clark was leaving, but Susan still hadn't been able to fill her new F&B position. She had however filled the position of Sommelier. Boston the Waiter had been 'promoted' to fill this spot just before Christmas. In consideration for his elevated status Boston became Clarence again. He was an erratic waiter due to heavy drinking and lack of respect for small spenders, which led to a continuous string of complaints about his service. However he was a great salesman and had an incredible aptitude for wine. It was a natural progression to take him away from the Tables and put him in charge of the Wine. This was to have momentous repercussions.

Susan had begun looking in plenty of time for a F&B, but the pickings were slim. Either the applicants weren't acceptable to her - or the job and pay weren't acceptable to them. For those who were most qualified the pay wasn't good enough and when the pay was satisfactory, the applicant wasn't. With Clark giving notice, she was in the desperate position of having no managers. She had dug her own grave.

Desperate, she finally made her choices with great reluctance. For the newly created job of Food and Beverage Manager, she chose Manager Number 13, a pot-bellied tired man, nearing retirement, who's main experience was drinking and managing in bars and restaurants - that he had owned - none of which had come close to our level of Fine Dining. He lasted less than a month - did not have the right appearance or motivation for Susan's Vision.

For the Restaurant Manager, beneath the F&B in the Corporate hierarchy, she initially chose Silas, a well dressed ex-hippie, whose brain did not operate that efficiently - possibly fried by too many drugs - maybe speed. He could not retain information beyond a few minutes His favorite phrase was "I'll get right on that!". This meant that he had probably already forgotten whatever it was that he was supposed to do. He might have been in the initial stages of Alzheimer's because he would routinely punch walls to express his frustration with his mental powers. Silas muddled on, and was promoted to the position of F&B. He became Number 14, when Number 13 was let go.

Although we never had a Breakfast Manager in all of our years, this position was also part of Susan's vision. Denise, a breakfast waitress from the Midwest, was hired to fill this spot. With no understanding of quality service, she immediately had problems with the Guests and the Staff, who complained about her lack of class, which included hitting on the daytime Bartender by patting and pinching his ass. These were Susan's disastrous hires of January - all of whom were properly subservient but none of whom were competent.

### **Résumés can be deceiving**

Susan could easily see that Silas, although good looking, was inadequate as a Restaurant Manager because his short term memory was shot. She promoted him 'upstairs' into the office to get him out of harm's way. Susan now needed to replace the vacant Restaurant Manager position. She looked back at her applicants.

“Here is one,” she thought. “Luigi - Hmmm - Résumé looks good - Why didn’t I hire him? - Oh yeah - Remember now - He dressed so terribly - Hurt my eyes - But résumé is good - Can work with clothes - Seems like something else - Oh yeah - Will probably have a hard time working with him - Seemed so stubborn - Set in his ways - Would’ve loved to hire a woman - But I already hired Denise for Breakfast Manager - She’s already had complaints from Guests and Staff - Can’t promote her - At least Luigi’s résumé is good - Will give him a chance.”

Enter Luigi, soon to become our living nightmare.

## Chapter 22: The Wheel of Fortune revolves

Luigi was hired in the growing business cycle of Spring, a great relief for the Waiters, who were tired of covering for the incompetents that Corporate called Managers. Initially everything went smoothly. He was fit and healthy looking, unlike Susan's first F&B, who was pear shaped. Further he seemed to be relatively alert, unlike Silas, the replacement F&B.

After the normal salutations:

Me: "I'm excited to have you on board." To myself: "Especially after those Bozos that Susan hired."

Luigi: "I'm excited to be here, too. I have worked around the world as a Wine Steward - both in London and Los Angeles. But I'm ready to take on the responsibilities of leadership."

Me: "What brings you here?"

Luigi: "Santa Barbara seems like a great place to raise kids. My wife is pregnant - I've sowed my wild oats - and I'm enthusiastic to settle down in this beautiful coastal city with my new family to be."

To myself: "Perfect. He's a family man like me. I'm sure we'll get along just fine. I can tell already that he'll treat me much better than Clark, the father hater, ever did. The Universe is finally rewarding me for my detachments." Out loud: "You saw the job opening and applied just recently?"

Luigi: "Actually I applied for the F&B position when it was first advertised last fall. For some reason Susan didn't want to hire me. I've been working as a waiter in a local restaurant in the meantime. But I'm real tired of that. I'm ready to be in charge."

Me: "With your qualifications, I'm surprised you weren't the first choice for the position. With your job experience you appear to be perfect for the job."

However, looks can be deceiving, as we were to find out.

### **Breakfast more important than Dinner?**

Who was in the way of Luigi becoming F&B? Only Silas, who wasn't able to remember things for very long. Silas wasn't attached to being the F&B. He just wanted a job - and to get along with everyone. A cooperative, gentle and kind man, he wanted everyone to like him. To this end he tried his best to make the Staff happy when he wrote the weekly Schedule. Although Silas was popular with the Staff because everyone got the schedule they wanted, our Guests weren't happy because there was not enough Staff on to cover the less desirable shifts.

Those shifts were the breakfast shifts. Arising early, to work for less money in a much less glamorous atmosphere, wasn't that appealing. However, Breakfasts were just as important to Corporate as Dinner, if not more so - much to the chagrin of the Dinner Staff.

Sky: "Why do we even stay open for Breakfast? Breakfast business is terrible."

Clarence: "And the labor costs must be astronomical. I used to work Breakfasts. There is a lot of staff on just to serve a few guests and provide Room Service for the Hotel."

Me: "Hmmm? Costs are high. Revenue low. Nobody wants to work those early morning shifts. Why not close down for Breakfast? Seems like a slam dunk, to me."

Brilliant idea. If Ma Belle had been an independent restaurant, her owners would have shut down for Breakfast in an instant. Unfortunately she was there, first and

foremost, to serve as an amenity to the Hotel. On the most basic level this meant providing their Guests with nourishment while they were in town. Further as a first class restaurant, she was intended to upgrade the Hotel. Her existence simultaneously attracted more Guests to the Hotel and allowed Corporate to charge more for his rooms. As mentioned low profit margin restaurants are not the business of Corporate, except as an adjunct to his high profit margin hotels. It took us awhile to realize that the grand and glorious Ma Belle was secondary to the Hotel in Corporate's Profit oriented Mind. Thus Breakfast for the high paying hotel guests was of an equal, if not greater, importance to the Fine Dining of the evening - at least for the Money Masters that directed our operations.

Silas' fatal flaw at this point was elevating employee happiness above guest satisfaction. He serviced the Staff at the expense of the Guest. A major 'No! No!'. Although employee happiness is important, it is nothing compared to guest satisfaction. Specifically, the breakfast shifts were regularly understaffed because Silas couldn't find anyone who wanted to work them. This does not sit well with the Hotel Guest.

### **The cup of coffee disaster**

To understand the situation let's imagine yourself as one of our Hotel Guests. You've paid a good price for your room - Have stayed out late - Maybe had a little too much to drink. You're anticipating the delicious flavors of your morning cup of coffee in the beautiful Ma Belle Dining Room - overlooking the boardwalk with a view of the Channel Islands beyond. As you enter our temple the sun is rising on your left - ricocheting sparkles off the ocean's surface. As your eyes soak in the panorama created by 180 degrees of picture windows, you think 'Life is good.' You can't wait to get your cup of coffee to settle your stomach and focus your mind. You know it will be good because this is Ma Belle - with a national reputation. Awed by her beauty you settle into a feeling of well being - You've played hard all weekend to justify all your hard work. - You're ready to be pampered - especially at the prices you're paying - It's not cheap - Well what else would you expect, from an ocean front hotel in such a beautiful little city. You're seated - You're ready - You're waiting - And waiting - and waiting - and waiting for your Server to arrive.

At first you were patient and tolerant - "Well things are a little slower, more laid back in these smaller beach cities," you tell yourself. "I'll try and relax."

But still no coffee and you're starting to get mad.

To yourself: "It really has been far too long for my cup of coffee. I'm going crazy and can't help myself. My expectations have not been met and I am extremely unhappy.

Instead of releasing tensions this has aggravated them. I can feel my blood pressure rising. I can't help myself."

Aloud: "I want to speak to the Manager - I am very unhappy - my whole weekend has been ruined because I couldn't get a cup of coffee in a timely fashion I was coming to Santa Barbara to detoxify from the stresses of my weekly life - Now I am extremely agitated and can't settle down."

Finally the Manager comes over. Now you'll get relief at last.

"I've been sitting for over a half an hour and no one has been here to greet me and bring me my needed coffee."

"I'll get right on that."

"That's not the point. Where's your staff?"

"I couldn't find anyone who wanted to work on Sunday morning."

"What do you mean you couldn't find anyone who wanted to work?"

You're furious now. "I want to talk to the GM of the Hotel or better yet write him a letter. I'm expecting some kind of compensation, rate reduction or refund because I'm so mad and my blood pressure is rising - just because I couldn't get my coffee because there was no one to serve it."

This is why Breakfasts are more important for Corporate than Dinner.

#### **A Reluctant Decision**

With a rising number of complaints like these Silas' incompetence was beginning to show. It was obvious to all concerned that Luigi was on the way up the Wheel of Fortune and that Silas was on the way down.

Susan to herself: "Hmmm? Silas keeps getting me in trouble with Corporate because he is not firm enough with his scheduling. He doesn't seem to understand that Guest satisfaction is more important than Employee happiness. He also has a severe short term memory problem, which limits his ability to function as manager. But I can't terminate him - That'll look bad - Already fired my first F&B - My second fired after less than 4 months? - Not good - Corporate will not be pleased. Besides, at least Silas dresses well - Luigi's clothes still hurt my eyes - Must have worn uniforms at his other jobs.

I know - I'll just marginalize Silas by reducing his duties until he quits. Then I won't look so bad in Corporate's eyes. I've already taken him off the high volume Dinner shift. But who is going to write the Schedule? Certainly not Clarence. Besides being too close to the Staff, he is far too disorganized and chaotic. Luigi is the logical choice, but he is so hard to get along with - so obstinate - seems to have his own agenda. But, at least he is firmer with the Staff than the rest of my managers and they seem to respect him. I guess I'll put Luigi in charge of the Schedule."

"Finally," Luigi thought to himself. "At last I can make my mark. F&B, here I come!"

#### **The Force is agitated**

With Silas' fall from grace, Luigi and Clarence became our Management Team. For some reason Ma Belle shuddered involuntarily the day the decision was made.

Guest: "Waiter was that an Earthquake that I just felt."

Sky: "I don't think so. The building does that from time to time."

And my meditation was agitated: "Feels like a disturbance in the Force. There must be some kind of psychic storm brewing. Better be prepared. I'll sink a little lower, maybe it'll go right over.

Brain: "I certainly hope we don't have to get involved. After all we are so evolved that we have begun detaching from the material plane of the restaurant. We are so wise that we are pursuing *wu-wei*, the Taoist state of 'non-action'."

Universe: "To protect Space from living Brain had created an elaborate fantasy world. I set this drama up, in part, to put these delusions face to face with Reality. No contest."

## Chapter 23: In charge, at last!

You might wonder how Luigi looked. A small Italian with a dark demeanor - his pants too tight - his coat too loose with lapels that were too wide - his tie too thin - and none of the colors quite matched - in short a walking fashion violation.

Indeed one of the reasons that Susan had hired Silas over Luigi for the position of F&B, even though Luigi had far more experience, was that Silas dressed better - was a better show. Luigi's clothing tastes were so out of date that he could have been dressing for an '80's party. "I remember when that style was in - a few decades ago."

Sky sarcastically: "I love his Mafioso look - leather trench coat with snug leather pants and a narrow black tie. A small man with large convictions."

It wasn't clear whether Luigi just had no fashion sense or whether he was arrogant - stubbornly refusing to blend with the propensities of Ma Belle's environment. Either way his horrific sense of appearance was disturbing to those with refined sensibilities.

If Luigi's appearance had been his only flaw this book would never have been written. Unfortunately Luigi had also been silently watching and, unbeknownst to us, was already hatching his misguided schemes, which were to create so much turmoil for us.

Luigi: "My 'fresh eyes' have seen flaws. After a careful analysis of the problems I employed my superior wisdom and came up with a Plan which will solve Ma Belle's Service woes. Once I implement my clever 'solution' they will be so happy that they will proclaim me King or at least make me F&B. I'll be respected, at last."

You see Luigi was the 7th of 8 children in an Italian family. He never got his way - had never been respected. Overshadowed by the 'baby', he had always been expected to know what was right. And if he didn't get it right someone would yell at him or give him a quick cuff to the head. Training was not part of the picture; his parents were far too busy for that. And without supervision his brothers were not mature enough to carefully correct him. Instead they relied on muscle power and volume to teach their little brother. He figured that he probably deserved his punishment for doing something wrong.

Luigi: "Experience. This is how people learn. They do something wrong. Yell at them. Then they do it right. That's how I learned. And look at me."

Needless to say training was not one of Luigi's strengths. Nor was negotiation. In his big Italian family, might made right, not negotiating skills. No matter how well he talked or explained, the older were bigger, stronger, and used to getting their way.

Luigi: "At last I'm in charge. And, by God, people are going to do it my way, or else. I'm the Dining Room Manager, with a capital M. I was hired in March at the beginning of spring. Now it's only May and I'm already writing the schedule. I'm that good."

Watch out!

### **"Why won't they cooperate?"**

Although Silas considered the Staff more important than the Guests, Luigi viewed us as chess pieces, which he could move around at will. He didn't seem to realize that we had lives outside the confines of the restaurant. If there were scheduling conflicts, most spoke up to complain - whether Latino, Anglo, male or female.

Pacifica: "I have school during the day. You scheduled me for Breakfast shift on Monday. I won't be there."

Diablo: "Luigi, you scheduled me for Tuesday morning. I can't work mornings. I have another job during the day. You'll have to find someone else."

Luigi: "I hate these complainers. Don't they know that I'm in charge. They should just do what I say without questioning because I am the Manager. Why won't they cooperate? Why can't these people work with me? I want to put up the Schedule and have no complaints. It's this laid back Santa Barbara mentality. They think their lives are more important than this job. I'll have to teach them a lesson."

Metal on metal. The sound of Will scraping on Will.

### **Revenge**

Diablo - hired by Lewis as a Night Bus - so nicknamed because his given name was Lucio, which I extended to Lucifer and then Diablo - the Devil. Father died before he was born. Migrated to Santa Barbara in his teens. Did a great job, but wasn't willing to be pushed around by anyone. Fated to become one of our Misfits - those deemed incompetent by a series of managers, but who covered our ass at the end.

As usual Luigi posted his weekly schedule in the middle of the shift. Then, before anyone could check it, he scurried out like a cockroach when exposed to light.

Diablo: "Hey! What's happening with my schedule? I need 4 shifts to pay my bills and feed my family. You've only given me 2. I always work 4."

Luigi: "Sorry. The waiters said you were doing a poor job. Too much attitude."

Diablo: "What?! I do just as good a job as everyone else."

Luigi: "Sorry. That's what the waiters said. I'm just responding to their demands. My hands are tied."

Diablo to self: "Hmmm. The waiters said that I do a bad job. Well nothing extra for them anymore. Just the minimum from now on."

I noticed bad blood developing between the waiters and the Bus.

Me: "What's the problem with you guys these days? You seemed happy and cooperative before. Now you all seem bitter."

Diablo: "The waiters complained about my service. So Luigi cut my schedule."

Me: "Who complained?"

Diablo: "He said all the waiters."

Me: "Hmmm. I didn't complain. I think you're doing a great job."

Diablo: "Really?"

Me: "Of course."

Diablo: "Thanks. I was surprised."

Me: "I wonder who complained? I'll ask around."

After a brief investigation, Me: "Nobody else has complained either."

Diablo: "Luigi. That ass-hole. He told me that all of you complained."

Me: "I wonder why he said that?"

Diablo: "Probably because I wouldn't come in on my day off. I had already worked 6 nights here at Ma Belle and 5 days at my other job. He wanted me to work on Sunday but I said no. That's my family day. He said I would pay a price. Now I know what he meant."

### **Creating animosity**

In addition to power tripping with the Schedule Luigi frequently disrupted the service equilibrium through rude and disrespectful behavior. Although not a good management technique, Luigi specialized in it. He seemed to take particular delight in attempting to push Karen over the edge - by trying to make her mad.



Why you might ask?

Karen, one of the ladies hired by Lewis and Clark to upgrade Service, was one of Antoine's favorites. She had the highest standards - tables crumbed - empty glassware cleared - good wine knowledge - great customer relations - attentive, but not obtrusive - efficient. In short she took care of her station effectively. However she didn't like Luigi and was constantly comparing him unfavorably to Lewis & Clark - to his face - somewhat subtly - but obviously.

Karen to Luigi: "The quality of the Bus help is pathetic. This last one you hired takes the cake. His English is so bad that he makes lots of mistakes. The other evening someone asked him for tap water. He said 'Pelligrino or Evian?' They repeated 'Just tap water.' Again he said 'Pelligrino or Evian?' The Diners were getting frustrated. Luckily I arrived to clear things up. When Lewis and Clark were here we had great backup help - mostly college students. We need Bus who can relate to the Guests in their own language. What's the problem?"

Needless to say these digs did not endear Karen to Luigi. But overall Karen's complaints didn't really bother Luigi. He actually liked making her life miserable. It was the old Respect battle, which we shall see again.

Karen: "I have no respect for Luigi. His behavior is totally unprofessional Disappearing in the middle of a shift. Treating employees poorly. Yelling at customers. Drinking on the job. Need I go on. I miss Clark."

Luigi: "That Karen shows me no respect. I'll show her - teach her a lesson or two about power. Then she will be forced to show respect me."

It was unfortunate that Karen and Luigi locked horns. One time he even yelled at her through the bathroom doors to show that he was in charge. You can imagine how impressed she was.

Luigi: "Karen, I know you're in there. We are having a meeting and we need you there. So make it snappy."

Karen, sitting on the toilet, raised her right index finger, bent at the joint. A limp dick. This was her symbol for a man who was compensating for his lack of power. He had to prove himself externally - because he had nothing going on internally.

Karen: "That was totally uncalled for - yelling at me through the bathroom door. What's that all about. I'm a professional. I don't hang out in the bathroom all the time. I don't smoke pot at work - like some people I know. I always show up on time, not like other employees. I always take care of my side work and my Guests. I don't like to brag but Clark referred to me as a model employee."

Deliberately trying to make Karen mad was certainly not professional behavior on Luigi's part. He let his personal relations get in the way of the Guest Experience. It would be so nice if our Managers attempted to harmonize our emotions rather than disturb them unnecessarily.

Luckily for our clientele Karen didn't let Luigi's erratic behavior upset her equilibrium. Although she didn't like Luigi, she was still able to provide quality Service. Nothing disturbed her intimate relation with her Guests - neither the Kitchen's rudeness - nor the Manager's arbitrary treatment of the Staff - nor the Guest's erratic

behavior. This is the sign of a high level professional Waiter. The best Waiters remain undisturbed, calm and focused while the whole world is collapsing down around them. No matter how badly Management treats them, they forget all this in the Service of the Guest. Ideally the Staff gives good Service with the assistance of the Management. Unfortunately during this period our Staff gave good Service in spite of Management.

## Chapter 24: The Origin of the Plan

Universe: "Please don't vilify Luigi. Although you humans tend to look for and find culprits, usually I am just moving my actors around to reveal some deeper truths. Frequently those that are called stupid or evil are only playing their roles to perfection. Challenged and tested every step of the way by these 'flawed' characters, you are inspired to transcend yourselves. As such Luigi is not evil or a bad person. He was chosen to test certain members of Ma Belle's Family. His movements, for better or worse, succeeded in stimulating personal growth in some of those around him. Did Luigi choose his part? No, but he can choose to stop playing it anytime he wants. Although some say that everything happens by chance, I actually gave Luigi the task of putting stress on certain key Players. Stress has the potential to stimulate growth. Read on to see who was being tested and how. Some passed by rising to the challenge. Others did not.

Now let's see which problems inspired Luigi to come up with a Plan that was going to 'save Ma Belle's Service' or at least test my humans."

### Viejo

Viejo, the Bus Karen was referring to, was not exactly the sharpest knife in the set. He flunked 2nd grade so many times - never learning to read - that he quit school to work in the fields cutting sugar cane in Guadalajara. He eventually crossed the border for better opportunities. After briefly working in California's Central Valley, he joined some of his extended family who were living in Santa Barbara. Happy to escape the grueling field work, he got a job in Housekeeping at the Biltmore, one of the premium hotels in the area. After working for a decade cleaning rooms, he was promoted to Day Time Busser in their Dining Room. Then after many more years he applied for and was accepted to work as a Night Busser with me. Because he was in his late 40s when he started working for me the other Bussers called him Viejo = Old Man. In appearance he resembled Don Quixote, slightly hunched over, slender with the angular features of a Spaniard.

This was the pinnacle of Viejo's career. Night time Busser. But in many ways his was an immigrant success story - from laboring in the fields to working in the elegance of Fine Dining. Success is very personal.

Luigi hired him to replace Jim, one of the student Bussers that Clark had cultivated. But they were leaving in droves with his recent departure. Jim, an Econ Major specializing in investment, had been Karen's favorite - providing her with efficient service as well as giving her valuable stock tips.

Karen was appalled by this Bus exchange. Jim, her special Bus, eloquent, bright, clean cut, intelligent, and helpful, replaced by Viejo - an unsophisticated, just adequately dressed, illiterate, non English speaking Busser.

Karen: "A major step down as far as I'm concerned. He has no common sense. I asked him to get hot water for a Table. He brings the hot water without the cup. What did he think - that they were going to take a bath in it? I told him to use his brain. I confess I might have raised my voice a little. But he got so rattled that he dropped and broke a plate while clearing a table. Please! Plus his hearing is so bad, I'm never sure if he even understands what I'm saying. I don't want him at my tables anymore. Besides he doesn't smell good - with all his after shave. I think he uses it in place of a deodorant."

Although not that bright - Viejo was a steady worker - still bussing and resetting tables, and refilling coffee cups and water glasses long after the well dressed, intelligent

Anglo bussers had petered out. After the Rush was over they were normally in the back gabbing it up. Viejo was destined to become the center of the coming storm - although he was never really aware of it.

### **Bussers don't speak English?**

Despite Viejo's persistence Karen was not about to put up with this obvious downgrade in service quietly. She had experienced better and wasn't about to settle for less. Wanting to provide the best provide the best service possible she continued to pester Luigi whenever she could. Strangely enough, her Vision and Luigi's Vision were about to merge to create a nightmare for us all. Karen was about to come face to face with the old adage: "Be careful what you ask for. You might get it."

Although Luigi loved torturing Karen, he hated dealing with Guest complaints. He hated dealing with people at all.

Restaurant Guest: "I want to speak to the Manager."

Luigi: "I heard you wanted to speak to me."

Guest: "It's disgraceful that you have personnel in the Dining Room who can't speak English, You should only hire English speaking staff."

Luigi, thinking to himself: "I hate complaints - Must solve this problem."

Later Luigi engaged me. "Why do we have Bus who can't speak English."

Me: "They work hard and always show up. Why do you ask?"

Luigi: "Last night a Guest complained."

Me: "What about?"

Luigi: "Viejo asked if the Guest wanted some mineral water with his thick accent and the Guest couldn't understand him. He flipped. He said that he was tired of being around people who don't speak English."

Me: "He's probably from Los Angeles, where all the gas station attendants are Persian and only speak Farci. Sounds like he was having a bad day."

Luigi: "I think it's just the tip of the iceberg. Probably lots of Guests have been disturbed but haven't said anything."

Me: "The tip of the iceberg or a random complaint. You can't make everybody happy."

Luigi: "You can try."

Although Guest satisfaction was not one of Luigi's top priorities, he hated to deal with problems because then he had to deal with People. Ideally in his isolationist mind he wanted to set up a System which would run itself - with no problems of course.

Luigi, thinking to himself: "Hmmm? We've had Bus that speak English. What happens to them? Hmmm. They end up as Runners. Hmmm? It seems that all the best English-speaking Bus end up in the Kitchen serving Chef Antoine's Food rather than on the Floor, serving the Guests."

"Why does this happen?" he asked Slick the Runner.

Slick: "Shorter hours, better tips and more pleasant working conditions in the Back. Why would I want to go back on the Floor? Duh!"

Luigi to himself: "This is not right. I must do something about it. It's not fair that Antoine should get all the best help."

In the middle of testing some sauces Chef Antoine shuddered involuntarily as if a dark force had passed over head.

Luigi: "Hmmm? Let me think. How can we solve this problem? Eureka! I've got it. I

have the Plan to save Ma Belle. I know it's right because it makes logical sense. I know I've only been here two months but I've had lots of experience around the world. I know what's right for Ma Belle. They might resist initially, but soon they'll praise me, lifting me up on their shoulders, erecting statues to me and possibly even singing songs about me."

Unfortunately we didn't even know that there were any problems that needed solving. Like the indigenous tribes of the *New World*, which were unwillingly colonized by the Europeans, we didn't know that we needed to be saved.

### **We play our Normal Roles**

For some reason Luigi and I were joined together like the poles of a magnet.

Luigi: "I've got a Plan."

Sensing danger, my eyes rolled back in my head: "Must detach from this world of illusion."

Luigi, repeating himself: "I've got a Plan that will make things much better around here."

To myself: "This apparition is not going away. Perhaps I'd better listen for my own good." To Luigi "Well what's your Plan?"

Luigi: "It's a secret. But I'll give you some clues. It has to do with changing the Service System and Backwaiters."

To myself: "I hope I'm dreaming." To Luigi. "You're thinking about changing the System? It seems like it works pretty well to me."

Luigi: "I've thought about this a lot. It will make things a lot better. Trust me."

Me: "Who have you talked to about your Plan?"

Luigi: "Nobody really. I find that People just get in the way - bringing up stupid objections."

Me: "Have you at least talked with the Chef?"

Luigi: "He's the worst. Anyway he's in charge of the Kitchen while I'm in charge of the Floor."

Me: "When is this Plan going into effect?"

Luigi: "Tomorrow night."

I gulped. "Tomorrow is a busy Friday night. Don't you think it would be better to attempt a new untried System on a slower night?"

Luigi: "I find it's better just to go ahead with these things rather than delay. People can always imagine all kinds of obstacles to anything new. I've thought a lot about this. I can't imagine what could possibly go wrong."

Upset, my liver excreted some bile to deal with the poison from the rising anxiety. "But you've only been here a couple of months,"

Luigi: "I'm looking at things with 'fresh eyes'. Trust me. The Service will be much better with my new System."

Me: "What was your System again?"

Luigi: "You'll find all about it tomorrow night."

Me: "Have you talked with Susan, the GM, about your Plan?"

Luigi: "She would never understand. She's a Hotel person. Trust me I've done a lot of thinking about this. It can't go wrong."

Me: "Why do I have a feeling of impending doom?"

Luigi: "Don't be so negative. If we all cooperate, it'll be much better for all concerned. Trust me."

Me: "I see some customers on my station. Back to work."

Thinking to myself: "I should probably warn Antoine or Susan. But I don't really want to get involved. Anyway how bad could his Plan really be? Maybe it will actually improve things. I'm just a waiter. They would never listen to me anyway."

Universe: "In the first significant interaction between Luigi and Space, they both played their normal roles - Luigi presenting his overactive Plan and Space withdrawing and hoping for the best. Sometime you humans must pursue and bear the consequences of your course of action for better or worse. In this case this was to be true for both Luigi and Space. They were both operating under many misconceptions. Kindred spirits they both used Ideas to shield themselves from Reality."

## Chapter 25: The Quest for Enlightenment?

That's for sure. As a balance to Luigi's over-involved state was my under-involved state. Although I had done a good job as a waiter, providing a little more stability and maturity to the Floor, I had never really gone beyond this level. In an employee evaluation Lewis told me: "I have only one suggestion for you, Space. Get more involved in the operations of the restaurant. Share a little of your experience with us for the good of all. Don't be so aloof. Express yourself."

Water off a duck's back. I still only punched in and out, resisting any urge to get involved - never extending myself into Ma Belle's arena. Everyday I was busy doing Nothing, affecting Nobody. But I was very busy doing it and hated for the Real World to interfere with my Imaginary World of Ideas. Perhaps this is why I had fallen into my career - no responsibilities, short shifts - a common appeal for many waiters.

Once I had managed a dying restaurant. Although I enjoyed harmonizing the staff, who loved me, the time demands were too extreme - interrupting my family time and my creative life. I didn't have enough time to do Nothing,

This included practicing Chinese Sword forms, which taught me balance, concentration, lightness, defense and offense. The Universe sent Luigi to teach me to apply these lessons in the Real World as well. Although those who worship science consider this connection between Luigi and myself as merely a random circumstance, it's obvious to me that the Universe intentionally set up this drama to balance our disparate characters by setting us on a collision course with Reality.

At this point in my life I thought myself *beyond* the restaurant business. Brain was feeding me half truths to prop up this distorted perspective.

Brain: "Don't bother yourself with the petty external world of Ma Belle. After all we're on the internal quest for enlightenment, which is obviously superior because it's spiritual."

Little Voice: "Why is the restaurant world inferior?"

Brain: "Because it's based in the physical ever-changing transitory world of illusion. The phenomenal world, based as it is in materialism, is impermanent and hence inferior to the spiritual world which is permanent. All the really enlightened ones say so - Buddha, Lao Tzu, the yogis. We've studied them all. They all say the same thing."

Little Voice: "Have you experienced this permanent spiritual world or are you just asserting what others have said."

Brain: "We've definitely experienced the Bliss and At-One-Ment of the spiritual world. And it is definitely superior to the impermanent pleasures of materialism which are always balanced by pain and suffering when these same desires aren't fulfilled."

Little Voice: "So your spiritual joy is permanent?"

Brain: "Of course."

Little Voice: "So you're in a state of constant bliss?"

Brain: "Well not exactly. But we're working on it. This is the point of the quest for enlightenment. A release from suffering. We're almost there. Any day now."

Little Voice: "So you're aiming for around the clock, 24 hours per day ecstasy?"

Brain: "Exactly. Definitely a worthy goal - permanent happiness. Nothing less than the best for my Person."

Little Voice: "Sure. Who wouldn't want to be happy all the time? But for the time being, at least, this spiritual bliss comes and goes?"

Brain: "Yes, but just for the time being."

Little Voice: "Then what's the difference between the transitory pleasures of materialism and this spiritual bliss that comes and goes."

Brain: "It's a difference in quality not just degree."

Little Voice: "How can you tell the difference between just feeling really good and this spiritual bliss of yours, which comes and goes."

Brain frustrated now: "I can see you'll never really understand the spiritual quest. We've read all the masters and we've experienced the joy that confirms their message."

Little Voice: "So in the last resort all you can give me is an assertion of a permanent joy, supported by your authorities, but unsupported by personal experience."

Brain: "Space, let's leave this skeptic behind. She's only confusing things. We both know that the restaurant world is definitely part of the lower realm of materialism. Not worthy of our time or attention. Pay it no mind. It will only bring suffering. Best to detach from Ma Belle's transitory phenomenal world to reach enlightenment with its permanent state of bliss."

Space: "Yes must detach from Ma Belle's world to attain the permanent bliss of enlightenment."

Little Voice: "Beware of relying on authorities rather than direct experience."

Space: "Whadaya mean?"

Little Voice: "Even if they are right, how do you know that you are interpreting their words correctly?"

Brain: "Time to leave. We are wise because we have read, studied, and even written papers on this. We know the Truth with a capital T. And we're on the quest for enlightenment with a capital E."

Space: "Yes Enlightenment. Here I come!"

Little Voice: "Beware of confusing the quest for enlightenment with the desire to shelter your Ego from harm - one of the worst forms of spiritual materialism."

Space: "Confuse Ego with Enlightenment?"

Brain: "Come on Space. She obviously doesn't know the spiritual quest like we do. Remember we are wise."

Space: "Yes, so wise."

Fading into a whisper now, Little Voice: "And remember not to confuse foolishness for wisdom."

Brain: "Here we go on our Quest for Enlightenment, which will yield a permanent state of Bliss, And we're almost there. Don't let anything distract us from our one-pointed focus on the goal."

Space: "Yes permanent bliss here I come."

Just the rustling leaves of the tree Little Voice: "Beware of confusing words for Reality."

Brain: "Enlightenment - A permanent state of ecstasy."

Space: "I can't wait."

### **No More Complaints?**

In the meantime Luigi's Little Voice was raising objections as well.

Luigi: "I'm so pleased with myself because I'm so clever. There were complaints, which I hate - anything to avoid complaints - demands face-to-face interaction - too messy. I observed and analyzed the source of these complaints. Then I came up with a brilliant Plan, which will eliminate these complaints once and for all. Viola! Simple. My Plan will make me the hero of Ma Belle."

Little Voice: "There will always be complaints no matter what the Plan."

Luigi: "Not under my Plan. It is perfect. I have used Logic to figure it out. What could



possibly go wrong?"

Little Voice: "Beware of the limitations of Logic. Fixing things that aren't broken can easily lead to unforeseen difficulties. Ma Belle has operated successfully for years under the present System. If you make major changes, it could easily throw everything out of balance leading to far more complaints than you have right now."

Luigi: "Not to worry. My Plan will solve all these problems and there will be no more complaints."

Little Voice: "Just be forewarned - there is no perfection in your human world."

Luigi: "My Plan is as close to perfection as is humanly possible. Time to implement it. I can't wait. No more complaints."

### **Insights from the End**

A moment of reflection as I go through my final read through before submission: I started this ordeal when I was 49. Now I'm a little over 57. I feel the same anxieties I did then. I'm just as afraid to call my cousin about getting this book published as I was to get involved - so many years ago. The only difference is that now I'm facing my fears rather than running away from them.

My continual emotional roller coaster counters the theory of enlightenment that I held way back when. At this point in my personal history I felt I was on the verge of a breakthrough into a new way of Being - when it was just a moment of euphoria - usually followed fairly quickly by insecurity, anxiety, anger and/or greed.

Possibly there are less of these episodes now. Or maybe not. But I keep plodding on nevertheless. However now, instead of attempting to deny or suppress these negative emotional states I embrace my neurosis - my manic depressive state. After all it's me. Instead of numbing my feelings to lessen the Pain, I'd rather open my Heart to experience the fullness of Life, the good and the bad, for better or worse, until death do us part.

These things I've learned in my relation with Ma Belle - chronicled in these many pages - for which I'm eternally grateful.

## Chapter 26: The Collision with Reality

### Ready to Wait Tables?

We all knew our place in Ma Belle's Hierarchy and how to move up the Restaurant ladder. A chain of promotion had been established whereby new employees started working Breakfasts, then worked their way up to Lunches, and then finally to Dinners from Bus to Runner to Expediter to Waiter. As always, some felt that they were ready to move up before they were qualified. Others would never be qualified. And others, even though they were qualified, found new jobs because they didn't want to wait for an opening. Promotions were not guaranteed. This would have ramifications that none of us could anticipate.

Although a relative harmony had been reached it was by no means universal. It never is. Gerald the Bus was one of those who was not in harmony. He felt he was ready to move up the Restaurant ladder.

Gerald: "I'm disturbed because I have not been given a chance as a Waiter. Sometimes I think it is because I am a Latino."

Luigi: "No, it is not because you are Latino. You just need a little more experience. But I'm about to start a new System. You'll be perfect as one of my Backwaiters."

Gerald: "Backwaiter?"

Luigi: "Someone to support the Waiter."

Gerald: "We do that already. The last manager called us Wait Assistants, but we're still just glorified Bussers."

Luigi: "As Backwaiter, your duties will be expanded. You'll be taking orders to gain experience as a Waiter."

Gerald: "I'm not sure the Waiters will like that."

Luigi disgustedly: "That's one of the problems with Ma Belle. The Waiters think that they are in charge. They think they know what's best. They will certainly resist my Plan. I'm here to teach them a lesson, but I need some allies. How about it? Are you on my side?"

Gerald: "Uh ... I don't know."

Luigi: "Work with me and I'll make you a Backwaiter the first night of my new System. How does that sound?"

Gerald: "Uh... Sounds great, I guess. Well at least I'm going to be trained to wait tables."

Unfortunately, Gerald had no experience with cocktails or computers.

### Uh Oh! A Man with a Mission

Friday night in May at the staff dinner before the evening shift:

Luigi: "We're trying a new System tonight. It might be a little difficult at first. But it will be good for the long term."

Karen: "Tonight is a busy Friday night. Perhaps let's try this new System on a quiet weekday."

Luigi: "No. You just have to move forward with these things or else everyone raises too many objections. Trust me. I've spent a lot of time thinking about this Plan. It'll work if you just give it a chance."

Karen: "How about a trial run next week during a slow night?"

Luigi: "Trust me. My System will work. You'll make a lot more tips because the Service will be that much better."

Space: "How does it work?"

Luigi: "We have a new position called Backwaiter. It will be staffed from the best of the Back of the House. Just think what it will be like having Blair as your Backwaiter."

Blair was one of Chef Antoine's superb Expeditors - A recent college graduate - who was investigating the food and wine industry as a profession. One of his professed goals was to make someone laugh every day. A bright light. Ironically he was destined to be Ahab to Luigi's Moby Dick in our little drama.

Angel: "And just what will these Backwaiters do?"

Luigi: "They'll take all the cocktail orders and dessert orders. Just think of all the time it will save."

Angel: "I like taking my cocktail and dessert orders. It allows me to establish a rapport with the Guest."

Angel was a Latino waiter, who had worked his way up through the ranks. Hard working and ferociously serious about customer happiness. With great pride. Had survived many managers.

Jane: "I don't want to give up control of my station to someone else."

Jane - a Waiter of the female variety - Hired by Clark, ostensibly, to upgrade service - Just at Ma Belle until she got a 'real' job - Definitely not in the Business for the Duration - not a Lifer - Certainly not going to be pushed around by this 'twerp', who had replaced Clark - the darling of the women - the enemy of heterosexual men. Luigi - exactly the opposite.

Space: "What will the Waiters do if we don't take the cocktail orders?"

Luigi: "You can take them." [pausing significantly] "if your Backwaiter is busy. But, if possible, hand your order to your Backwaiter - as soon as you can."

Space: "I take my orders in my head."

Luigi: "Start taking them down on paper."

Space: "Nobody can read my writing."

Luigi: "We can easily work through these petty problems. May I note that all the Backwaiters will be fluent in English." Nodding knowingly to Karen. Thinking to himself, "She's going to be so happy with me. She's going to have the best support anywhere in town - why, probably the whole state - if not the world."

Angel: "I don't want anyone taking my orders."

Luigi: "Just give it a go. If you just give it a chance, you will love it. Just think - not having to worry about cocktails anymore. We'll give you Gerald for your Backwaiter, he's been here a long time."

Space: "But he doesn't know anything about cocktails."

Luigi: "This will be a good way to learn. No more discussion. We've drawn up the station map to reflect the changes."

Karen: "Why would the Expeditors want to be Backwaiters?"

Luigi: "They'll be making more money."

Space: "Where's the money coming from?"

Luigi: "From the Waiters, Expeditors and Runners. I'm sure the Waiters wouldn't mind kicking in a little more for such great help. The Expeditors and Runners are overpaid any way."

Karen: "Sure. Everyone loves a pay cut."

Jane: "I certainly don't want to give out any more tips than we already do."

Space: "How are you going to divide up the tips?"

Luigi: "We haven't quite figured that out yet. We're working on it. Service first."

Angel, attempting to develop a positive attitude: "OK. Let's try your System. We'll make it work."

Luigi: "That's the right attitude. Remember the Backwaiters are to take all the cocktail orders and deliver them. Then at the end they are to take the Dessert order to. That's what a Backwaiter is for. It'll make your job a lot easier. It might be hard at first, but will work out for the best in the end."

The entire Floor Staff gulped collectively.

### **The Opening Night Test**

Universe: "Some say that I'm impersonal. Actually I possess a sublime, though diabolical, sense of humor. Gerald made his debut as Backwaiter on Friday night - the opening for Luigi's New System. I arranged an immediate Test, turning up the Fire in Ma Belle's Oven to cook some Souls. Who will be able to take the heat?"

A well-dressed party of ten was seated in Angel's station.

Angel was a conscientious perfectionist waiter, preferring to do everything for each of his tables to make sure it was done right. However he was not one to rock the boat.

Angel, hesitantly: "Uh, Luigi. Maybe I should take the cocktail order for that party I don't think Gerald is quite ready."

Luigi: "Don't worry he will learn. Let him take the order."

Gerald to the guests in broken English: "May I take your cocktail order?"

First Guest: "I'll have a Belvedere Martini Up very dry with extra olives."

Gerald: "Balfour here, I don't think we have any."

First: "I said Belvedere. Belvedere Vodka."

Gerald: "Yes we have Vodka."

Angel whispering from behind: "I have that order Gerald. Let's go to the next Guest."

Anyway from guest to guest he went, trying to write everything down long hand - not in waiter short hand. The order itself must have taken ten minutes. Angel was hovering, not so patiently, over Gerald's shoulder. As the last order was taken Angel snatched the Gerald's order pad from his hands: "I'll put the order in the computer."

Luigi: "Just one moment, Angel. Gerald is supposed to put the order in the computer. That's the System. He will deliver them too. You go deal with the wine. That's the beauty of my Plan."

Angel sighed: "But..."

Luigi: "No buts. Work with me."

Angel then approached the host, Mr. Harcourt, who was studying the Wine List.

Angel: "Would you like some help selecting some wine?"

Mr. Harcourt: "Certainly but we would like our cocktails first."

Angel: "Of course, sir. The other waiter is getting those. They should be on the way any minute."

Mr. Harcourt: "In that case we would like a good California Chardonnay and Merlot."

Angel: "ZD is an excellent full bodied Napa Chardonnay, while Stag's Leap makes a very complex Merlot."

Mr. Harcourt: "Sounds good. Bring a few bottles of each. But we want our cocktails first."

Angel: "I understand sir. We'll just get the wine service prepared."

Meanwhile Gerald - who regularly froze in stressful situations - had frozen up on the computer - with its many menus - none of which he had ever seen before.

Guest of Mr. Harcourt: "Hey Fred. Where are our cocktails? I'm dying of thirst. I thought you said that this place was first class."

Mr. Harcourt: "I'm certain it is. This is a Francis Le Roi restaurant." To Angel: "Waiter

could you find out what's happened to our drinks. My Guests are starting to complain."

*The Shit begins to move downhill.*

Angel, discovering Gerald frozen on the computer terminal: "Here let me put the order in. They're already starting to ask where their cocktails are."

Luigi walks in at this point: "Angel, what are you doing. I thought I told you that Gerald was supposed to put the order in the computer."

Angel: "He's taking too long. They are already starting to complain."

Luigi, thinking to himself: "Hmmm, Complaints are bad. I hate complaints. They disturb me." Out loud. "Well OK. Gerald watch how Angel puts the order in. But remember Gerald delivers the cocktails to the table. Angel put the order in and then get your Wine."

Angel, a seasoned waiter, is starting to panic now. His station is starting to fill up with Deuces - parties of two - and he wants to make these high rollers happy because they will certainly make him happy if he does. He takes some orders on a few of the other tables in his station and then begins getting the glasses and wine arranged for his big party.

Angel to the Mr. Harcourt: "The '95 ZD Chardonnay and the '94 Stag's Leap Merlot."

Mr. Harcourt, getting irritated: "Those are the wines but where are our cocktails. We've already been waiting for 20 minutes. This shouldn't happen here. We are friends of Francis Le Roi." More stress.

Angel: "Let me find out what's happening."

Gerald, paralyzed with anxiety, not knowing a Martini from a Manhattan, hadn't been able to deliver the cocktails quickly because he was in the state of shock - moving in slow motion - while shaking slightly. He had just gotten all the cocktails on the tray when Angel streaked over,

Gerald: "I don't really know where these cocktails go. You'll have to help me."

Angel: "Let me take those."

Luigi arrives: "Angel, what are you doing. I told you Gerald is supposed to deliver those."

Angel: "The customers are starting to get mad."

Luigi, thinking to himself: "They're starting to get mad? Time to retreat."

Sighing to Angel: "Do what you think is necessary. I'll be in the office writing the schedule if you need me."

Luigi to himself: "This is a good time to write next week's schedule -No one bothering me - because they're too busy on the floor to bother me with their stupid human problems."

Back on the floor:

Angel: "Gerald let me take those cocktails."

As quickly as possible Angel delivers the drinks.

Mr. Harcourt: "What's the matter? It must have taken a half hour to get our drinks. Francis will certainly hear about this."

Angel, apologized: "Normally our Service is excellent but our Manager is trying a New System."

Host: "Scrap it."

Back in the quiet of the office, random thoughts floated through Luigi's Mind as he was writing the Schedule. "Why can't those Waiters cooperate? I'm only doing it for

them. If they would only work with me.”

### **Picking fruit before it's ripe**

Although everyone, Front and Back of the House, was discouraged by these Service atrocities, Luigi insisted on continuing with his Plan. The only member of the Staff who was still excited about the new System was Gerald. Unfortunately he had a hard time remaining calm under the pressure of the Restaurant Rush.

Gerald: “I’m grateful that Luigi promoted me to Backwaiter. Lewis and Clark kept telling me I wasn’t good enough. They were prejudiced against Latinos. I just needed a chance. But those Customers sure are demanding. Why are they in such a rush for their drinks? All that pressure - it makes my brain explode. Luigi said it would be easy. But the Waiters and Customers kept getting mad at me for little mistakes. I get so nervous I make more mistakes. Why do they get so angry? It’s just dinner. They need to be a little more tolerant. After all I’m just learning.”

Gerald had many more such experiences that weekend. After a few too many stressful situations, Gerald was found in front of the computer, banging his head against the wall. “I can’t handle all the picky people and the demanding waiters.”

Frequently the Initiate craves Enlightenment before he is ready, ruining the Process. Gerald coveted the position of Waiter before he was ready, aborting his training. Those who are wrapped up in their own personal affairs at the expense of larger picture draw down a curse upon them. In this case Gerald was not thinking about the good of our Guests, he was just thinking about what was good for Gerald. Overrating his own talents, he stopped learning. A precondition to entering the Door to the Kingdom is the willingness to yield to Universal Will.

### **Francis Le Roi steps in**

Needless to say many of our Guests didn’t experience the ultimate in Fine Dining this weekend. Especially Angel’s party. The anticipated feeling of harmony was replaced by agitation before the cocktails arrived. Even the intoxication from the wine didn’t help. Guest expectations were not met and they weren’t happy. Victimized by Luigi’s Plan - these elegant patrons called Francis Le Roi to complain.

*The Shit gathers speed.*

Francis: “It took a half an hour to get your drinks?” - “By then you were already upset?” - “Yes, this is not right. I’m awfully sorry.” - “Your Waiter said it had to do with a New System?” - “Well, got to go now. Glad you called.” - “Yes, I’ll investigate. Come in for some desserts on me - to show that I care.”

After hanging up: “Mon dieu! What’s happening at Ma Belle now? Always more problems. Will they never end? New System? Must call Susan to find out what’s going on now.”

*The Shit is racing now.*

Francis: “Hello Susan.” - “What’s this I hear about some new Service System?” - “You don’t know anything about it?” - “Why do I ask? Some friends of mine called to complain about Service. They said that their Waiter mentioned something about a New System.” - “What’s the matter with the System I set up?” - “You don’t know anything about it. Well you better find out.” - “You’ll get right on that?” - “Well I hope so.” - “And Susan...” - “No changes in the Service System unless I authorize them personally!”

*The Shit hits bottom.*

Susan calls Luigi into her office: "What's this I hear about a New System?"

Luigi: "New System?"

Susan: "Francis called to say that one of his friends had unacceptably slow service at Ma Belle over the weekend. He said the Waiter blamed a New System."

Luigi: "Which waiter?" Thinking to himself. "Must get revenge."

Susan: "It was a party of 10 on Friday night."

Luigi to himself: "Angel?!"

Susan: "Which waiter doesn't matter. All that matters is that we return to the System Francis set up. He says that any service changes must come through him. That's all."

Luigi: "OK."

Susan: "I want to hear. 'Yes Susan, I'll get right on that.'"

Luigi: "Yes Susan. I'll get right on that." Thinking to himself: "The Waiters sabotaged my divine System. Especially that Angel. And I thought he was on my side."

This New System was discontinued, but not before Jane gave notice. Although she was upset at the disorganization of Luigi's System, she also missed Clark and was not pleased with the patriarchal nature of the new Management Team. She was the first of Clark's ladies to leave.

## Chapter 27: Misconceptions Remain "Thumbs Down."

We all sighed with relief that Luigi's Backwaiter Plan had died a quick death.

Chef Antoine hadn't seen it coming. He hated it, of course. He did not want to lose his Runners to the Floor. He felt rightfully so that they were a very important component of his culinary masterpieces. Plus he did not want the Guests to suffer. He wanted them to have the Experience. That weekend had been a nightmare of complaints. Chef Antoine's fine artistic sensibilities had been shattered. It triggered an enormous headache because he felt helpless before the atrocities that were being performed on his food. Although an artist, he wasn't a social revolutionary and had been passively victimized. And those things that were disturbing to Antoine were likewise disturbing to me, Ma Belle. As uncommon Lovers we shared the same Vision and the same disappointments when it was violated.

Nobody on the Floor liked the new System either.

Karen: "The Backwaiters did more harm than good. They actually interfered with my Station. I felt that I had lost touch with my Guests. I went up to one of my Tables - 'May I take your Dessert Order?' - 'The other Waiter already took it?' - 'Yes. We do need to communicate more.' - I was so embarrassed. And then I had to tip the Backwaiter extra for taking orders that I didn't want him to take."

Space: "Some of the Backwaiters were expected to do tasks that they weren't ready for. Gerald was asked to recommend a good Port and he suggested San Francisco. At least the Guest just laughed."

Slick, the Runner: "I don't want to be a Backwaiter. It's just a glorified Busser. I've done my time. I prefer my privileged status in the Kitchen - shorter hours - better pay. Plus I'm more useful there. On the Floor I'm just getting in the way of the Waiter. If I have to do that again, I might have to look for another job."

Hugo, a Latino Bus: "Although I don't speak English good, I like working with Waiter as Team. Mas bueno."

Guillermo, another Latino Bus: "Less challenge. Less money. More work. No bueno."

Viejo, the Bus whose poor English had inspired Luigi's System, just shrugged his shoulders.

### A Negative Experiment

Even Gerald was relieved that this Service experiment was over.

Gerald to Luigi: "I want to be taken off Nights. I want to spend more time with my family." Thinking to himself: "The pressure - the heavy demands - all the anger from Waiters and Guests when I make my little mistakes - not worth it."

Luigi: "But you're doing great. You're my friend, my ally. I set this System up with people like you in mind. You can't abandon me."

Gerald: "I appreciate the opportunity. But I hate the stress. Too disturbing." To himself: "Too many uptight people with so many demands."

Eventually Gerald left the Business altogether. Fine Dining is not for everyone - certainly not for him. He got what he wished for but gave it back after he realized that he didn't want it after all.

Universe: "Gerald experienced a common human mechanism. You desire something intensely and then pursue it. Finally after a long chase, you fulfill your desire. But it is not what you expected. There is a sense of let-down and disappointment. This is fine; for you've learned that this is not what you wanted after all. Your Experiment has



yielded negative results. Rather than getting fixated and falsifying data, it's time to let go of faulty assumptions and readjust your desires. After all desires are useful in drawing you into new arenas of action.

Gerald thought that being a Backwaiter would make him happy because he would make more money and have more prestige. He tried it out and discovered that unbearable stress accompanied the prestige. Being a Backwaiter caused him more anxiety than happiness. He also discovered that less money and less stress allowed him to enjoy his life and family much more. What a great life lesson!

Most of you have the same choice. Stress and Prestige vs. Happiness and Peace of Mind. Which do you choose?"

### **Misguided Ideas still Thriving**

Although Luigi's System had been laid to rest for the time being, many issues had not yet been resolved. For instance the Ideas which separated our protagonists from Reality were still alive and well. To shield himself from the inadequacies of his Plan Luigi had assigned external blame - a common strategy.

Luigi to Space: "I can't believe that Angel would say that to the customer."

Space: "Say what?"

Luigi: "That my System was to blame."

Space: "Wasn't it?"

Luigi: "Perhaps - but you should never say that to the customer. Now Francis Le Roi has gone and told Susan that he doesn't want to use my System."

Space, under his breath: "This is bad?"

Luigi: "The Waiters just didn't give my System a chance. They are the ones to blame. It might've taken a few weeks to get all of the bugs out. But it would have made things so much better in the long run."

Space: "Yeah right." Thinking to himself. "Thank God for Francis Le Roi and a little restaurant sanity. Whew! Glad to be past that crisis."

Wishful thinking. What a fool! Obviously Space had no understanding of Luigi's obsession with Idea - his beloved Backwaiter System. Plus Francis' intervention had only reinforced Space's misconceptions.

Space, full of himself: "My strategy of non-involvement was successful once again. Non-action in the midst of action - *wu-wei*. Glad I didn't do anything. Everything has a way of working out for the best. Although we lost the Service battle this weekend in that fewer achieved the Experience, we won the war against Luigi's stupid System. I know that some of our Guests suffered from the diffusion and confusion of the Service, but that's all in the past now. We might have lost a few customers and a server, but the Universe cooperated to expose the shortcomings of the System. I'm certainly relieved that we killed it so quickly."

*We?* Space certainly can't take any credit whatsoever. It was all Francis Le Roi's doing. My hero - protecting me, his baby, from harm. Hopefully Space doesn't think that he can just sit back and hope for the best - relying on others to fight his battles. If he does, he's going to be sorely disappointed.

Before proceeding forth let's see how he misinterpreted his security blanket philosophy of *wu wei*, a concept derived from the Chinese martial arts.

### Space's Wu Wei (rhymes with hooray)

In the midst of some herbalizing after work Space: "If only Luigi would follow the Taoist principle of *wu wei* - non action in the midst of action - everything would be so much better. Instead he attempts to assert himself - forcing his way on the natural pattern of things. Acting independently, he isolates his Personal Tao from the Universal Tao. This is why he is always doomed to failure. Me I try to align my Personal Tao with the Universal Tao."

Sky: "The Tao. Wow!"

Space: "The Chinese ideogram for false action even has the Person symbol in front of the ideogram for action - indicating that imbalance occurs when our personal intentions become involved. This is why I've adopted the policy of non-action."

Sky: "Non action? Where's the traction?"

Space: "Maybe a better word to use would be non-intentional action."

Sky: "Non-intentional? That sounds unconventional."

Space: "Frequently yes. Things have a way of working themselves out when we detach and take ourselves out of the picture rather than trying to take over. That much I've learned from my Master. Everything works much more smoothly that way."

Sky: "Serious people away. Let's play today!"

Space: "Luigi spends all his energy working on the external world - creating imbalance. He would be better off working on his internal world - to better align himself with the Tao."

Sky: "Pow! The Now of the Tao."

Space: "The Now is corrupted by his overdeveloped Brain. Luigi needs to tame his Brain; instead it rules him."

Sky: "His untamed Brain makes him lame. What a drain!"

Space: "That's for sure. That's why I try to work on myself. That way I'll be the best example I can be. People learn much more from watching than from words. That's why I never say anything. Instead I try to transform the world by behaving impeccably - the wisdom of a good example. That's another meaning of *wu wei* - non action in midst of action."

Sky: "Wu wei. Hooray!"

Space: "Exactly. I practice non action rather than participating in the transitory world of illusion associated with the restaurant."

Sky: "Your illusion sounds like confusion."

That's an understatement.

### The Gossip Mill

Of course at the next Staff dinner the gossip mill was running a top speed. Without Luigi there to defend himself, he was fair game.

Space: "I can't believe that guy. Springs a new System on us and then ducks out in the middle of the Rush, just when the heat starts to rise."

Punky: "Yeah. Why try to fix something that's not broken."

Slick: "He's obviously incompetent."

Karen silently raised her half mast finger: "The little man complex."

Space: "Experimentation is not the entire problem. It's OK in certain circumstances. His flaw was that he didn't stick around to observe the results. Scientists constantly run experiments - some of which are successful - but most of which aren't. Running experiments is a great idea, but it is essential that the results are observed to determine success or failure. In this case he ran an experiment - changing the form of Service - but was not there to observe the disastrous results. This allowed him to

imagine that everything turned out perfectly.”

Sky: “Yeah he told me that he couldn’t understand what everyone was so upset about. He said that everything went according to plan - with just a few difficulties - which are to be expected with any new System.”

Karen: “A few difficulties? It was a complete disaster. His Backwaiter System sucked. I am a perfectionist at my profession. This weekend I didn’t feel like I was in charge of my Station. Instead I felt like part of an extended team. I prefer being a full service waiter. I want to do everything possible for my Guests. No offense, but I don’t trust anyone to provide the level of customer care that I can. Plus I feel that the Guests prefer having fewer people at the table. They get confused. They also get confused when the Bus can’t speak English. I hate having Viejo as my Busser because he can’t understand me or my Guests. He has no class like Hugo. Lewis and Clark would never have hired someone like Viejo.”

Punky: “Let it go Karen. At least Viejo is steady.”

Karen: “Steady like a snail.”

Space: “At least he stays on the floor. Luigi that coward vanished in the middle of Service.”

Clarence: “Now, now. No name calling. It never does any good.”

Space: “Just descriptive. Plus he blamed the Waiters for the problems.”

Karen: “The Waiters?”

Space: “Said we didn’t cooperate.”

Karen: “We did the best we could. His System just didn’t work.”

Relieved that this unsuccessful Service experiment was short-lived and gone, we returned to our normal Service System to regularly provide our Guests with the Fine Dining Experience. Oblivious to our fate, we expected to continue this way forever. Instead it was just until the end of the month.

## Chapter 28: Antoine stands up for me

### "Cut labor costs and move up the Ladder"

In June, if that matters, our Corporate Father, previously named Best Star, decided to merge with another Hotel Management Corporation to become Bigger Star. From managing about 80 hotels, Corporate was now going to manage almost 200 hotels. Further with the closing of the deal on July 1, Corporate would 'go public'. This meant that his stock would begin to be traded publicly. He would even be listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Although we didn't really know what this meant, it sounded important. We were proud - until we found out what it meant for us.

Because of this 'exciting event' the managers at each of the Best Star hotels were asked 'to cut labor costs in June by 10% to hopefully 20% - for the good of Corporate'. Why? To maximize Corporate's value at the time of the merger, labor costs needed to be as low as possible. In other words to maximize the profits of Corporate's humans, his stock holders, our Guests were to suffer. Cutting labor means to cut service. Reducing service is bad for business. Hence this cost-cutting move, although good for Corporate's momentary monetary value, was bad for business - bad for our Guests - bad for the Staff - bad for the lower management.

Corporate to Susan: "To become Corporate Players you and your managers must cut labor costs to the bone - only for the month of June - a one time cost-cutting maneuver. This is good for Corporate - and anything that is good for Corporate is good for the Staff." This was his way of saying: "Don't complain if you want to be part of my corporation. And if you want to move up in my corporate hierarchy, act happy and enthusiastic, and do as I say."

*The Shit moves downhill.*

Susan immediately relayed this message to Luigi and Clarence. Attempting to align themselves with Corporate's wishes, they embraced his directive. Leading the way, Susan cut maintenance and housekeeping for the Hotel to half time. Foreshadowing future events Luigi and Clarence decided that they would eliminate all Runners and Expeditors by taking that task on themselves. All of Antoine's favored Runners and Expeditors were cut to half time and replaced by Managers who didn't know what they were doing. You can just imagine how happy that made Antoine.

Luigi: "Don't worry guys. This is for one month only."

Slick, one of our full time expeditors, who was on a collision course with Luigi: "Great I'll tell my landlord that I'll just miss the rent payment for one month only."

Punky, previously a Bus, now one of Antoine's fine expeditors: "Yeah, I'll just skip my car payment this month. I'm sure they won't mind."

Luigi: "Sorry guys. It's out of my hands. This was a corporate decision."

In other words: "I really don't care about you guys. I just want to move up the corporate ladder. I want to show them that I have what it takes."

In other words: "I want to show the corporate leaders that the corporation is more important to me than the employees or the business."

In other words: "I'm willing to sell my soul to the corporation, just reward me with a promotion."

In other words: "I believe that job security with all the benefits brings happiness."

Poor misguided souls, as they were soon to learn.

### **Silas caught in the cross fire**

Chef Antoine attempted to cut labor costs like the rest of the managers. While he stepped up his pace to do the work that needed to be done, he wouldn't compromise the Fine Dining Experience. He was not attempting to move up Corporate's hierarchy. He was where he hoped to stay. He just wanted to run a good business. Antoine held the line, refusing to bow to the Man.

Not true with Luigi and Clarence. They bowed quickly. Luigi, worshipping Corporate as any good manager should, eliminated the lunch expediter from the schedule. This meant that Silas, the marginalized F&B was supposed to run the food like the rest of the managers. Unfortunately his attention span, not very long under normal circumstances, was shortened under duress.

Thinking to himself as the lunch orders began pouring in Silas: "Where was I supposed to put that ticket? - Which garnish am I supposed to put on that dish? - Was it rosemary or parsley?" And then as he walked out of the kitchen: "Which table was I supposed to go to? - Which dish was the lady getting? - Where is position 4? - Do I go clockwise or counter-clockwise? - Was this the Salmon with the Chardonnay Mushroom Sauce or the creamy port sauce? - What is that black thing on the plate? - I hope it's not a mistake?"

Poor Silas was constantly apologizing as he walked back in the kitchen after having misplaced and mis-described the food: "It seems that I should be firing food or doing something else. I can't quite remember what. The kitchen asked me if table 24 was finished with their appetizers. Which is table 24? Everybody seems so excited but I can't remember what I'm supposed to do next. The Chef is trying to help me, but he seems to be upset. He said to take this dish to the lady on Table 21 but I can't remember which table 21 is. This is getting frustrating. I may as well kick the wall to get my frustrations out. That will show everyone that at least I'm trying." Kicks wall. "Ouch. I feel like I cracked my foot."

From that point Silas began limping physically as well as mentally.

### **Expecting the Experience, finding Anxiety instead**

Poor Chef Antoine began developing a huge headache. He could just imagine the Guests coming in for their Fine Dining Experience:

Mr. Jones: "I had heard that this was one of the best restaurants in town combining excellent food and service. We went in for lunch. The staff seemed almost frantic. No one seemed to know what they were doing. Somebody that looked like a manager, because he was dressed in a nice suit, tried to serve our food to another table. When he finally reached our table, he asked who was having the Salmon. Everyone seemed very confused. The food was delicious but our experience was flawed because of the service."

One of the necessary aspects of Fine Dining is that it appear seamless. When watching a musical concert, the audience doesn't want to worry about the musician hitting the wrong notes. If they are worried they can not become the music. If they can not become the music, they cannot lose their sense of Self. If they cannot lose their sense of Self, they are denied the Experience. Similarly if the Service Staff seems confused, anxious or upset, this in turn disturbs our Guests. If our Guests are disturbed they can't lose their sense of Self in the Moment of Dining. If they can't lose their Self they are denied the treasured At-One-Ment experience.

Mr. Jones: "The chaotic Service at Ma Belle reflected the stress and strain of my day-to-day life rather than relieving it. Instead of a sense of well being I felt disturbed. Instead of forgetting my problems, I was reminded of them. I empathized with the agony of the staff and went away feeling anxious and depressed rather than relaxed and refreshed. Instead of feeling that all is well in the universe, I experienced degeneration and chaos. Dining at Ma Belle was not at all pleasant. Although the food was delicious, I do not want to duplicate the sense of anxiety and chaos that I had. I don't like eating at restaurants which are so poorly run.

Recently a friend suggested going to Ma Belle for lunch. I said, 'No way! The last time I went the service was so chaotic it stressed me out. A managerial looking person was running around getting nothing done. He took my food to the wrong table and then it arrived cold. For the prices, it's not worth the tension.'

Ouch!

### **Antoine's attachments causes him pain**

Unlike most humans, who only serve their own personal desires, Antoine was evolved enough to have expanded his personal spiral to include me - the restaurant who supported his Art. I was the Temple; he was the High Priest; and the Guests were the congregation of this Church. The Guests were coming to me, the Temple, for a mystical Experience, which he and his helpers were attempting to provide. Although he would never use these words, he understood. This subliminal understanding was one of the reasons that Antoine was such a great chef.

However like any normal human, Antoine was attached to his world. In particular as a French Chef he was attached to me, Ma Belle. After all I was the restaurant in which his splendid food was served. More particularly as a human, he was attached to my Guests who came to experience his Art. Their happiness was his happiness, while their agony was his agony. This attachment caused him to suffer.

Because Antoine cared about our Guests, their pain became his pain. The more he cared, the more he suffered. Agony! To ease his pain his Heart began developing a callous to dull his emotions so that he could cope. But, at this stage at least, it wasn't thick enough. He tried to stop caring so much, but this proved to be impossible. As a reaction to this suppression he developed a headache instead. After all he was a French Chef. Just as a mother cares about her child no matter what, a French Chef cares about Fine Dining no matter what. Similarly just as the mother bear will rise ferociously to the support of her cubs when attacked, so did Antoine - finally.

### **Throwing the Money Changers out of the Temple**

For the first week of June Luigi, Clarence and Silas attempted to do all the running and expediting, except on weekends. Silas limped along, with his stress fracture getting more and more excruciating - which didn't improve his already unacceptable performance. Initially Antoine attempted to go along with Father's program. However as the Guest complaints grew, his personal pain increased - eventually becoming unbearable.

His Little Voice began screaming at him: "Outsiders are desecrating our Temple! Drive them out!"

When Antoine failed to respond his Little Voice retaliated with severe headaches.

Antoine couldn't take it any longer. He had finally reached his boiling point.

Antoine: "I demand real Expeditors to serve my food."

Luigi: "But Corporate says ..."

Antoine: "I don't care what Corporate says. I'm the Chef and Ma Belle is my restaurant."

With Silas disabled by his constant pain and service a mess, Luigi and Clarence finally complied. They turned away briefly from their corporate gods and nodded to me, the Restaurant. They began to schedule Expeditors again.

**Antoine, my Husband?**

I loved Antoine so much for standing up for me. He loved me and what I had to offer more than any material reward. He understood and appreciated my Art and Beauty. He fought against Corporate himself to protect me. What a man!

He must have loved me too. On more than one occasion I heard this dialogue, or something similar, between him and my Guests.

Guest: "Are you married?"

Antoine: "Ma Belle is my wife. I spend all my time with her. I have no time for anything else."

Because of his love for me, he didn't have time for a normal human relation. I was ecstatic that he cared so deeply about me. Nobody else understood me the way he did - except maybe my Mother, Francis - but she had her own world. Our love was deep and passionate. Although most humans were caught up in their personal worlds - filled with other humans - Antoine loved me - spending 60 to 70 hours a week with me - far more than most human couples. Although we never had a formal marriage, I think that we almost have a common law marriage because we've been together nearly 6 years.

This experience provided an incredible growth opportunity for our relationship. From this point on I was not just providing him employment anymore. I was not just another restaurant job. Because he had taken a stand, he realized how attached he had become to me and my Guests. Unfortunately instead of just doing what he could to protect my Experience, he was overly attached to results. He stood up to defend me but was emotionally stained by caring too much. This is what caused and was to cause him so much more mental suffering.

## **Chapter 29: The Principle of Aesthetic Necessity**

To better understand Antoine's reactions to the atrocities Luigi perpetrated on our Dining Room let us explore the Principle of Aesthetic Necessity. Roughly speaking it has to do with an appreciation for the importance of Beauty. For many this principle has no meaning. For others it dominates their lives. Antoine was one of those - with a sense of balance and harmony rooted in the core of his Soul - enveloping his entire life. Space was another - with aesthetics a motivating force behind his service. Their devotion to beauty is why they loved me so much although I caused them so much pain. Eventually they were both compelled by inner necessity to champion the Experience I offered. Beauty inspired them to transcend the personal in the service of higher ideals.

### **Visuals and the Context of Taste**

Like Antoine and Space most of those who join me to Dine are also driven by a thirst for Beauty. If this Aesthetic craving is satisfied the food actually tastes better.

You might wonder what the visuals have to do with taste. Unlike other art forms Fine Dining is dominated by context. The content of the food and wine, is only a small part of the taste sensation. If Body even thinks about food the salivary glands in the tongue are activated. Then when the eyes see something that appears delectable all the digestive juices begin firing in preparation for consumption. Conversely if an item looks unappealing or unsavory, Body decides it is indigestible and doesn't send the appropriate signals to prepare her Organs for eating. Because Body is resisting, nothing has been set up or readied for the incoming victuals. Hence the taste is impaired.

If you doubt this analysis ask any mother who has a toddler. If the food doesn't look good they won't touch it. Shortly after the initiation into solid foods every mother discovers how important it is for her meals to look appetizing if she wants her wild one to consume it. Anyone who has tried to feed a resistant child senses that they are behaving as if you are trying to poison them. Struggling with all their might they resist any attempt to feed them this food that, while perhaps perfectly delectable, just doesn't look good.

Those who are content with the standardized packaging of frozen dinners or fast food, probably call these children spoiled or picky. However because of the universality of this behavior I consider the importance of visuals to taste at the level of genetics. It might be enhanced by upbringing but is much more instinctual than that. This is why we call this need for aesthetics a necessity.

You can see why Antoine's Runners and Expeditors were so important to him. It was they who garnished and wiped his plates as well as serving them elegantly to the right Guest. It must be equally obvious why it was so disturbing to Antoine when incompetents like Silas, Luigi and Clarence fumbled around pretending that they knew what they were doing. When a plate was spotted or improperly garnished it was as if one of our Guests forgot to put his shirt on before coming to Dine. And when it was served to the wrong person or wrong table it was akin to a stinky fart in the middle of my Dining Room.

### **Disorder, Cleanliness and Aesthetics**

So what is this Principle? It has to do with an almost innate sense of balance and harmony. The Chinese have made a science of it, called Feng Shui, which has become very popular here in the West. The Chinese even believe that health and fortune are enhanced by positive Feng Shui while sickness and bad luck arise when the Feng Shui is bad. Regardless of whether you believe in these almost supernatural side effects, many are disturbed by a messy environment or sloppiness in general. Indeed



frequently, although not always, disarray is a sign of internal imbalance, mental or physical.

While disorder or clutter frequently reflects a lack of health and vitality, it also mars the Symmetry of our Dining Room. And Symmetry is intimately linked with Aesthetics. Symmetry is beautiful because it reflects the crystalline order of nature - exhibiting health and an inner harmony. Humans are attracted to Symmetry because it represents the greater order that they hope to partake in.

Although disorder merely suggests a lack of psychic health, an unclean environment can actually lead to sickness - because dirt harbors germs which can cause disease. That is why there is a Department of Health. Filth also dulls the sparkle of my Dining Room, which diminishes the precision of my beauty. So on this level cleanliness is directly linked to aesthetics.

### **Tarnish tastes bad?**

While grime inhibits my Beauty and can lead to disease it can also impair the taste experience as well. Although clean windows and an orderly dining room augment the Dining experience on subliminal levels, they don't have an actual influence upon the taste and scent molecules themselves. However one of Susan's upgrades had the potential to impair the physical experience of the food. This had to do with the innocuous transition from stainless steel to silver flatware.

Silver, even plated, requires more maintenance, as is true of many items of quality. The advantage of stainless steel is that it is inert and so remains constant, only needing to be washed regularly. Alternately silver oxidizes and so needs to be constantly maintained for both appearance and taste.

Taste, you might wonder?

The tarnish of oxidation definitely has a detrimental effect on taste. On a gross level it's like sipping soup off a clean but rusty spoon. Although the silverware is cleaned in a dishwasher, the surface grunge from oxidation remains so that the silver is not really clean. Eating off tarnished silver is like eating off a dirty utensil. For those with blunt sensibilities this might not be perceivable, but for those with a refined sense of taste, tarnish imparts a slight bitterness to the food, which could easily be the difference between good and spectacular. Just as dirtiness impairs the environmental sparkle, it can also impair the sparkle of the taste. Antoine and my most sophisticated Diners were well aware of these factors.

### **An aversive reaction to disorder**

Although some might not notice disorder and cleanliness and others might only respond intellectually, those blessed and cursed with internal aesthetics are affected physically. Antoine actually felt a negative bodily sensation when he entered the Dining Room and things were somehow out of order. It might have been stomach acids or it could have been some weird psycho-chemical excretion which was poisoning his system. But feel it he did. To relieve his disturbance he might respond angrily or rudely. "What kind of Waiters are you, with tarnished silver on your tables?" Antoine spat out disgustedly.

"Ass-hole!" - "Anal." - "Rude." - "Uptight." - "Obsessive." - "French." were just a few of the pejorative labels that his hostile behavior earned him. But he was just reacting to the environmental disturbance, which was aggravating to his almost instinctual sense of aesthetic necessity. Because he was a French chef Antoine did not have a choice as to whether he cared or not. His response came from his gut - from an internal imperative. It was not generated intellectually, nor was it induced by social pressure. The disturbance he felt was integral to his being.

This instinctual reaction was at the root of the cyclic hostility between Antoine and my Waiters. Antoine felt, justifiably so, that as a group they lacked the necessary attention to detail. Some in particular cultivated rapport with my Guests and their fellow Staff at the expense of the aesthetics of my Dining Room - neglecting details which Antoine considered important - including clean windows and floors. Not enough polishing. Too much gabbing. Some of them didn't seem to understand that Guest rapport and a well ordered Dining Room are not mutually exclusive events. It was the Manager's role to make sure that the slackers didn't forget these details. And if the Manager was equally afflicted by this lack of awareness, as in these times, woe to Antoine. Unfortunately Luigi was so involved in his schemes, my Waiters in their tips, and Clarence in his Wine that the details of my Dining Room were frequently left unattended - dust accumulating on table legs, windows streaked, and pictures askew.

### **The Necessity of a Well Ordered Environment**

All artists, whether musicians, poets, painters or writers have this same innate sense. However while dominating their creations, it might not dominate their physical environment. We've heard of or known messy artists who only live for their art. But Fine Dining is different. It is just as important for the physical environment to be attractive as it is for the food. Possibly the eyes are primed by the physical surroundings to have a greater appreciation of the food. If the environment is shabby, then the rods and cones of the eyes aren't readied for action. Conversely if the surroundings are gorgeous the eyes are immediately called into action and are ready to appreciate the delicate intricacies of the plate presentation.

Most housekeepers and gardeners also understand the importance of a beautiful externals to an internal sense of peace and harmony. It is only the highest level spiritual master who can find an inner ecstasy in the midst of chaos and disorder. Spiritual retreats regularly include an orderly environment - often nestled comfortably in the midst of a gorgeous natural setting far from the turbulence of the city, so that the participants can find themselves and/or balance their erratic personal lives.

Although Antoine didn't have any desire to meditate on mountain tops he did require an environment which reflected his inner sense of the Aesthetics. Accordingly it was imperative that the windows be clean, the glasses polished, and the tables and pictures on the walls be properly arranged and ordered. This innate feeling emerged instinctually from the ethno-genetics of his Being.

(I use the word '*ethno-genetics*' because Antoine's gene pool was so intimately connected with his culture and upbringing. His DNA probably contained gene sequences which had been inbred in and around Brittany for millennia, not mere centuries, or tiny decades, as it is for many of the humans here in California, where I reside.)

### **Shabby appearance innately disturbing**

Of equal importance to the satisfaction of this innate craving, was the appearance of my Service Family who worked the Front of the House. While Antoine didn't require that the Servers be physically handsome, his sense of external aesthetics demanded that they be neatly groomed and dressed in the proper attire. Further their bearing and posture must be upright and alert. These qualifications became more important as the position required more face to face interaction with the Guests. For instance it was mandatory that the Hostess and Maitre'd look immaculate, while it wasn't as important for the Bus to achieve the same level of grooming.

Most of my Floor Family maintained acceptable standards of appearance out of respect for me and my clientele, which was linked with their inner sense of aesthetic

necessity. However those that lacked this innate sense had to be reminded what it was to dress appropriately. Clark: "Go home and return only after you iron your shirt." Externally induced, not internally produced.

Of course the offenders called those who required them to hold to these seemingly arbitrary standards of attire - fussy, backward, or uptight. They didn't realize that these enforcers experienced a disturbance in their personal energy field when they saw employees in sloppy or inappropriate dress. These fashion police weren't told which laws to enforce, instead they found these violations innately disturbing. Instinct, not Choice.

This was Antoine. It caused him actual physical discomfort, especially when the Maitre'd or Managers, in particular, didn't achieve or enforce the minimum standards of dress required by his ethno-genetics. This is why Luigi's attire almost immediately put him in a foul temper. The visual dissonance shattered his internal harmony - his psyche disturbed and his organs excreting acids. Attempting to set things aright, Antoine would explode in fury: "What kind of costume is this?!"

Luigi was not the only recipient of Antoine's wrath. These outbursts led to the normal accusations and insults behind his back from those who, for whatever reason lacked his refined perceptions due to undeveloped aesthetic sensibilities. Or in Antoine's words, spoken disdainfully, of course: "They criticize me. It doesn't bother me; I've got broad shoulders. Besides I care nothing for their opinions, anyway. These vermin with their retarded or infantile appreciation for the finer things in life."

#### **The Aesthetically challenged**

Although some are driven by this innate need for Beauty others don't have a sense of aesthetic necessity, or very little. They don't notice when things are out of place - askew - dirty - unbalanced - disorderly. I'm not sure if their sense of aesthetics has been dulled by poor diet - by their cookie cutter housing developments and shopping centers - by an upbringing which was an assault on their innate sense of beauty - or if they were just not born with any sense of it. It doesn't matter. Some seem satisfied with mediocrity in all aspects of their life, which is their blessing because you humans seem to be surrounded it.

Not Antoine. His need for Beauty was thriving and acute. His joy and internal ecstasy when this necessity was satisfied was his blessing. His curse was the torture he felt, mentally and then physically, when the Beauty of my Temple was violated in any way. He was appalled at the lack of attention to detail that abounds. "Why am I cursed with these fools and simpletons? Don't they understand how important Beauty is to the Experience. People just don't care anymore. No respect."

I'm not sure if people don't care. More likely it's a case of arrested development, where they didn't get the right stimulus at the proper time in their upbringing and so didn't develop any sense of Beauty - or perhaps they've developed an aesthetic callous from abuse. Whatever the reason some humans seem to have no awareness of their external environment beyond what is absolutely necessary to get along. It was especially disturbing when my Dining Room Manager lacked this vital sense, which was all too frequently during this period and the trying times that lay ahead.

Antoine's Vision of my potentials, driven as it was by his innate sense of Beauty, was much more elevated than the rest, including Corporate, Staff, and Management. Everyone else, perhaps with the exception of Francis, my Creator, had lesser Visions, conflicting Visions, or no Vision. This was due to arrogance, ignorance, a lack of sophistication, or all three. It must have been frustrating for Antoine to have a Vision that no one else could see.

However at this point in time we thought that these aesthetic violations of Antoine's inner Vision were just temporary disturbances. Unbeknownst to any of us this was just the beginning. Like the dust clouds on the horizon from the pounding hooves of the horses of the Mongol hordes at first we paid them no mind - not realizing the imminent dangers that lay just ahead.

## Chapter 30: The Brain casts his spell

Battered, but relieved, when this unique month was past, we went back to providing our clientele with the Experience. Some just had Dinner and were on their way. Others derived a feeling of Status that they were better than the rest because they could afford to Dine with me. And yet others got Drunk on fine Wines to escape their every day life. However our favorites were those who became lost in the sensuality of Dining - shedding their petty selves to attain the state of At-One-Ment - a deep satisfaction with their place in the universe.

During this period Corporate was pleased to discover that over 95% of our Guests rated their experience with us as 'Excellent' on the comment cards he provided. We were proud of these results. However nothing remains the same.

### A stepping stone? or Differing Views of the Future

Unfortunately Luigi had other things on his Mind besides our Fine Dining Experience. He had his sites set much higher than Restaurant Manager. As with many Managers, this was just a stepping stone to a higher position in the corporate hierarchy.

Luigi was already thinking to himself: "This Restaurant Manager position will only be temporary. As soon as they see how good I am, they will make me F&B of the Coastal Inn - then GM of my own Hotel. Can't wait."

His Mind fed by the Collective Mind of Society was thinking upward mobility and all that entailed - more money, more prestige, more security. These things would, of course, bring him more happiness. This is the fundamental Western mythology. Of course the happiness that is sought is external rather than internal, therefore transitory, as Luigi was to quickly discover.

Unfortunately for Luigi, Susan's vision of the future was quite different than his. Even before she offered him the manager job her thoughts already were moving in an opposite direction to his. Let's turn the clock back a little to see what they were thinking at that time.

Susan, thinking to herself: "After my disastrous F&B hires of January, I need to be more cautious. Hmmm? This Luigi is far from ideal - too independent and his clothes were fashionable decades ago. Plus he's not properly subservient. But he is the best of a bad lot. I guess I'll give him a trial run as Restaurant Manager, while continuing to search for a F&B, who will do my bidding."

Susan to Luigi: "I already have a F&B, but I'm not sure he's going to work out. I'll hire you with the provisional title of Restaurant Manager."

Luigi: "What does that entail?"

Susan: "As Manager you must manage the Staff and run the Dining Room."

Luigi, to himself: "Manage Staff and deal with the Public? Yuck!" To Susan: "What about the F&B position that you advertised?"

Susan: "You must first prove yourself."

Luigi: "Then I'll be first in line when the F&B position opens up?"

Susan: "Most definitely. Just sign right here."

Thrilled, Luigi accepted the less desirable position of Restaurant Manager with the hope of moving up to the fabled F&B slot. With this transaction Susan became the personification of the faceless Corporation for Luigi. Dangling the F&B carrot, Susan was able to manipulate him to her advantage - he ever hoping for the promotion - always striving to please Susan - but never quite good enough.

## **The F&B Appeal**

Why was the F&B position so appealing to Luigi and why was Susan so committed to it? Let's see what they're thinking, at least on subliminal levels.

Susan: "Even if the position is expensive for such a small property, it fits my agenda perfectly. With the proper F&B I'll never have to deal with Ma Belle, her Staff or the Public, ever again. I'm beyond that. I hate all those messy emotional confrontations."

Similarly for Luigi: "I can't wait to become F&B. Then I will be a manager of managers. The lower level managers will act as a buffer zone between me and the masses with their confused emotional states. I will be able to avoid all that drama. Then when they see how good I am, Corporate will make me a GM of my own hotel. How great! I'll be even further removed from humanity."

I want desperately to be made F&B so that I will no longer have to deal with people. I don't really like people all that well. That is why I've been a Wine Steward for so long - only wine bottles to organize. They always show up and never talk back. As F&B I will only have to deal with other managers. I won't have to deal with those 'unpredictable' employees and guests any longer. That's just so messy. I'm beyond training bussers and dealing with customer complaints. By this time in my career I should only be training managers to do my bidding.

Actually the money and prestige are just icing on the cake compared to what the F&B position entails. The F&B only works with other managers. The F&B rarely deals with employees or guests. He mainly deals with salesmen and managers, all of whom are trying to please him. I know that I'll have to please the GM and Corporate. But that's child's play compared to the multiplicity of complaints from the Staff and Public. The F&B never has to deal with those murky details. Never having to deal with customers or staff - Heaven! F&B is the ideal position for me. I'll never have to do Floor Duty again."

Unfortunately for Luigi the F&B was just a ghost position at the Coastal Inn. Even if he got the position he would just be a glorified Restaurant Manager with a F&B title. The Coastal Inn was just too small to have a F&B who only deals with managers. There were simply not enough managers to manage. All food came out of the same kitchen, served by the same staff, whether for Ma Belle, Room Service or Catering. Although it was a good idea to coordinate these departments, the job was not big enough to absolve the F&B of his hated Floor Duty.

It's easy to see that these kindred spirits were both attempting to minimize human contact, thereby avoiding the uncomfortable emotions that inevitably arise when your species interacts. And they believed that their F&B fantasy would fulfill this desire.

### **The Fantasy attains a Life of its Own**

In a strange way Susan's fantasy merged with Luigi's to create a stronger fantasy - a common human mechanism. One person's delusions are hard to maintain in the face of Reality. But if these delusions are supported by a group of people, they attain a strength that is hard to dissolve. Then other humans get trapped by these collective delusions, becoming part of its momentum. The growing mass sucks others into its sway - the rolling snowball effect.

Conversely if no one gives it any fuel, the delusion simply fades away. By itself Susan's F&B Fantasy would have collapsed in the face of Reality. But supported by Luigi's desire for the position, the F&B Idea attained a strength that was relatively impenetrable. This is the Mob mentality which mindlessly supports the insanities of

nations and religions. Certain ideas would be considered idiotic when held by an individual, but are considered deep truths, even worth fighting for, when held by a large group. I'm afraid to even elaborate the more absurd examples for fear of retaliation.

With Luigi joining Susan's F&B Fantasy the Idea became independent of the people who believed in it. The Fantasy didn't even need Susan for support anymore, it had acquired a life of its own. Luigi was the perfect addition. His desire to become F&B instilled more pride in Silas and justified Susan's idea - making the Fantasy stronger than ever.

Desires have a peculiar power. When two children want the same toy that toy attains a desirability disproportionate to its inherent features. The child who is in possession holds on desperately, even though the toy has lost its appeal. The fact that someone else desires something invests it with much more appeal, than was intrinsically there. The rich, famous and powerful know that their external trappings don't bring happiness, but when the lower classes want what they have, they hold on frantically - even bribing governments to employ armies to protect their privileges.

With all these desires generating a greater field the F&B Fantasy was able to suck others into its sway, increasing its power even more. Positive feedback. Watch out. The momentum is self sustaining. It was years before this Idea died a natural death.

#### **The Denise Issue - Not Another Lawsuit?**

In the meantime Luigi's dream seemed to be verging on reality. Frustrated when he had to expedite in June Silas had kicked the wall and had fractured his foot. He hobbled through the summer. Then his wife got transferred to a job outside of Santa Barbara. Silas quit and simultaneously filed a lawsuit against Corporate for making him work with an injured foot. So much for marginalization as a strategy. The bitterness that is created bites back.

Luigi was ecstatic. The legendary F&B position was soon to be his. Unfortunately for him, Susan wasn't ready to give up her carrot.

Luigi on bended knee: "With Silas gone and the F&B position vacant, I think I deserve to be promoted."

Susan: "Not quite yet. Luigi, you must jump through a few more hoops yet. For one we must resolve this Denise issue."

When Susan was hired, there were just two restaurant managers, Lewis and Clark, who ran everything in the Coastal Inn related to food and beverage, After Lewis left, Clark ran everything by himself for the entire season of Autumn. Then in January Susan hired five managers to replace the two. Her vision of a well managed hotel included a Breakfast Manager, Dining Room Manager, Sommelier, F&B, and Catering supervisor. Unfortunately because the Coastal Inn wasn't that big these managers kept running into each other with not enough to do.

The two managers who ran into each other the most were Denise, the breakfast manager, and Luigi. They both thought that the other was incompetent and each attempted to undermine the other, especially in Susan's eyes.

Luigi: "Denise is an incompetent thief."

Denise: "Luigi is an incompetent sexist."

Although both exaggerated their claims, Susan knew that there was some truth in

their charges of mutual incompetence. After an extended and vicious battle that was going nowhere, Denise finally quit in November, just a few months after Silas left. She also filed a lawsuit against Corporate for character defamation, specifically mentioning Luigi. Although the courts eventually absolved Luigi of any blame or legal responsibility, a law suit had been filed against him. And a law suit is a fatal flaw in Corporate's world of promotions, successful or not. Corporate hates law suits. A little superstitious, he suspects that 'where there is smoke, there is fire.' We were to find that Corporate's intuitions were partially correct.

The upshot of the lawsuit was that Susan could not have promoted Luigi to the vacant position of F&B, even if she had wanted to - which she didn't. She loved dangling the F&B carrot to get Luigi to perform. However, obsessed with promotion, he still wasn't performing.

Susan: "How can Luigi manage managers, if he can't even manage the Staff?"

Corporate: "How could this Luigi manage a Hotel if he can't even manage a Restaurant."

### **Idea of Promotion obscures Reality of Job Well Done**

Susan's precautions concerning Luigi were well justified as his desire to become F&B distorted his performance. His Brain was so dominant that it had conquered his Mind, as Brain's tend to do - effectively blocking out the wisdom of the Little Voice. Here is a brief account of the Little Voice's valiant, yet doomed, attempt to free Luigi from domination by his Brain. (Note that the following conversation and many others like it occur on subliminal levels. Few of these ideas ever entered the Conscious Awareness of the human participants.)

Luigi's Brain: "Luigi and I are moving up the corporate ladder. Manager, F&B, GM, then Vice President and maybe eventually CEO. Corporate approval is primary. All else is secondary. Approval leads to promotion."

Little Voice: "Don't let your Idea of promotion obscure the Reality of a job well done. After all doing a good job leads to the promotion."

Brain: "Don't worry about us. We're on our way up the ladder. The next rung is the F&B position. If we act like a F&B then they will make us the next F&B."

Little Voice: "No, no. That way of thinking is fatally flawed. You must focus on doing a good job as Manager first."

Brain: "We're into creative visualization. If we focus on our upcoming promotion, then it will happen naturally."

Little Voice: "I'm warning you. You'd better focus on the job. Susan will reward you with a promotion if you do a good job."

Brain: "Only losers focus on the job. How boring! We're projecting our Vision past this dismal point to the promotion. Everything else will take care of itself. Next stop: F&B of the Coastal Inn. Job heaven. Managing managers. A stepping stone to the GM position. Plus we hate the job of Restaurant Manager. Such a lowly spot. Dealing with all those imperfect, messy, emotional humans. The Public has such high expectations and the Staff thinks they have a life outside the restaurant. They never behave as they should. When will they ever learn?"

Little Voice: "Uh, Luigi. I don't mean to interrupt, but maybe the best way to get the Promotion would be to do a good Job."

Luigi: "A good job?"

Brain: "Shut up! We've got a good fantasy going. Please don't spoil it. I think the best



way to get the F&B job would be to act like an F&B so that Susan knows that we're ready."

Little Voice: "But Luigi, you are the Restaurant Manager, not the F&B. Focusing on doing your job will impress Corporate; not pretending to be a F&B."

Brain: "You certainly are depressing. Here I was creating a heavenly future. Then you interrupt and throw a damper on it."

Little Voice: "The cold water of Reality. Luigi, you need to focus upon the Reality of your Job rather than the illusory projections of Brain."

Luigi: "Illusory projections?"

Brain: "But Reality never behaves how its supposed to, while my Imagination can create a world where everything behaves as it should."

Luigi: "Yes. Must behave."

Little Voice: "As Restaurant Manager you should always be on the Floor - making sure things are running smoothly."

Brain: "But that means dealing with messy unpredictable situations, where you will lose control."

Luigi: "Mustn't lose control."

Little Voice: "Don't worry about being in control, which is just an illusion anyway. Just listen to me, your intuitional sense, and everything will work out just fine."

Brain: "But that will undermine my authority. And I am in charge. Remember Luigi, you and I are one and the same."

Little Voice: "Not true, Luigi. You are separate. Brain is just meant to give advice, not make the decisions. Seize control of your life."

Luigi: "Seize control?"

Brain: "She doesn't know what she's talking about. All that 'women's logic' based upon superstition. Ignore her and listen to me. We are one and the same."

Fading Little Voice: "Wrong. Luigi, he's supposed to be your Servant - not your Master. He is only going to get you in trouble. It would be like letting the accountants run Ma Belle. They have no understanding of Art, Beauty, and the Experience. All they know is numbers, which, although useful, are only part of the package - not the whole thing."

Brain: "She's just jealous of our masculine relation. Stick with me and we'll go far. Ignore the Dining Room Floor - too unpredictable - nothing behaves as it should. Instead spend lots of time in our Office 'organizing things' - creating the perfect System - where everything behaves properly."

Little Voice, just a whisper: "Luigi beware. The F&B Fantasy, which your Brain created, has constructed an Idea filter, which has distorted or obscured the Reality of your Job. Unless you reverse course and listen to me, you are doomed."

Brain: "She's such an Alarmist. Logic applied to the imperfect world will create a perfect System, where there will be no problems. No doom. Instead you, I mean we, will be rewarded with the F&B prize."

Little Voice, now just the wind whispering in the trees: "What about the Experience?"

Brain: "Who cares about the Experience. It will take care of itself. We just need the F&B promotion - the next rung on the Corporate ladder. Right Luigi?"

Luigi: "Right sir."

Brain: "So stop wasting time on the Floor, which disturbs our equilibrium with all those female emotions. Spend as much as time as possible in our Office working out the Perfect System. And whatever you do, don't focus on the Results because they might contradict my, I mean our, conclusions."

Luigi: "Yes sir."

Brain: "And remember, this is all about us - and our Future."

Little Voice, now part of the white noise of the background: "Focus upon the Job at hand rather than the Job your Person would like to have in the Future. The Chef doesn't want a Cook, who gets too creative with his works of art. Nor does a Waiter want a Bus focusing upon Guest interaction at the expense of refilling water glasses and resetting tables. Nor does the GM want her Restaurant Manager acting like a F&B of a big hotel, when he should be managing the restaurant. Ironically your obsession with becoming F&B actually is hurting your chances of becoming F&B."

Luigi: "What's that noise? It must be the freeway."

Brain: "Don't worry Luigi. Put Reality out of your Mind. It is too disturbing. Let's reside in the F&B Fantasy land instead. It is much more comforting."

Little Voice: "Beware! The Universe loves to pop bubbles."

Universe: "Sure do. It comes naturally to me. I love to cram Reality down people's throats, especially when they resist."

Brain: "That's mean."

Universe: "Not really. If they would just relax and take their medicine, it goes down fairly easily."

Luigi: "Whaaa! I don't want to take my medicine."

Brain: "Relax. Susan agrees with us and she's the GM. She believes firmly in the Corporate hierarchy, where the F&B and the GM get to minimize their contact with the unpredictable world of humanity."

Luigi: "Whew! I was getting nervous there for a moment."

Brain: "Take it easy. There's nothing to worry about with me as your partner."

Universe: "We'll see about that. Let me tweak events a little to break Brain's stranglehold on Luigi's Soul."

### **The Consequences of Ignoring Reality**

Although I, Ma Belle, love all of my Staff, it always bugs me when they forget that they are here to serve me. It is especially irritating when my Managers are the problem. They should be part of the solution. It is their duty to focus my Staff on serving me to the best of their abilities - in the context they were meant to. No more, no less. This was why Luigi was incredibly aggravating to me. Instead of focusing the Floor Staff on servicing the needs of my Guests - which was serving me, his desire to be F&B clouded his attention. He forgot all about me in his continuing attempts to build an utopian system, which would need no management. These schemes distracted my Staff from focusing on me and I demand to be the center of attention. Instead of managing my Reality, Luigi was servicing his Ideas about me. And Ideas are always distorted - by nature.

Susan also lost track of my needs due to her F&B Idea and was suffering the consequences. She had lost two highly competent managers, Lewis & Clark, attempting to force her Idea of a resort hotel upon the Reality of the Coastal Inn - pounding a round peg into a square hole. Although Lewis & Clark disagreed with her, they had maintained and even enhanced the Experience for my Guests. The four managers, that she had hired to replace the two, had all said 'Yes Susan, I'll get on that,' but had all proved incompetent - disrupting my Guest's Experience through mismanagement. Furthermore two of the managers ended their employment with me by filing lawsuits against my Father. Not good.

These are the consequences of holding onto Ideas in the face of Reality. Both Luigi and Susan attempted to force their personal agenda on me instead of being sensitive to

me. They followed their own way rather than the way of the Universe - the Tao - the way things really are. Instead of being sensitive to my propensities - my existing conditions - my Reality, they imagined how they would like me to be. They based their actions towards me on this Idea of what I should be, rather than the real me. This is a recipe for disaster or divorce - projecting an ideal upon a partner rather than loving them for who they are. It is also the cause of much human suffering - focusing upon our Ideas of the way things should be rather than upon the Reality of the way they really are.

Thank you for listening. I feel much better now that I've been given an opportunity to vent. However in light of the following events, it doesn't seem that either Susan or Luigi learned their lessons. Fortunately they both have children who will train them.

## Chapter 31: Internal Rage and External Impotence

Although I didn't realize it at the time I was equally frustrated with the Managers. Specifically Luigi's habit of avoiding Floor duty drove me crazy. However I buried my reactions beneath the emotional calluses which protected my Heart from pain, Management consistently violated service standards that were integrated into the core of my Soul from being in the business for decades. It enraged me when Luigi and Clarence didn't fulfill certain duties that I considered essential - the classic conflict between the Ideal and the Real. Unfortunately however I was paralyzed by Brain's misconceptions. Let us see how Brain casts his spell on me.

### Ducking Combat

Me: "Where's Luigi?!"

Nicole the Hostess: "In his office."

Me: "What's he doing there? He should be on the Floor."

Nicole: "Writing next week's schedule. He said to notify him if anyone needed something important. Should I call him?"

Me: "No. It's all over now."

To myself: "Rage! Kill! Obliterate! Destroy! What does Luigi think he's doing anyway?! Doesn't he know that he is supposed to play the role of Host. He seems to view our Diners as Customers - degrading an intimate interaction to a monetary transaction. Instead he should treat them like Guests - granting them the utmost consideration by attending to their every need - regardless of the potential for financial gain. He should behave as if they were Guests in his own home - attempting to make them are as comfortable as possible - physically and emotionally, by adjusting lighting, music, and temperature to optimum levels. Instead he runs away.

What a coward! Cowering in his cave when he should be supervising the Staff to ensure that they too are treating these visitors to our Temple of Fine Dining like royalty. He should be ensuring that they are performing their duties to the best of their abilities - including quenching thirst and appetite - rather than goofing off in the back. As Maitre'd he should be leading the way - providing a good example so that all of us on the Floor play the role of Host to our Guests - making them as comfortable as possible - just as you would if they were visitors in your own home. Instead the idiot is writing next week's schedule. I wonder is this what he does when he has people over to his house? He's such a joke!

And that Boston, or Clarence as he prefers to be called now, always catering to the big spenders, neglecting the common man. This is driving me crazy. I've got to do something. I know. I'll give a talk to the Staff about playing the role of Host and listening. That should wake them up without hurting their feelings. I certainly wouldn't want to upset them by being too personal. No offensive comments."

On more subliminal levels, denied even to myself until my 10th rewrite: "I certainly wouldn't want to jeopardize my most favored waiter status."

Emotional coward that I was, I couldn't bring myself to directly confront either Luigi or Clarence about their inadequacies. So instead I gave this brief talk to the Staff, expecting that Luigi and Clarence would hear and understand. A futile hope.

Today's topic is ...

## **The Importance of Playing the Role of Host to our Guests**

Some of us seem to view the visitors to Ma Belle as Customers with a Dollar Sign on their foreheads. Instead we should treat them as if they were Guests in our own home with us playing the role of Host. This entails making our Guests as comfortable as possible. Comfort is an essential ingredient to the Dining Experience. Comfort allows our Diners to relax - neutralizing their anxiety which blocks their Awareness. This, in turn, frees their Body to have our Experience. While we Waiters play the role of Host to individual Guests; ideally the Maitre'd should play Host to all the Guests.

Playing Host is a great role for anyone to play because it cultivates incredible 'listening skills'. Developing these skills is a way of neutralizing Personal Ego. Being truly sensitive to others, means that the happiness of our Guests becomes our happiness - which means that our own personal agenda has disappeared. Our obsession with our own personal issues fades into the background, as we merge with our visitors in order to take them to higher levels.

Listening has two aspects, sensitivity and anticipation. The sensitivity aspect is related to interpreting the visual and auditory clues generated by our Guests. As we make our initial contact we need to be sensitive as to whether they are just in for Dinner or the full experience of Dining. If they just want to have a quick bite to eat and leave quickly, this desire should be satisfied as much as the desire to Dine in a leisurely fashion. Ideally all of us on the Floor, including Waiters, Bus, Hostess, Bartender, and Maitre'd, should treat our Guests as royalty - attending to their every need - giving them exactly what they want, whether it be the Fine Dining Experience, or just Dinner. Service should not depend upon how much they are going to spend.

All of us, including management, should also attend to the emotional needs of our clientele as well. While the Waiters take care of the Diners in their section, Management should circulate the Floor ensuring that everyone's needs are attended to. Some prefer to Dine privately, but others want to interact. This desire should be fulfilled by either the Waiter or Management. Of course if they are deliberately ignoring us, then we should remain unobtrusive until summoned - until the time has come for our services. Alternately if the Guest wants to interact, ideally one of us, including Maitre'd and Sommelier, should be there to interact with our esteemed visitors about any topic - including Food, Wine, Philosophy, or Child Rearing.

The other side of listening has to do with the anticipation of the Guests' needs before they ask. On the most basic level we should attempt to anticipate their physical needs.

"Would you like your second drink, now?" - "Another bottle of wine?" - "Maybe some more water?" - "A refill on your coffee?"

On higher levels we should even attempt to satisfy needs that our Guests are unaware of - for instance, the need to be appreciated.

"My, what lovely well behaved children you have." - "How lucky you are to have such a beautiful lady by your side."

On the highest levels, we act as Guides - leading our Guests to a Fine Dining Experience, whether they knew it existed or not.

"It's so great to have you here with us in this beautiful environment. Aren't those Crispy Maui Onion Rings wild. They are visually stimulating and give a

little crunch to the Scallops. Mix them up with the Chardonnay Mushroom sauce for a taste treat that can't be beat."

"You might try the Sanford Pinot Noir with your Ahi. It would complement it perfectly. After all food and wine create a heavenly synergy."

"Take your time. Enjoy the beauty of the Food and the Environment. Relax. Get a little buzz on. Settle into the Moment. No need to think about past and future. You are where it's at. There is no place that you'd rather be. Wallow in the Now."

In summary we should all attempt to play the role of Host to our Guests as a way of neutralizing our Personal Ego with all its attendant problems. As a side benefit it develops our listening skills which includes sensitivity and anticipation. On the highest level all of us are privileged to act as a Guide by priming our Guests with comfort and then pointing them in the direction of the Glorious Moment in which they reside. Thanks for giving me your attention.

Luigi to the assembled group: "We can see that Space is a refugee from the 60s with all his talk of the Now and Ego. Hope his talk has inspired you to give good service so that there will be no problems tonight. I'll be in my office writing the schedule if you need me."

Clarence: "And remember to push wine - even to the losers who just want a Beer or Ice Tea. They're not the clientele we're aiming for but, as Space pointed out, with the proper guidance we can convert them."

To myself: "Aurgh! Those dimwits didn't hear a word I said."

Angel: "Great Talk. I totally agree. I always try to treat our clientele like they're my best friends. It would be nice if everyone else could too."

Me: "Thanks. At least you were listening."

### **Detaching from my Heart**

Later on automatic subliminal levels denied even to me due to all the emotional noise that was blocking the airways.

Me: "I can't believe those idiots! <Anger and Rage!>"

Brain: "We must detach from these evil emotions. They are disturbing our peace of mind. After all they come from the unreal lower restaurant world which is based in illusion."

Little Voice: "Space, don't detach. This is Ma Belle's welfare we're talking about. Maybe your talk was too general. Why don't you approach Luigi and Boston individually and speak directly to them about your concerns. Then make a personal request. Your speech was a roundabout way of communicating which does no good whatsoever. Those who it's meant for never hear it, while those who don't need your message are always the ones to hear it. Angel was listening but he's not the one with the service problems. You've got to go face-to-face with Luigi."

Brain: "Face-to-face!? Yikes! Anything but that. No way. Avoid unpleasant situations. Must retreat into our Eastern religious philosophy. Remember we are almost enlightened. Repeat after me our favorite mantra. Detach from the unreal world of illusions. It only causes pain and suffering."

Me: "Yes. Must detach from unreal material world. Too much suffering."

Little Voice: "No! What about Ma Belle and her needs?"

Heart: "And how about me? I don't want to be numbed. I want to feel."

Brain: "Just the lower world of messy emotions. Detach Space."

Me: "Yes, must detach from pain."

Heart: "No, please. I want to be free to care and love despite the pain."

Little Voice: "Detach from results, not from mental suffering. Suffering reveals where your weakness are - where work needs to be done. You're just using detachment like a tranquilizer to avoid facing your fears of confrontation."

Brain: "Confront!? Anything but that. Run. We hate confrontation. Too complex with all those confused reactions. Not logical and controlled like my simple mantra. Much better to detach."

Me: "Yes detach. Clean, calm, orderly and controlled."

Brain: "Everyone will be impressed with how enlightened we are, because we never exhibit any negative emotions."

Me: "Yes. The world will be impressed with how enlightened I am."

Little Voice: "No it won't. This is just a facade. You're only fooling yourself."

Brain: "No we are wise. We do Tai Chi and have read a lot about the Eastern religions, including Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism."

Me: "Yes I am wise. And because I'm wise I will detach from these false emotions."

Heart: "No please. My emotions are real. They provide us with a passion for life. If you lock me up again I will retaliate with bitterness which will poison your vitality."

Little Voice: "No one will be impressed by your nonchalant response; they'll just think you don't care. But you do care."

Heart: "Yes we love Ma Belle passionately. We care deeply about her welfare. Please don't let Brain imprison me with his calluses again."

Brain: "Care about your inferior transitory plane of illusion? Hardly. Our sights are set higher than that. We are detached from your lower realm."

Me: "Yes detached from the pain and suffering of Ma Belle."

Little Voice: "But your emotional response betrays you."

Heart: "I care so deeply it hurts."

Brain: "That's why we need to detach from these negative emotions. They are all based in the misconception that the illusion is real."

Me: "Yes must detach from negative emotions."

Heart: "No!!!"

Brain: "Back in your cage."

Little Voice: "You'll be sorry. You will certainly bear the consequences of your supposed enlightenment."

In my 'quest for enlightenment' I continually attempted to detach from Heart's emotional response to the external world, which I considered to be the lower, inferior material plane of illusion. Unfortunately for me, my anger showed that I did care. However in a state of denial I didn't even acknowledge I was angry. Plus I was afraid that if I expressed myself and no one listened that I would get so frustrated and angry that my equanimity would be disturbed. So rather than speaking up to right the wrongs, I chose to remain silent.

I believe that the Universe set up this drama, in part at least, to open up my Heart and to get me off my ass and involved rather than always remaining on the sidelines pretending that I didn't care.

## Chapter 32: An Unholy Alliance

Meanwhile Luigi's Idea had not gone away. It had just been dormant. You might wonder what sparked its reemergence from its Dracula like sleep? Most likely it was his desire to prove himself: inspired in part by the Denise debacle, in part by his masculine need to leave his mark, and in part by continuing complaints about non English speaking Bus - not from our Guests.

### **"Lewis and Clark's Bus spoke perfect English"**

Karen still held onto her constant complaint, even though it had been partially responsible for Luigi's Plan, which she hated. She was still unhappy with the Bus situation, which she blamed on Luigi. Furthermore she continued comparing him unfavorably to Lewis and Clark - to his face.

Karen: "No offense, Luigi. But my Bus help still sucks. Specifically Viejo with his lack of English. This is not fair to the Guests. The Bussers were great when Lewis and Clark were here. What's your problem?"

Luigi: "I would love to hire English speaking Bus, but none have applied. That is why I came up with my Backwaiter System. It was designed to make you happy by giving you better back up help. But none of you cooperated with me."

Karen: "I don't want you to change the System. I just want Bus that speak English."

Luigi: "But I can't find any."

Karen: "Lewis and Clark didn't seem to have any difficulty."

Luigi: "Times have changed." To himself: "It's obvious that Karen doesn't respect me. Must get even."

Karen: "I'm just thinking of the good of Ma Belle and her Guests."

Luigi: "So am I."

Karen: "If so, you need to get rid of Viejo and hire some quality Bus."

Luigi: "I think we're going in circles."

Karen: "I'm not the only one who thinks this way. Antoine's on my side."

### **"If the Service Staff were only French"**

Of course Antoine wasn't totally innocent. He felt that the Service Staff should all speak English to communicate with our Guests, who are mostly Americans. Of course he preferred that those working the Floor all be French, feeling that they are the only ones who really understand. Because that was not a possibility, his second choice was to have them to at least be of European stock. Although these were his preferences, most of all he wanted professionalism in service, which meant showing respect for the ritual of Fine Dining.

Antoine's desire for Floor Staff with European heritage might sound a bit racist. However before you jump to any false conclusions, let me elaborate a little. Most restaurants have a theme, whether seafood, steak house or vegetarian - something to make them stand out from the rest. A common obvious theme is cultural, i.e. Mexican, Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Italian or French. In each of these restaurants the decorations attempt to reflect the culture. In the Oriental restaurants, i.e. Japanese, Chinese and Thai, especially, but in Mexican restaurants, also, the Guest expects the staff to be of the right cultural ethnicity, as well. In other words the Guest expects Thai people to be cooking and serving in Thai restaurants - Chinese to be serving you in Chinese restaurants, and Mexicans in Mexican restaurants. Although the owners of French and Italian restaurants would love to have French and Italian waiters, there are not enough and so they settle for Northern European Americans, a White American, as next best.



Hopefully they might even be able to speak a little French or Italian.

If one gets a white American server in a Chinese or Thai or Japanese restaurant or any other ethnic restaurant, one almost doubts the authenticity of the cuisine. It casts some doubt on the whole experience. On the other hand if one is in a restaurant with no ethnic theme, then the waiters can be of any culture, as long as they speak the right language.

As is normal, there are some fuzzy lines, Although nothing about our decor suggested French culture, our cuisine was distinctly Gourmet. Gourmet is linked to French cooking, whether California or French. More importantly Antoine was French. Therefore whether Corporate wanted the food to be international, continental, or California, it was French because both Francis Le Roi and Antoine were French. Although technically speaking Ma Belle was not a French restaurant, practically speaking she was. Antoine preferred workers of European stock on the Floor, not for racist reasons, but to lend some strange authenticity to his food.

Although in each of these ethnic restaurants it is almost necessary that the Waiter be the right ethnicity, this is not true of the Bus help. This is why the whole Bus issue was such an overreaction. The Bus help can be of any culture as long as they understand simple phrases such as, 'More water' and 'More coffee', and are willing to work hard. Frequently Bus are either college students, or people who can't speak English very well. In the city of Santa Barbara this position is most frequently filled by Latinos - whether the restaurant is French, Chinese, or Italian.

#### **Co-conspirators?**

Although Karen and Antoine just wanted English speaking college students as Bus, Luigi evidently couldn't find or attract any. Whether it was the labor pool or his lack of personal magnetism doesn't really matter; he couldn't. Ignoring the Reality of Luigi they continued to press their Idea upon him. The desire to appease or silence his critics and prove himself to Corporate inspired Luigi's Brain to develop a New Improved Plan.

Luigi's Brain: "Our new System will not only save Ma Belle Service, but Corporate will be so impressed that we'll get our promotion to the legendary F&B position."

Luigi: "F&B at last."

Brain: "Plus we'll never have to listen to Karen's complaints about the Mexican Bus ever again. In fact we can ignore any complaint under Ma Belle's antiquated Service System between now and then."

Luigi: "Ignore complaints?"

Brain: "Definitely. Just let them give you the energy to change the old System. Remember when our New Improved System is in place, there will be no more problems. I doubt that we will ever have to deal with complaints again."

Luigi: "Ah! No more complaints."

More importantly Luigi had gained a valuable ally, Clarence, the Wine Steward. Although he was now responsible for anything to do with Wine, he still had to run the Floor as Assistant Manager because we were such a small establishment. However as soon as Clarence had been 'promoted' to management, he immediately minimized his Floor duties. Some, including Antoine, would say that he almost stopped working. Immediately sensing a kindred spirit with common goals, Luigi waited for the opportune time to make his pitch.

Clarence: "The waiters might make the tips, but they have to run around like chickens. As managers we are not supposed to work. We are supposed to manage their work."

Luigi: "Let's turn that dream into a reality."

Clarence: "What do you mean?"

Luigi: "To become a real class act, Ma Belle needs to change to a Backwaiter System like they have in France. It works great there."

Clarence: "But it caused so many problems with the Staff the last time. And they are my friends."

Luigi: "I've fine-tuned it. It won't cause any more problems this time. And just think if we had Waiters, Backwaiters, and Bus to manage, you could spend more time selling wine and less time dealing with complaints because there won't be any. The Service and Staff will take care of themselves because of my Backwaiter System."

Clarence: "I don't know."

Luigi: "Just imagine yourself in charge of multiple Service tiers - Directing Waiters, Bus, and, we can't forget, Backwaiters to do your bidding. We will become an exclusive House - just catering to the wealthy. We won't have to deal with the lower classes anymore. Ma Belle will have so much Status that the Rich and Famous will fill our tables with Diners - creating waiting lists. We'll even fill our pockets with side tips for dispensing the best tables. Ma Belle will be like the Fine Dining Restaurants of Paris, London, San Francisco, and New York. All this will happen if we just adopt my Backwaiter System. What do you say, Clarence?"

Clarence: "Status and more Money? Hmmmm."

Luigi: "A side benefit of the European multi-tiered Service is that there will be more people scurrying around. That means we will have to do less and supervise more."

Clarence: "Increased Status and a Life of Ease? Now that you put it that way, how could I say No? What's there not to like?"

This merger of fantasies bonded Clarence and Luigi in a way that no one suspected. From this point these co-managers of our Dining Room, were constantly buzzing together like conspirators. Planning for the return of the Backwaiter System each complaint about the old outmoded System just fueled their fire for change.

Both: "Our New Improved System is foolproof. We've thought about it a lot. We have addressed the problems that had previously emerged. This time, acting in concert, we are not to be denied. We are going to force our children to take their medicine. They will love us for it in the long run. A type of hard love. We are virtuous as well as smart."

### **Some Unwanted Information**

It was mid December of our eighth year. Although Luigi normally didn't eat with us at mealtime, tonight he did. This was a bad sign. It meant that something was up.

Luigi: "We're going to use the Backwaiter System again."

Collective groans.

Luigi: "And this time we're going to make it work."

Me: "How about if we wait until January, during the slow season?"

Luigi: "I'd rather get it going sooner than that. Clarence and I have fine tuned the System. It will improve Service in no time at all."

Angel: "I agree with Space. Let's wait until January."

Karen: "Do we have to go back to that System at all? Last time it was a nightmare."

Luigi: "We've been giving it lots of thought. We are going to make it work. It'll be better for everyone. Trust me. But Susan doesn't want me to disturb the Staff. If it will make you feel better, we'll start it in January."

This advance warning of the imminent return of the Backwaiter System, caused the entire Staff to simultaneously groan: "Why?"

### Chapter 33: Afraid to Live

Emotionally agitated due to Luigi's revelation I wanted to yell and scream - attached as I was to excellent Service for Ma Belle's clientele.

Me: "Aurgh! The Backwaiter System was a nightmare the last time we used it. Must destroy Luigi for destroying our peace. Aaiiieee!! I can't take it. I'm getting a job as a garbage collector."

Little Voice: "Space. Snap out of it. Chill. Remember the external world of transitory phenomena is all an illusion. Don't take everything so seriously."

Me: "Easy for you to say. You're not involved in it like I am."

Brain: "We've been through this already. Why do we have to do it again?"

Me: "Yeah, why do we have to go through this again?"

Little Voice: "Break away from Brain's projections. They are distortions and exaggerations."

Brain: "Service is going to suffer. Customers are going to be unhappy. It's going to be another disaster."

Me: "Unhappy customers. Problems. Complaints. Agony!"

Little Voice: "Take a deep breath. Relax. Stressing out will only make things worse."

Brain: "Ma Belle will go out of business. I'll have to find a new job."

Me: "A new job!? Yikes! Starting at the bottom again. Nooo!"

Little Voice: "Detach from your Brain, Space. You are not him or his projections."

Me: "That's right. I'm not his projections."

Brain: "Yes, you are. Everyone agrees. We are the same, Space. My world is your world. I am smart and she is unrealistic. Unemployment and homelessness are right around the corner according to my predictions."

Me: "Alas. I'm doomed. I'm a failure as a human being."

Brain: "Totally inadequate. You should have gotten a job as a teacher, like I told you. Then we wouldn't be in this predicament. But you went ahead and listened to her instead. If you had only listened to me, we would be secure and safe right now rather than being a victim of circumstance."

Me: "If only I had listened to my sensible logical Brain, I would be overwhelming happy right now."

Little Voice: "Space, get a hold of your Self. You're freaking out. Time to meditate. Put out the wild fire created by your Brain. Take a bath in the Void. Cleanse the Mirror of your Mind of these emotional attachments which are distorting your perception of Reality."

I went into a deep meditation - focusing upon my breathing, my posture, on relaxing my muscles. But disturbing thought trains kept ruining my concentration. I began to observe these thoughts to neutralize their power.

Me: "I am not my thoughts. They are just clouds in the empty sky of my Mind. Watch them, but don't attach to them. Let them go where they want to go. But don't jump on the thought train. It will only lead to stress, which leads to sickness and fear."

Brain: "Problems and more problems. Backwaiters. Turbulence. Luigi and Clarence. Bad!"

Me: "These are your thoughts, not mine."

Brain: "But I thought we were partners."

Me: "I'm breaking off our relationship for now."

Brain: "Ah boss. I'm just trying to help out by pointing out potential problems."

Me: "You're causing more problems than you're solving. So shut up! If you don't mind. Give me some peace from your endless chatter."

Brain: "But boss ..."

Me: "Quiet. We need to address these emotional attachments that are causing me such distress. Let us focus our attentions upon why we are so disturbed by the return of the Backwaiter System."

Brain: "Calamity and Change."

Me: "Silence. Besides the obvious."

After the emotional wind died down a bit, Little Voice: "If you feel that the Backwaiter System is bad, why don't you speak up?"

Brain: "Speak up? Aaiiee! No way. Remember what happened when we spoke up before."

Me: "No, I can't. What happened?"

Brain: "You can't remember? You must be getting senile. We've based our entire life's strategy on it."

Me: "What?"

Brain: "You probably don't care. After all you broke off our partnership."

Me: "Don't be so sensitive. Besides you're my valued servant, not my partner.. Now, refresh my memory. I'm intensely curious. I think we're getting somewhere."

Brain: "Remember we were locked up in solitary confinement by the authorities for speaking up."

Me: "What!?"

Brain: "When we were younger, we were regularly shut up in a closet by our father for speaking out against perceived injustices."

Me: "I don't remember that at all."

Brain: "It was before our conscious memory. It all happened between the ages of two and three."

Me: "This is getting juicy. Tell me more."

Brain: "We formed an automatic response to solve this problem. 'Avoid solitary. Don't speak out.'"

Me: "This was the unconscious mantra that you've been playing over and over since my early childhood?"

Brain: "Yes. It has worked out well, hasn't it. You haven't gotten imprisoned, have you?"

Stunned by this insight, Me: "I've imprisoned my self. My fear of speaking up has inhibited my involvement in Life."

Brain: "It's for the best. A secondary mantra which we derived from the first is: 'Don't get involved. It will only lead to difficulties.' But these mental slogans have proved effective? After all you haven't had any serious external problems for years."

Me: "Just the internal problem - that I've been afraid to Live."

The waves of insight were cascading over me.

Overwhelmed, slowly, quietly Me: "Ahh! This is why waiting tables was such a successful Life solution for me."

Brain: "Of course. It's brilliant. That way we never have to get involved. We can avoid the problems of living."

That was what my Brain thought anyway. Brains tend to create the illusion of permanence - so that their Plans will be justified logically. In fact there are only

temporary apparent solutions to temporary apparent problems. Indeed waiting tables did give me a temporary respite from involvement. However the Universe had other plans for me. Watch what happens in the following months.

Overcome by the breakthrough, I sank deeper into meditation - washing my Mind in the Quietude.

Immersed in emptiness, my Little Voice provided direction: "Why not say something to Boston, or Clarence, as he's now called?"

Me: "Great idea. He used to be a waiter. He'll understand. Maybe he can talk some sense into Luigi."

Brain: "What about solitary?"

Anxiety rising Me: "Solitary?"

Little Voice: "Boston is your friend. He would never retaliate. Just approach him in a reasonable fashion - without emotional attachment."

## Chapter 34: A Devotee of Status

Unaware of the alliance between Clarence and Luigi, I engaged Clarence in conversation in an attempt to prevent the return of the Luigi's dreaded System.

Me: "Isn't there any way we could avoid this Backwaiter System. It was a disaster the last time we used it."

Clarence: "It's unavoidable. Luigi showed me the light."

I shuddered, realizing that I was appealing to an authority who had already been corrupted.

Clarence: "I like his vision of an elite Gourmet restaurant with a tiered service system like they have in 3 Star French restaurants - a Maitre'd, Sommelier, Head Waiters, Backwaiters, Runners, Expeditors and Bussers.

Me: "Do we really need all of that? It will cause so much confusion. Why not fine tune what we have."

Clarence: "We're aiming for the top. The old Service System is just that - old. The new System is intended to attract the wealthy cosmopolitan set. Ma Belle is so classy, she should only cater to the elite - no riff raff. I'm only thinking of her good, of course."

Me: "*Right*. This elevated opinion you have of Ma Belle is distorted. Her reality is quite different. You're only pushing that image to justify your agenda."

Clarence: "No, you don't have enough respect for her. You have set your sights too low. We're aiming to be a 5 Star restaurant."

Me: "You have delusions of grandeur. Ma Belle is located in a sleepy coastal town inside a nice middle class hotel - not at all fancy."

Clarence: "With the Status our System will bring, Ma Belle will attract the upper classes like bees to honey."

Me: "Have you forgotten that Ma Belle is here first and foremost to enhance the Hotel, with their bourgeois clientele."

Clarence: "Don't worry. Our European System will upgrade the restaurant thereby also upgrading the Hotel. It's a win-win situation. With enough Status anything is possible. The well-to-do will be fighting to get a seat."

Me: "But Status is just one of the Brain's distortions - a lower state, not worth pursuing. Unfortunately Diners are frequently corrupted by their brains to worship Status, which distracts them from the Direct Experience of Reality - Ma Belle's Vortex of Sensuality."

Clarence: "And what's wrong with that? Status rules. Your so-called Direct Experience is only for those who can't afford the best."

Me: "What's the best? The other night I waited on a group of very wealthy people who had supposedly come in to Dine - multiple courses each accompanied by a variety of expensive wines. One particular Guest - one of Corporate's executives had a permanent scowl - as indicated by the deep wrinkles etched onto his face. He and another gentlemen were comparing expensive wines that they had consumed in expensive restaurants in exotic settings throughout the world. The one with the omni-present frown said, 'We are some of the fortunate few who can afford to regularly drink such fine wines. A true Fine Dining Experience.' No animation, enthusiasm or vitality. Just blah. A corruption to be sure. This type of uptight, snobby Diner makes me yearn for the simpler side of the restaurant business. Sometimes I fantasize about working at the Castle."

Clarence, disdainfully: "The Castle is for the common man. Me, I prefer to serve the

privileged elite - drinking fine wines - feeling special - better than the rest."

Me: "I know the Castle's Guests aren't sophisticated, but they aren't pretentious either. They are certainly boisterous on occasion, but at least they aren't so rigid and stern - seeming as if they had heard some bad news - angry at something - a bad taste in their mouth that won't go away. This is the consequence of constantly worshipping Status."

Clarence: "Each to his own."

Me: "I would even say that the craving for Status detracts from the taste of the food. The wealthy, obsessed with their exclusive money games, where their primary desire is to impress their so called friends and acquaintances with their opulence, lose track of what Dining is all about - an orgy of the senses. To those worshipping Status, the food, wine, service, and atmosphere are only important to the extent that they create jealousy in those around them. Wrapped up in trying to be 'better than' they lose track of being 'content with', which is a necessary precondition to fully experience the sensuality of Dining."

Clarence: "Contentment is too boring - not enough drama. Being 'content with' is for those who have given up trying to be the best. Who needs it, when you have money? Peace and harmony is for you hippie types. The rest of us go for the gold. Striving to rise above the rest motivates us to transcend ourselves. Status inspires us to struggle for something more, while contentment lures your type into a life of stagnation."

Me: "I hardly think that the ecstasy of Dining and the contentment you are referring to are the same."

Clarence: "Whatever."

Me: "Why can't you just be happy with things the way they are?"

Clarence: "To be happy with things the way they are means you have given up trying for more. Me, I prefer the tension of striving to be part of an elite club. And I love the feeling of exclusivity that comes with it. This is why I prefer the feeling of Status; it is only accessible to the elite, while your Experience is for everyone."

Me: "Not quite. The ability to truly taste the food and see the view is available to anyone with a clean Mind, but it is denied to those who are lost in the pursuit of Status. This obsession with being superior detracts from the ability to just sense. In attempting to be 'better than' your devotees of Status dissipate their attention on their standing with others - always looking over their shoulder to see who's gaining - as they're passed up. In contrast those who aren't lost in these meaningless comparisons are able to fully enjoy the ecstasy of the Moment. Champion athletes reach world class status because they are specialists at concentrating all of their energy upon their goal. If anything distracts them, including trying too hard, the championship eludes them. World class musicians must also focus all of their energy upon the music to merge with the performance and achieve the higher states. Conversely wasting energy on comparisons draws our Guests away from the direct sensations of the food, wine, and atmosphere. Those who aren't draining their attention in the 'who's superior' game are able to really experience the Moment, which leads to the sacred experience of At-One-Ment - the sense of being at home in the Universe."

Clarence: "Most aren't content with 'being at Home'. They want to 'be the best'. And they are inspired to be the best because of Status."

Me: "But the rewards of Status are transitory. Like fast food they provide no long term nourishment and are actually unhealthy. Instead of feeling At-One-With, those



worshipping Status feel On-Top-Of. This feeling of being On-Top-Of has a momentary rush associated with it, but is always balanced by being On-the- Bottom. Somebody always has more."

Clarence: "So? Even if it's only for a short time, I love being On-Top-Of - looking down on the rest of the world. Then I get bragging rights."

Me: "Why do you need to brag about the sensual experience of Dining?"

Clarence: "Hate to break it you; but your sensual experience is too subtle for most. No bells and whistles. Nothing to brag about. And that's half the fun. Boasting to others - 'We spent \$200 on dinner at Ma Belle. We drank Dom Perignon and had Filet Mignon and Lobster. It was expensive. But I'm glad I'm wealthy enough to afford it.' - It's fun to see others turn green with envy."

Me: "But Fine Dining is it's own reward. It is beyond words. There is no need to brag about it to others to justify it. Quantifying an event doesn't make it better."

Clarence: "It does to me. It gives me a great deal of satisfaction."

Me: "But this attitude is based in division, while Dining is all about integration. Status is Two, higher and lower, while Dining is One, pure Experience, unadulterated by the Duality - the ordinary world of better and worse - which brings so much Pain."

Clarence: "But most are addicted to the Duality. That's why they love my Status more than your contentment. Although there is more pain, the quest for Status also brings more excitement. The tragic struggle to be the best yields much tension and drama. People love it and so do I. I find peace boring. Something for older folks, like yourself. Those of us who are young prefer the constant striving."

Me: "But expending energy impressing others in a manifestation of Personal Ego drains valuable energy from the Quest for Awareness. Lost in the illusory world of Personal Ego, the Person never escapes the labyrinth of his or her own making. They get distracted on a Side Path - out of the Mainstream - never to fulfill their Individual Destiny because of lack of Awareness."

Clarence: "Fancy words you throw about. Quest, Destiny, Side Path. The way I view it is that Status inspires humans to pursue their Quest for Power, so that they can achieve their Destiny which is to be Rich, rather getting side tracked by Contentment, which pulls them out of the Mainstream of Humanity."

Frustrated Me: "You'll never understand."

Clarence: "Probably not. But I think you're exaggerating the harms of Status to bolster your spiritual elitism."

Me: "Touché."

Clarence: "We're just playing with words anyway. You make too much of our differences. We are actually allies. Status frequently catalyzes the Quest to be the best - which aims at perfection. And this desire for perfection leads the Public to have our Dining Experience."

Me: "True. But regardless of whether Status is worthy of pursuing or not your Backwaiter System will be bad for Service. And if Service is bad our Status will fall."

Clarence: "Then so be it. If we fail, at least we tried."

Me: "Aurgh!"

## Chapter 35: Not quite ready Doing Nothing by Getting Involved

To still the thoughts racing through my Mind, I entered another meditation. However the situation inside my Head was quite complex as Brain and the Little Voice were vying for my attention.

Me: "I can't believe that Clarence - supporting Luigi's System because he thinks it will bring more Status. Sheesh!"

Brain: "Emotional disturbance. Retreat. Detach from Ma Belle's world of illusion."

Little Voice: "Detach from emotional attachment, not Ma Belle's world."

Me: "What are they thinking? It was such a disaster. Aurgh!"

Brain: "Seek peace within. Abandon the transitory world of Maya."

Little Voice: "Disconnect, but don't abandon Ma Belle."

Me: "What should I do then."

Little Voice: "Empty your Mind by concentrating on breathing. And watch what emerges from the Void."

Me: "In - Out - In - Out. Ah! Peace."

Little Voice: "How about an alternative to Luigi's Backwaiters?"

Me: "An alternative?"

Little Voice: "Maybe some kind of Team System like you used in your last restaurant."

Me: "That's it. As always the right course emerges from quietude."

Little Voice: "Now go pitch it to Susan."

Me: "Susan!?"

Little Voice: "Of course. How she going to know about it if you don't tell her?"

Me: "Oh great! That's discouraging. Now I have to do something."

Brain: "No, you don't. The world of phenomena is all illusion, anyway. No need to bother about it. I've read so much about this that I'm an expert."

Me: "Quiet down, Brain. I've seen through your schemes."

Little Voice: "Good. Although the external world is nothing but a Game, the internal world of emotional growth is Real. You must face your fears of the illusory external world. This is the only way you can break the chains that your Brain has constructed to shield you from Life."

Me: "Darn! I have to get involved. My Little Voice has revealed a course of action. Now I must to act on it. Or else bear the consequences."

Brain: "Beware of speaking up, Space. Remember solitary confinement. I'm warning you, it's dangerous getting involved."

Little Voice: "There is no need to worry. Relax. It's safe to speak up. All danger to your position is illusory. You are well respected - with a good reputation. They are certainly not going to fire you."

Me: "You're right. My position would not be endangered in any way by speaking up."

Brain, panicking now: "But Space, what about our projects? Remember wu-wei - non-action in the midst of action. Speaking up would be doing something, which is Action. This would violate your Taoist roots. You need to conserve your energy for our real projects, rather than wasting it on the unreal restaurant world."

Me: "This is true. Must conserve energy. Must continue doing Nothing."

Brain: "Exactly. This is the most efficient use of energy."

Little Voice: "Brain is tricking you again. He is confusing efficiency with sheer laziness, which is just an excuse for avoiding confrontation."

Brain: "Confrontation? Yikes! Run for your life, Space. Retreat into doing Nothing. It is much safer that way. No risks. Besides it's the Taoist way. And we're Taoist, right?"

Me: "Of course. We are very wise."

Little Voice: "Space, snap out of this verbal trance your Brain has created."

Brain: "We are Taoists. We're pursuing non-action. Please don't interrupt us with your trivialities."

Me: "Yes, don't interrupt us. We are wise Taoists."

Little Voice: "Speaking up to defend something you love is natural. It is like protecting your family. Your Brain is tricking you into doing Something by blocking this natural movement. Your internal urge is to get involved with Ma Belle, protecting her from harm. To express yourself is natural. Blocking this urge is unnatural. Getting involved is still doing Nothing because the impulse emerged from Quietude. Resisting this impulse wastes your vital energy, creating blockages elsewhere."

Brain: "But we don't have enough vitality to speak up. We don't really care about the lower restaurant world. Do we, Space?"

Me: "Yeah, I am pretty lazy."

Little Voice: "Space. Your Brain is blocking your urge for involvement by appealing to your laziness. Is laziness just a cover for fear? This is a question you must ask yourself."

Me: "You're right. Laziness is just the Packaging which conceals my Fear. All I need to do is open the Package to find my Fear, which is the Key to my Life."

Little Voice: "Exactly. Couldn't have said it better myself. Your Plan emerged from the Emptiness, Space. You must act on it. Or you will be cursed."

Me: "Hmmm? Certainly don't want to be cursed. My Plan is far superior to Luigi's Backwaiter system. I also feel the Staff would be enthusiastic about my System - because it would enhance Service rather than detract from it. This would also make our Guests happier. Everyone associated with creating the Experience would benefit from my Plan. Good for our Guests, for our Staff - hence good for Ma Belle. Alternately the Guest Experience, the Staff, hence Ma Belle, would all suffer from the Backwaiter System."

Brain: "But what if this is not true? What if Luigi's System is better?"

Me: "Yeah. What if I'm wrong. I have been wrong before - more than a few times in my life."

Little Voice: "It doesn't matter. All that matters is that you act on what you feel to be true. Then respond naturally to circumstances - not holding onto mental expectations."

Me: "My Plan would definitely upgrade our service and solve most of the present problems. My System is certainly better than Luigi's. I have no doubt about that."

Little Voice: "Good. With all this internal motivation, you need to speak up - for your own good, if no one else's."

Me: "Enlightened to my Delusions, speaking up should be easy - a slam dunk."

*Right!* Escaping Brain's influence is an easy concept to understand, but hard to accomplish. Brain continually manipulates and controls us by permeating Mind with 'logical, but problematic scenarios' to overwhelm the intuitions of our Little Voice. Full of these *logical* thoughts Mind is prevented from hearing his other Advisors.

## Dropping the Ball

In late December just before the Backwaiter System was to be reinstated, I attempted to pre-empt disaster with my Plan. I wrote a 3 page proposal, which I was going to present to Susan and Luigi, simultaneously. However my Mind, full of Brain's thoughts, was afraid. Working on subconscious levels Brain spread propaganda to subvert my best intentions. If I could have just stopped doing Something by emptying my Mind of Thoughts, then I could have manifested naturally. Brain is a tricky fellow though.

Brain: "What if Luigi and Clarence retaliate against you for your insubordination."

Me: "You can't fool me. We've been through this before. What could they possibly do to me?"

Brain: "Well for one, you are their favorite now. They always give you more tables than the rest. Luigi thinks you are the best. If you stand against him, he will certainly punish you."

Me: "I didn't think of that. You really think he would?"

Brain: "Of course. That's the kind of guy he is. Don't be so naive."

Me: "But what about the Staff, the Guests? What about Ma Belle?"

Brain: "It's every man for himself. That's why you love Luigi. He likes you - not like that Clark - who liked all the women. It's your turn to be the favorite. Time to exploit your advantages. "

Me: "But what about the Plan which was revealed to me by my Little Voice - emerging from the Void?"

Brain: "Don't listen to her. If you speak up, not only will you lose your favored waiter status, but you will be punished with a poor station, lousy tables, and who knows what else - maybe scheduled for Sunday Brunch - maybe even the dreaded Breakfast shift. I'm telling you, for your own good, you should remain silent. You really don't want to get involved. Think of yourself first."

Me: "Breakfast? Yikes!"

Little Voice: "But everyone else will suffer. Think of Ma Belle."

Me: "But I don't want to be closeted."

Brain: "For good reason. Keep quiet. It's not your responsibility any way. You're just a waiter."

Me: "You're right. My Plan, although good for the Whole, will probably not be so good for me."

Little Voice: "But what about our Plan, which emerged untainted from quietude to point the Way."

Brain: "Ignore the Little Voice. Too naive. Not logical like me. Run from fear into self interest. Besides the Backwaiter Plan might work better this time."

Little Voice: "No, it won't. It was a disaster before and it will be a disaster again. Your plan was successful before and will be successful again."

Brain: "Sunday Breakfast and Brunch shift for the rest of the year as punishment."

Me: "Aiiieee!?!? I'll do anything to avoid that possibility."

Brain: "Just shut up. And do your job. You are just a Waiter."

Little Voice: "What about the Experience?"

Me: "Yes. The Experience. I must protect the Experience."

Ma Belle: "That's my boy. You're finally remembering your training."

Brain: "How about a compromise? So you don't appear to be leading a rebellion, show your Plan to Luigi and Clarence, before you show it to Susan. It's not in good taste to

go over their heads.”

Me: “Sounds like a good plan to me. Everyone agree?”

Little Voice: “What a cop-out!”

Brain: “You’re just jealous and bitter that he chose my advice over yours.”

Little Voice: “You won by appealing to his chicken shit side.”

Brain: “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me. Nyah, Nyah.”

### **Brains unite to undermine my best intentions**

And so it came to pass. I presented my Plan to Luigi and Clarence.

Luigi: “What’s this Trunk System? Pooling tips - teamwork? That’s European. We’re American.”

Clarence: “Sounds Communist to me. I prefer free enterprise. Competition to get ahead - that’s what America is all about. Incentive and struggle make us great.”

Although I had a million comebacks, I said nothing at all.

Brain: “Don’t speak up or you’ll be locked in solitary confinement - like before.”

Little Voice: “Space, wake up! You’re operating from old mental habit patterns rather than from a state of conscious awareness.”

Brain: “Play it safe. Avoid imprisonment.”

Luigi: “Give our System a chance. I know it will work. We’ve thought about it a lot.”

Thinking to myself: “I know full well how thoughts are divorced from reality. I should say something.”

Brain: “No! Better to remain silent rather than speaking up. Remember getting locked in the closet. We don’t want to go there again.”

Little Voice: “Space, you are just afraid. You are operating on unconscious behavior patterns. Break free.”

Brain: “All you need to do is retreat graciously and give their Plan a chance. That is the fair thing to do.”

Little Voice: “You are letting these *logical ideas* fool you because you are afraid. It is stupid for you to watch from the sidelines as their Plan disrupts the Ma Belle Experience.”

Me: “I just don’t want to make waves.”

Little Voice: “You’re reacting from fear.”

Brain: “Not at all. You’re acting from a position of superior wisdom. You are not a coward. You are acting spontaneously from the elevated Taoist state of wu-wei - non action.”

Me: “You’re right. I am so wise - undoubtedly superior to the common men, who surround me.”

Little Voice: “You’re letting Brain’s faulty logic trick you into thinking you’re superior, when you’re just afraid. You should know better.”

Brain: “Now that Luigi’s and Clarence’s Brains have joined me, you must go along with the Crowd. They are so logical - just like me. Besides you’re helpless in the face of two managers.”

Little Voice: “Space, those managers have little credibility compared to you. At least engage Susan in the service decision. Don’t give up your power just because you are afraid. You will certainly suffer along with the rest.”

Maybe I was looking forward to the chaos to take my Mind off the scary advice of the Little Voice, - “Get involved.” Maybe not. However in retrospect I can safely say that I acted stupidly by avoiding involvement - especially in view of all the problems

which ensued.

## Chapter 36: The Return of the Backwaiters

After the New Year's celebration, the Luigi/Clarence Backwaiter System was back - with a vengeance - stronger than before - like the bacteria that is not completely killed by the antibiotics.

### Expediting Managers?

In the first weekend of January, Luigi ate the Staff Dinner with us again - a bad sign.

Luigi: "OK everyone, we are going to be using Backwaiters again. I know what you are thinking - 'There were lots of problems the last time we used it'. But don't worry.

Clarence and I have worked out the bugs. We have upgraded the System. We have spent lots of time thinking about this. Slick, Blair, and Punky are going to be the Backwaiters tonight. This should make you especially happy Karen. No more Viejo."

Karen: "I guess. But who's going to expedite and run food if Slick, Punky and Blair are on the floor."

Slick: "And what about our Tips? We don't want a reduction in pay."

Luigi: "Don't worry. We've thought of everything. Chef Antoine agreed to expedite his own food. Because he doesn't take tips, the tips that are normally given to the Expediter will be given to the Backwaiters instead. So you Expeditors will actually make more money as Backwaiters."

Slick: "I'll believe it when I see the Green."

Me: "How can Antoine expedite when he doesn't have a Sous-Chef?"

Clarence: "He promised. He can't back out now."

Me: "When did he promise?"

Clarence: "Last November."

Me: "Before he lost his Sous-Chef. Have you asked him recently?"

Luigi: "No, but he promised."

Karen: "We better ask him now."

Clarence: "But he promised."

Karen: "I'll ask him." She goes into the Kitchen and then returns.

Karen: "Antoine said 'How can I expedite when I don't have a Sous Chef.'"

Luigi: "He refused to Expedite? But he promised."

Angel: "Maybe we better postpone your System."

Luigi: "No, we'll make it work. I'll expedite. I used to be real good at it."

Blair: "In another restaurant in another place a long time ago."

Everyone laughs.

### Uh Oh! Brain's in charge.

The Brains of Luigi and Clarence had merged behind their Idea.

Brain: "Under our Plan, Chef Antoine is supposed to expedite. And I'm in charge; so what I say goes."

Little Voice: "But you're ignoring the Reality that he has lost his Sous Chef, his main assistant, and is working double time already. Unfortunately your stooges, Luigi and Clarence, forgot to confirm your Idea with Antoine's no Sous-chef Reality. Time to abandon your Fantasy."

Brain: "No way! And give up control? Don't be silly. We are fully committed to this Backwaiter Idea. We refuse to let go. That would undermine my authority. Luigi can expedite. He doesn't like the Guests anyway."

Little Voice: "But he doesn't have any experience."

Brain: "Better that than relinquish control and give up my marvelous Idea."

Little Voice: "Detach. Let go. Or Reality will crush your Idea - painfully."

Brain: "Never. I'm in charge and like it that way. You're just jealous."

### **Anyone can Run food?**

Under the New Improved System, Runners and Expeditors were to work as Backwaiters - taking orders which Waiters didn't want them to take. A Manager, who had never worked in the Kitchen before, was to expedite. To compound matters, the newest Trainees were to be his Runners.

Luigi, with his usual impeccable logic: "Running food from the Kitchen is easy - something which anyone can do - even the newest employee. In fact I will make that the entry level position. I am so marvelous - filled with so many constructive ideas. Once Susan sees how well my Plan works she will certainly promote me to F&B."

His Mind clouded with Thoughts, Luigi couldn't see what was in front of his face. Attempting to analyze the holistic Service scheme deductively, he had missed some of its integral features. The Runners didn't just run the Food to the Guest; they presented the Food to the Guest. On the most basic level, they had to present Antoine's Food to the correct person at the correct table from the correct side. But they also had to speak English well enough to describe the Food - to remind the Guest what they ordered.

Ignoring these features of the Expediter System (perhaps due to ignorance or because they conflicted with his Plan) Luigi plowed full speed ahead.

Luigi: "Pancho, I know this is your first day on the job. So I am going to give you something easy - running Food. Anyone can do it."

Pancho, speaking only minimal English: "Tell me what to do. I know nothing."

Pancho's father had died when he was only 3. Faced with the Void at such a tender age, Pancho never worried about anything. He flunked out of school by the age of 9, never learning how to read. He followed the rest of his brothers from Zacatecas to California in search of better opportunities. He had worked at many top class restaurants - as a night cleaner and a dishwasher - never on the floor.

As the first orders come in, Luigi: "Take this food to the man and woman on table 21."

Pancho, not understanding anything: "Que?"

Luigi: "Table 21 - mesa veinte uno. Man and woman. Hombre and muchacha."

Luigi's Spanish was as minimal as Pancho's English. They made a good team - for comedy.

Pancho: "Where?"

Luigi, becoming impatient: "Just take the food out. The Waiters will help."

Antoine, slamming his spoon on the counter: "Garnish! Watercress!"

Luigi: "Don't worry. It won't take too long to get the hang of this. I've done it before."

Pancho wandered around the Dining Room with Antoine's culinary art work in his hands until someone noticed which table it went to. Initially Pancho was told to serve the food. However as soon as the Waiters saw that he didn't know what he was doing, they took the food from him to serve it themselves.

Karen: "Here give me those plates. They're for my table."

Clumsily the food changed hands and was served. This same scenario was repeated over and over again throughout the busy Friday night.

Although well staffed upon the Floor, the Kitchen was a disaster. Antoine got very discouraged - felt another headache coming on. Frustrated, he punched the wall. The wall only moved slightly. His wrist took the biggest impact. Just a little bone in his wrist sustained a crack. Although we didn't know it at the time this seemingly insignificant



event was to have momentous consequences.

Saturday night, Luigi continued to Hold onto his Idea, now a little more desperately.

Luigi: "I know there were a few problems last night. But we need to give the Backwaiter System a chance. I'll expedite again, with Pancho as my Runner."

Karen: "But Friday was a disaster."

Luigi: "Don't worry, it will go much smoother tonight."

Slick: "Why?"

Luigi: "That's one of your problems, Slick. You're always so negative. Work with me instead of against me."

As the Night heats up, Antoine holds his head in disbelief, moaning to himself: "My beautiful works of art are garnished improperly and then are served improperly to the wrong Guests at the wrong tables without description. Pancho, the new Runner, doesn't know the Food. Even if he did, he doesn't speak English. He has never even worked in a Restaurant before. Mon dieu, why I am so cursed?"

Frustrated Antoine starts yelling at Luigi and banging his spoon: "Garnish!. Wipe the plates! Hot food! Must go Now. You're ruining my food. Merde!"

Luigi thinking to himself: "Antoine's not being very nice.

Brain: "In fact he's being rude and inconsiderate. You don't need to put up this. After all you are Dining Room Manager. He has no right to treat you this way."

Luigi: "He has no right. I'm not going to put up with any more of this abuse.

Little Voice: "But Luigi. It's 8:30, right in the middle of the Rush."

Brain: "Who cares? Nobody should be treated that way. Especially the Dining Room Manager."

Luigi: "Yeah."

Brain: "This will teach Antoine a lesson in manners."

Luigi: "Yeah, a lesson in manners."

Brain: "We're outta here."

Luigi: "Right. I don't care if it is 8:30 right in the middle of the Rush. I'm leaving."

On the Floor thinking to myself: "The Food is taking forever. I better check the Kitchen to see what's happening."

Entering the Kitchen, I see plated Food backing up in the window.

Me: "Where's Luigi?"

Antoine: "He walked."

Me: "Walked off the job?"

Nodding his head Antoine: "He should be fired for lack of responsibility. Good Riddance."

Me: "Do you think Susan will fire him?"

Antoine: "Probably not. She's just here to collect a paycheck. But he'll never come in my Kitchen again."

There were many complaints from our Guests that weekend. "What has happened to the fine Service we count on at Ma Belle?" We were ashamed. Ma Belle's Temple had been desecrated by an Idea - her Experience ruined by a Mind full of Thoughts.

#### **Antoine's fault?**

Me: "It seems that your Backwaiter System isn't working. Let's go back to the old tried and true System."

Luigi: "My System would work just fine if Antoine had expedited like he said he

would."

Me: "But the Reality is that he won't expedite and there are a whole lot more problems to the System besides that."

Clarence: "It's all Antoine's fault. He is deliberately sabotaging our System."

Luigi: "You'd think he would cooperate considering its his restaurant."

Karen: "But he still doesn't have a Sous-Chef."

Clarence: "He's not trying to hire anyone."

Me: "To save on labor during this slow season."

Luigi: "It's Antoine's fault this is not working. He's not cooperating. Neither are the Waiters."

### **The Search for the Perfect System?**

What was Luigi thinking? Or maybe he just wasn't Listening. It was easy to tell that he mistakenly identified himself with his deductive Brain. I could just imagine all the good advice of the Little Voice that had been ignored due to Brain's chatter.

Luigi: "They're fools if they think I'm going to give up my Plan that easily. Last weekend was just a minor setback."

Little Voice: "But, Luigi honey, don't you think it's time to scrap the Backwaiter System. It's obviously not working."

Luigi: "But I've spent so much time on it. I can't give up on it now."

Little Voice: "Why not? It's been a disaster. Everyone hates it."

Luigi: "They just don't understand. They're too shortsighted."

Little Voice: "Even Francis vetoed it."

Luigi: "That fat Frenchman. What does he know? Besides I've upgraded the System. And what about all the energy that I've put into my Plan? It would all be wasted if I gave up now. I certainly don't want to waste my time or energy."

Little Voice: "But you'll be wasting more time and energy by pursuing this bad Plan. Cut your losses."

Luigi: "My Plan isn't bad. It's the Staff's fault that it didn't work. They didn't cooperate. My System is Perfect."

Little Voice: "Beware. You're blinded by an Idea. Don't ignore all contradictory data. Pay attention and the inadequacies of your System will become immediately apparent. Don't let your obsession with Idea obscure your perception of Reality."

Luigi: "Humans are the problem, not my Idea. Once they understand it, there will be no more problems."

Little Voice: "A pipe dream. Modern Chaos theory has shown that in a naturally occurring dynamical System - such as the Weather, the Stock Market, or the Restaurant Business, random spikes will irregularly occur which fall outside the parameters of what it is possible to prepare for."

Luigi: "That's a defeatist attitude. All customer complaints will be eliminated by the Perfect System. It's just a matter of finding this System and then fine tuning it. I've found the System, which will save Ma Belle. It just needs some fine tuning."

Little Voice: "There will always be random problems, which can be minimized - not eliminated altogether."

Luigi: "We just need more Staff on, until they get used to my Perfect System."

Little Voice: "What about Labor costs? If your System costs more, then it is certainly not perfect for Accounting."

Luigi: "My System is so good that Service will improve, which will increase Business so much that Labor costs will automatically fall. Plus we will be able to hire better Staff

because my System will be so profitable for everyone.”

Little Voice: “What about this weekend? Tips fell because Service suffered and the Staff was demoralized. Plus there were more complaints than ever.”

Luigi: “Any System takes time to implement. The Staff is just learning. After the bugs are worked out my System to eliminate all complaints.”

Little Voice: “Even the Perfect System is limited by the constraints of business - labor costs and available labor pool. In the Real World, the attempt is to maximize Guest satisfaction, not to guarantee it. This would be too expensive.”

Luigi: “Are you telling me to leave things the way they are rather than experiment. That’s timid behavior, not dynamic at all. I’m the Manager. I must make my mark.”

Little Voice: “Why not make your mark by doing a good job as manager?”

Luigi: “That’s what I’m doing.”

Little Voice: “No. A manager must supervise the Staff rather than creating a System which will do it for him.”

Luigi: “Yuck! Then I’ll have to deal with people. I’d rather create the Perfect System.”

Little Voice: “There’s no such thing. You’re doomed to fail.”

Luigi: “Are you saying that I shouldn’t experiment because of the fear of failure? Hold onto the past because it is safe? That’s not the way of the hero.”

Little Voice: “If you feel you must experiment with Ma Belle’s Service System, you must at least hang around to observe the results. Just think if scientists ran experiments and imagined the results rather than actually observing them. Not good.”

Luigi: “But results are always messy. Better to ignore them and trust logic instead.”

Little Voice: “But logic should be tempered by Reality, which is always complex, unlike Ideas, which can be clear and simple.”

Luigi: “But Reality is messy and contradictory. It never behaves properly. I prefer my Ideas, which are always logically consistent, predictable and true. I have faith in Reason. Reality is always so confusing. I try to not let it get in the way.”

Little Voice: “So you are going to persist with your System despite all the evidence to the contrary?”

Luigi: “Of course. Why not?”

Little Voice: “We’re just going in circles. It’s time to let the Universe take over.”

Universe: “Oh Joy! Luigi is holding onto his Idea so tightly that I will have to batter him with Reality to make him let go. I love this part of my job.”

Blinded by his many *bright* Ideas Luigi couldn’t see beyond his face. Bewitched by Brain he was in a trance - sleep walking rather than observing what was happening around him. We would all bear the consequences.

### Chapter 37: The Problem with too much Thinking

Antoine's stand inspired Clarence and Luigi to do a lot more thinking during the week.  
Uh, Oh.

Luigi: "What are we going to do? Now that our System is in place, we can't give it up. If we stop now all is lost."

Clarence: "I'll expedite. After all I've worked in the Kitchen before. Instead of selling wine, my expertise, I will be the Expediter."

Luigi: "But the Waiters are complaining that Pancho doesn't know the tables or position numbers well enough to run the Food."

Clarence: "Not a problem. In some of the better houses, the food is brought out on trays, put on a stand and served by the waiters."

Luigi: "We did that in London. But we had silver domes on top of the food to keep it hot. All we have here are those old ugly plastic covers we use for Room Service."

Clarence: "Better to serve the Food without the covers. They're too gross."

Luigi: "But how will we keep the food hot?"

Clarence: "There are plenty of Waiters and Backwaiters swarming around who will be able to place the plates before it gets cold."

Luigi: "Those trays and stands are pretty ugly, too. Looks like they've been through a few restaurants."

Clarence: "The Guests will never notice. Everything will happen so fast."

Luigi: "But does Pancho know how to carry a tray with a stand?"

Clarence: "It's easy. Anyone can learn how. And if he makes a few mistakes, well that's the risk of trying something new."

Luigi: "You're a genius Clarence. Applying logic we've worked the bugs out of our System."

Clarence: "We are so clever."

Luigi: "Let's hear it for Backwaiters."

Clarence: "We'll upgrade Service at Ma Belle despite objections from the small minded people that we're surround by."

Brain: "Very good, my Subjects. I'm proud of you both. You've continued to ignore Reality in favor of my Idea. Worship me and ignore your Intuitions. After all Logic reigns supreme. Little Voice, eat your heart out."

Little Voice: "I'm not worried. I'll just bide my time. There will be a price to pay. Reality will not be denied."

Universe: "That's for sure. I'll see to that."

As to be expected the degeneration persisted into the next weekend. Although the trays and stands were old and ugly - although they weren't covered - although Pancho had never been trained to carry trays - despite these Realities, Clarence and Luigi held onto their System - a little more desperately now. Although the Food was served by qualified Backwaiters to the right people at the right table from the correct side, it was cold from sitting upon unattended trays without any covering. Our Guests complained. No prestige from these Service disasters - only embarrassments. And far too many distractions to attain the sublime. Ma Belle's Guests experienced neither Clarence's Status nor my At-One-Ment Experience.

Antoine: "Aurgh! This weekend, another Service disaster. My beautiful Food served cold. The Temple is desecrated. It took years to build a good reputation. Now it is going steadily down the drain."

Guest: "We went to Ma Belle last weekend. We've always had a good time. We brought friends that we were trying to impress. It was a nightmare. The food came out on these ugly trays from another era - without covering - getting cold. Finally someone came over and served it. Everyone seemed confused and upset. I was so embarrassed. I'll never go back there again."

### **The Runner Exodus**

Obsessed by their Idea the Managers didn't see that their System had fatal flaws exposed by the Reality of Business. Frustrated by their ignorance Antoine threw his Reality at their Idea: "I demand a Real Expediter next weekend - not one of the so-called Managers."

Reluctantly accepting this intrusion into their fantasy the Managers scheduled a real Expediter, José. Of course, the Idea still said that anyone could run food out. Thus José was given two rookies as his Runners - Pancho, the Spanish-speaking rookie, and Jim, a dyslexic economics major with leg problems.

Jim to himself: "Was that table 24 or 42? Was the steak going to the woman or the man? My leg is starting to hurt. I need to sit down for a while."

Pancho, a peasant just up from the mountains of central Mexico, thinking to himself in Spanish: "Why is everyone so upset? This is just dinner. They have enough food to eat and enough alcohol to drink. They should be happy. Why are Karen and Angel so mad? People are so crazy here."

Accustomed to working with experienced Runners like Punky and Slick, José sweated blood to provide our Guests with the Service they deserved. However at the end of the night, he made less money than the Backwaiters because the Idea still said that the Backwaiters were more important. This was the last time José worked Saturday night, continuing a trend that had been growing each weekend.

The experienced Backwaiters who had been brought in to replace the Spanish-speaking Bus realized that a substantial amount of their work had to do with Bus duties - including lots of table setting, water and coffee service, and not that much table interaction. Further the Waiters became upset if they interacted too much with the Guest. To compound problems there was a severe spoon shortage which caused incredible stress just getting a cup of coffee to someone.

Thus these Backwaiters were taking Orders which the Waiter didn't want taken and were having to do mostly Bus duties, which they didn't really want to do. Further although the seated customers were getting over-served, the tables were not getting reset promptly for the Guests who were waiting in the Bar for a table. Many of the most qualified Backwaiters began refusing to work on weekends. The quality of the Backwaiters began falling. Nobody, but the desperate, wanted to work weekends. Our previously excellent Runners and Expeditors began finding other weekend jobs. Customer complaints continued as the Service degenerated. Antoine became more discouraged.

Unfortunately Luigi and Clarence continued to worship their System despite an incredible amount of evidence to the contrary. Another example of Idea obscuring Reality.

Me: "Too many service problems last weekend. Time to scrap your System."

Luigi: "The System's not the problem. It's Antoine's fault for not cooperating."

Me: "But Antoine's is short staffed in the Kitchen."

Clarence: "That's his problem. Not ours."  
Me: "Aurgh!"

## Chapter 38: Where was everybody?

Although Service was going from bad to horrible Upper Management seemed to have forgotten us.

Where was Francis, who had immediately squashed the first Service nightmare of May? We were all hoping for a repeat. Antoine left multiple messages on Francis Le Roi's answering machine. But Francis hadn't returned his calls. Unfortunately he was busy with his new Washington project and had no time for our Santa Barbara show.

What about Antoine? To correct the Service fiasco of June, due to Corporate's merger and 'going public', he had thrown a temper tantrum to restore the Expeditors to the Kitchen and the Managers to the Floor where they belonged. Antoine's Way was the Way of the Guest.

What happened this time? Did Antoine speak up on behalf of his Art and the Guests who were there to appreciate it? Unfortunately No. This time around Antoine had no Sous Chef. Further he was demoralized by the management that we had been subjected to for the last year and had no more life force to extend.

And Corporate? All he cared about was his profits, which he was still receiving. He relied on his local representative, the GM, to tend his shop. Where was Susan?

**"Just hoping that things are going well."**

Susan the GM: "I've had to deal with more restaurant complaints than normal. I'm beginning to sense that something is wrong in the Dining Room. I hope I don't have to do anything. I much prefer to remain in my office, tending to Hotel Business. I really haven't had that much time for the Restaurant. I hope Luigi and Clarence are doing a good job. Luigi keeps telling me that Service is getting better all the time. But what about these complaints? I know I haven't inspected their job performance in a long time or asked anyone how they are doing. I sure hope they're doing a good job. They certainly say they are.

But all these Guest complaints from the Dining Room? I wonder what's up? 'Cold food.' That's not like Antoine. Here's another one. 'Chaotic Service.' I wonder what's happening up there? I hope I don't have to get involved. I'm sure everything is just fine. I had some complaints from a few of the Expeditors like Slick and Punky. But they're just disgruntled employees. They've never liked Luigi. Why can't they learn to get along?

Antoine has been complaining about Luigi again. But he's always upset. He's French. What can you say? Antoine and Luigi are always competing for my favor, just like Denise and Luigi. They never have anything good to say about each other. We should probably all get together for another Team building seminar. That would certainly help. Learning to solve problems together. I bet that would generate some unity. Figuring out all the things we could do with cardboard, rubber bands, and pop-sickle sticks was fun, but I enjoyed the kayaking seminar even more. But in our last workshop, Clarence got drunk and lost his false teeth. That was certainly a spectacle. And Luigi never seems to cooperate. He always wants to work on his own.

But all these restaurant complaints? I'm sure they'll go away by themselves. Things have a way of working themselves out. I figure that Karen would say something if anything was amiss. She certainly spoke out regularly against Silas. But I haven't heard a peep from her in a long time. I wonder why? Things must be going well."

Why didn't Karen speak up?

Karen: "This Backwaiter System is killing me."

Me: "Why don't you say something?"

Karen: "Because I have a big mouth?"

Me: "No, of course not. Because you care."

Karen: "Normally I'm one of the first to speak up. But when that dufus, Silas, was our F&B, I was written up for a bad attitude. Susan said that I complained too much. After that I kept my mouth shut. I lost my last restaurant job from speaking out too vigorously. Why don't you say something?"

Me: "I've learned from your experience."

Karen: "What about Francis and the rest? Where is everyone? They don't seem to remember that we exist."

Me: "Antoine is demoralized; Corporate is wrapped up in profits; Susan is lost in her office and Francis is busy with his projects."

### **Denying my Love?**

And of course I was lost in my own little world - hoping that I didn't need to get involved. Out of touch with my feelings I didn't realize I was falling in love with Ma Belle.

Heart: "Please we need to help out Ma Belle. I love her so."

Brain: "No we don't. Ignore her Boss. She's just a residue of your attachment to the illusory material plane. She will only cause you pain."

Mind: "Yes. Must avoid pain."

Heart: "No. Avoid pain, and lose passion."

Brain: "Shut her up. She can only lead to no good. Better not to feel than to suffer."

Mind: "Yes. No suffering. We hate to suffer."

Heart: "Please, please! Don't shut me off., That only makes things worse - numbness in the best case scenario - more likely bitterness."

Brain: "Callous her off. We're on the quest for enlightenment - where there is no suffering - only around the clock happiness."

Mind: "Around the clock happiness. That's for me."

Heart: "A fool's dream. I'd rather feel passion - the pain as well as the pleasure. Although getting involved with Ma Belle will certainly arouse some intense emotions - better than passively sitting on the sidelines - afraid to live - neither here nor there."

Brain: "See just like I told you. She even admitted it. 'Intense emotions.' We're beyond that. We're into eternal joy."

Mind: "Yes eternal joy."

Brain: "Block her out with calluses."

Mind: "Yes. Block her out."

Heart: "No!!! I'm part of you. You're in a state of denial. We're in love with Ma Belle, whether you like it or not."

Brain: "Now she's talking gibberish. How could you possibly be in love with a restaurant? Obviously deluded. Part of your lower self. Time to eradicate her."

Mind: "Yes. How could I be in love with a restaurant. It doesn't make sense. Take moves to shut her out."

Heart: "Please, No! If you shut me out, I'll return as a shadow to haunt you."

Brain: "Who cares? We don't believe in spirits anyway. And if we stay away from the turbulent restaurant world we will be able to maintain our equilibrium - and with it



enjoy the peace and quiet.”  
Mind: “Yes. Peace and quiet. Filter her out.”  
Heart: “Nooo!! You’ll be sorry.”

## **Chapter 39: An Attempt to Shed Light on the Darkness**

Ma Belle: "I loved employees like Karen. She was certainly one of my favorites. Her standards were high. Like Antoine she cared so deeply about me that she had an emotional reaction when things went poorly. Although this over involvement sometimes caused problems, at least she cared. Better caring too much than not at all. Or pretending not to care - like Space. I sensed that he was falling in love with me. Who wouldn't? But he was in a state of denial - trying to protect himself from involvement with his phoney baloney Eastern philosophies.

With my Service in turmoil and no one doing anything I realized that I had to take charge of my own Destiny rather than being victimized by Fate. In a deep meditation I came to understand that Space, flawed as he was, was the only one left who could make a difference. I decided to make an appeal to the Universe - after all I had served Him well."

Ma Belle: "I have a favor to ask. My parents are so busy that they have forgotten I exist. You're the only one who seems to have time for me."

Universe: "That's what I'm here for. What's up?"

Ma Belle: "May I enter Space's dreams?"

Universe: "Certainly. But why?"

Ma Belle: "I need to talk some sense into him. He's neglecting me as my managers are ruining my business."

Universe: "His defenses are too elaborate to be penetrated by mere words. He needs to have his Ego ground by circumstances. Remember pain and mistakes are the best teachers."

Ma Belle: "Oh please let me try. I'm certain I could get through to him."

Universe: "Go ahead and try. Maybe you have something to learn, too."

Ma Belle: "Thank you so much. I'm so grateful for this opportunity to speak my piece. You won't regret it."

Universe: "My pleasure. Multiple birds with one stone. Sometimes I even amaze myself."

### **The Chain Dream**

In the midst of all the Service turmoil I had my first, but not my last, Ma Belle dream. When I became cognizant I was confused. It seemed as if I was watching Luigi speaking with a stunningly gorgeous woman. Or was I having the conversation myself? I couldn't really differentiate myself from Luigi in my dream world.

Luigi = Me: "You are certainly a beautiful and elegant lady."

Ma Belle: "Just appearing as a personification of my role in this existence."

Me: "But who are you - this vision of loveliness?"

Ma Belle: "Ma Belle, the restaurant you should be serving."

Me: "Impossible. You're a woman, while Ma Belle is just a restaurant. And restaurants can't talk."

Ma Belle: "Just a restaurant, eh? Humph! We'll see about that. - You haven't been doing a good job of serving me. I'm here to turn you around onto the correct Path. You've slipped onto a Side Path, which is no good for either of us."

Me: "Why should I serve you? You're just a restaurant, an inanimate object, while I am real. Hate to break it to you but you are just a stepping stone to my dreams. My personal agenda certainly trumps your petty world. I've learned to take care of number one. If I don't, no one else will."

Ma Belle: "This is just a scenario dreamed up by Brain. We are part of the same whole. And if you don't start serving me your personal dreams will be threatened as well. Your elevated sense of Self is pulling you over the cliff."

Me: "Whadaya mean by that?"

Ma Belle: "Watch."

Suddenly I was holding onto a chain, which seemed to be attached to something very heavy, which was hanging over the edge of a precipice. The weight of the chain and what it was attached to was slowly pulling me into the Abyss.

I panicked: "Help me! Someone. Please!"

Ma Belle: "Just let go."

Me: "I can't. There's something very valuable on the end of this Chain. All you have to do is help me pull it up onto this ledge."

Ma Belle: "It's too heavy. Both of us would be dragged over. Just release your grip."

Me: "No! It's too important to me. Please help. Anyone!"

As if from nowhere Clarence appears: "I'll help."

Me: "Thank god. Someone with a little human charity."

Clarence also grabs onto the Chain. Now it is pulling us both into the Abyss. The precipice approaches followed by a bottomless chasm into the emptiness.

Me: "Help! Just lend a hand, please! I'm sure the three of us could lift this on top. And be quick about it. We're losing ground!"

Ma Belle: "Sorry, this is your game. Not mine. It's all up to you. Just let go of the Chain."

I was terrified: "No! The Chain is attached to something very valuable. I can't let go. Help! Please."

Ma Belle: "How important can this thing be if it's dragging you to your destruction?"

Me: "Incredibly important. As a restaurant you couldn't possibly understand. If we could just get some more help, I'm sure we could lift it up. Please." The Abyss approaches.

Ma Belle: "If you don't let go you are going to die."

Me desperately: "But I can't let go. Can't you see that I'm attached to the chain by a lock. I need the key to open the lock and free me from the chains or I'm doomed."

Ma Belle: "Self reflection is the key to the lock that you yourself have created. You are unnecessarily attached to an artificial conception of your Self. This is the chain that is pulling you over the cliff. Detach from your personal goals and serve me. This will free you from your self induced bondage."

Thinking to myself: "Great. Just great. I'm in desperate need of assistance and all I've got is this lunatic to help me." Aloud: "Listen you aren't making any sense. Why don't you go get some help. I don't have much time left. Please!"

Ma Belle: "Realize the oneness of all things. Then you become the chain, the cliff, and the chasm. Calmly observing the entire scene you watch the chain, as it falls over the chasm into chaos, turbulence and dissolution. Having let go of your own personal agenda, which is binding you to your Backwaiter Idea, you will be better able to serve me. Merging with the greater good you will remain on top of your life - better able to participate in the essence and less likely to be distracted by illusion - thinking that it's real. It will be easier to stay on the Path rather than getting sidetracked by nonsense."

Me: "This is nonsense. I'm in desperate need of help and you're giving me a lecture."

Ma Belle: "Follow my train of thought. It is the key to the lock on the chain, which binds

you to your delusions.”

Me: “What could you possibly know about delusions? You’re just a restaurant.”

Ma Belle: “Let go of your sense of separation and join with me. Then your chain will drop away effortlessly.”

I screamed: “No!” as I continued to hold on desperately to the chain which was pulling me over the edge of the cliff. “I can’t let go. I don’t know how.”

Ma Belle: “Yes you do. Just release your grip.”

Me: “But I can’t lose my chain. It’s incredibly important to me. It defines who I am. I’ve become very accustomed to it. It’s been with me a long time.”

Ma Belle: “But right now it’s a hindrance that needs to be jettisoned to move to the next level.”

Me: “How can I let it go when it has grown to be a part of me?”

Ma Belle: “Artificially fused to your personal agenda. Although breaking free will be painful it’s time to detach.”

Me: “Please no more words. Just help me!”

Ma Belle: “I am. I’m shedding my light upon your darkness to reveal the key to your escape from bondage. Really listen and you will be able to let go of the chain that is pulling you over the cliff. All you have to do is detach from your System which is causing me so much grief. It’s time to change course.”

Me: “No!! My System/Muse is everything to me.”

Ma Belle: “Very well then. Over the cliff.”

Me = Luigi: “Aieeeee!!!”

As Luigi I woke up in a cold sweat.

Luigi: “Thank God that was just a nightmare. It seemed so real. But how ridiculous. That’s the last time I drink so much late at night. Whew! Some people pay attention to their dreams thinking they make some kind of sense. Not me. I think it’s just a way of getting rid of mental garbage. People always read too much into things. A restaurant that talks! How absurd! Imagine me giving up my Backwaiter System because of a night vision.”

Then I woke up in this dream within a dream as myself.

Me: “What a strange nightmare that was. It was obviously addressed to Luigi. The symbolism was quite clear. His obsession with his Backwaiter System is pulling Ma Belle over the cliff. But I wonder what that last comment about my Muse was. It was sort of as if Luigi’s System was merged with my Muse. What was that all about? Probably confused in my dream because Luigi has been in my thoughts so much of late. Perhaps I should say something to him about it. Who am I fooling, anyway? That would do no good. Ah, these dreams are never that straight forward. Sometimes everything is reversed. And why was I merged with Luigi? I guess it was one of those dreams that was just garbled nonsense - with no real meaning for me.”

At this point I, Ma Belle, realized the futility of words. This was a big learning experience for me. The Universe’s comment that pain and mistakes are the best teachers finally made sense. I had somehow thought that if someone heard the truth that they would be transformed by it. Maybe I didn’t explain myself well enough, but I think not. I feel that the Fog of Space’s mental defenses was too strong for the Rays of my truths to get through. It seemed that he was doomed to learn, or not, from experience. I had done my best to shed some Light upon his Ignorance. Holding onto his Illusions like a security blanket, he was fated to repeat his mistakes over and over again. Space was

definitely on a collision course with Reality.

## Chapter 40: In a State of Denial

After another chaotic weekend my Mind was filled with a tangle of Thoughts that wouldn't go away. I began to meditate to clean off the Mirror of my Mind.

Me: "I don't have to do anything. I am committed to non-action, like any good Taoist. When things get bad enough I'm sure that either Francis Le Roi or Antoine will intervene and right the wrongs inflicted upon our Guests by Luigi and Clarence. In fact I'm counting on it. After all they are the Chefs and I'm only a Waiter. Hmmm? But I've already been waiting patiently for the entire month of January, and they haven't done anything, yet. And things are getting worse."

Little Voice: "Maybe we should say something?"

Brain: "No way! And risk solitary confinement?"

Little Voice: "But we're the only ones left."

Brain: "Yikes! About face. Forward march."

Little Voice: "Speak up, Space. For the good of Ma Belle, if nothing else."

Me: "Darn. Must I really get involved? I hope I don't get locked in solitary."

Brain: "Space, wake up. Remember non-action. That means doing nothing. That way you won't offend anyone."

Me: "Yes. Non-action. The path of safety."

Little Voice: "Despite insights to the contrary, you're still holding onto the Idea that non-action means doing nothing? This is a major misconception. I thought we'd already been through this before."

Me: "Whadaya mean?"

Little Voice: "Action originates in the delusions of the Brain's projections."

Brain: "Liar. I'm brilliant."

Me: "Quiet down, Brain."

Little Voice: "Non-action is movement that emerges spontaneously from the state of No Mind."

Me: "No Mind?"

Little Voice: "A Mind empty of desire and hence personal agenda. And these are generated by Brain's thoughts."

Brain: "That's no fair. Don't listen to her. Detach from the external world of suffering."

Me: "Yes, I pride myself on my detachment. While others are stressing out, I look on with amusement."

Little Voice: "How noble. You watch dispassionately as those around you suffer. And you're proud of this?"

Me: "Hey, don't be so critical. I've tried to help out. Every weekend I've asked Luigi and Clarence if they are ready to try my System, but they always turn me down, saying that their System needs more time. I figure that once Clarence and Luigi reach the limit of their suffering that they will come to me for assistance. Just like in Buddhism. Once People have suffered enough, they let go of their petty personal worlds and embrace the Way. It makes me laugh to watch them hold onto their suffering despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary."

Little Voice: "What about the innocent victims?"

Me: "Innocent?"

Little Voice: "Luigi and Clarence are not alone in their misery. They are dragging everyone associated with Ma Belle into the pit with them."

Brain: "But we're detached."

Me: "Yes, I'm detached."

Little Voice: "So enlightened. You watch as everyone becomes more miserable. Chef Antoine is beginning to sink into a demoralization that will not be easy to escape from. The previously fine crew of Runners and Expeditors are beginning an exodus that will certainly undermine Service. Even the veterans on the Staff are beginning to question their jobs. And still you do nothing. What a pompous fool!"

Me: "I'm sure Luigi and Clarence are approaching the limits of how much suffering they can take. I'm sure they're on the verge of giving up their System."

Little Voice yelling: "You idiot! Don't you understand? Luigi and Clarence thrive on the chaos. They love to be miserable because everything is revolving around them."

Brain: "But we just wanted to be fair by giving their System a chance."

Me: "Yes fair."

Little Voice: "Liar. You are lazy and afraid. You just don't want to get involved, because you are afraid you won't pass the Test."

Brain: "We are very spiritually evolved. We can pass any Test. Right Space?"

Me: "Right. Very spiritually evolved."

Little Voice: "Well then involve yourself and see how easy it is to be detached."

Me: "But I'm not a manager. I'm just a waiter."

Little Voice: "No harm in speaking up."

Brain, weakly: "But we might offend the managers."

Me: "Yes, Can't offend the managers."

Little Voice: "You are so cruel, watching innocent bystanders suffer."

Brain: "We're just waiting for the right time. We need a Sign."

Me: "Yes, a Sign."

Little Voice: "Chef demoralized, staff leaving, customers offended. What more do you want? Don't you realize that you are Ma Belle."

Me: "Nothing has gripped me yet."

Little Voice: "Your fear is such an obstacle. OK then. I'll give you a Sign, as if you've not already had a million. Remember I am not pledged to non-violence."

Brain: "We're following the course of non-action, *wu wei*, dictated by Taoism."

Me: "Yes, *wu wei*."

Little Voice: "You are such a word-addicted fool."

Universe: "Sounds like it's time for me to get involved."

## Chapter 41: The Universe gives a Sign

The next evening at the family dinner my daughter, who worked as a Busser at Ma Belle, while going to high school, supplied the final argument.

Pacifica: "I think I'm going to quit Ma Belle. It is getting too weird. Everyone is so unhappy. It seems so out-of-balance. It is affecting my schoolwork."

Me: "Just hang in there. Things have a way of working themselves out."

Pacifica: "Every weekend it's getting worse. I'm starting to hate work. It's creating too much tension."

A razor across my face, I flinched involuntarily.

To myself: "I'm detached from a lot, but I am heavily attached to my daughter. Because she's going away to college next year, I'm relishing every moment I get to spend with her. I especially enjoy working with her. It gives me a special satisfaction, seeing what a good worker she is. Not everyone is a good worker, as evidenced by the managers. I don't expect her to stay in the Business, (God forbid!), but I'm so proud of her. But she wants to quit. Ouch! That hurts. I must take action."

Brain: "But I'm so afraid. There are so many objections."

Me: "Shut up, my daughter's happiness is at stake."

Brain: "What about detachment and non-action? You seem mighty attached to your daughter. Maybe you should have a deep meditation to help you let go of your attachment to Pacifica."

Me: "You are sick. Although my love for her gives me pain, it also gives me great joy. I'll take the pain of attachment of it's part of the package. I'm going to dive in. I must dive in. The Universe has given me a Sign."

Little Voice: "Hello!? How many Signs does it take to motivate an Idiot?"

Me: "My family threatened. I must take a stand."

Little Voice: "Don't you realize that your fellow employees are also part of your extended family."

I was still too blunt to hear what I couldn't understand: "Must do something for poor Pacifica. I didn't realize she was suffering."

Little Voice: "Blind to the suffering around you. A self-proclaimed saint with clay feet. Still trapped by Brain and the fearful world he projects."

### About Time

At the end of January, after three weeks of miserable service, I finally approached Susan the GM. With fear and trembling I revealed the ongoing travesty that was affecting our Guests and our reputation. Susan couldn't discount me as a disgruntled source - presumably because I had a reputation as a docile but good employee. Besides the restaurant complaints had reached a critical mass. I also provided my solution to the Service chaos. I had already mentioned it to the Service Staff and it had met their approval.

Karen: "Anything but this stupid Backwaiter System."

Angel: "It's certainly not working."

Sky: "Totally embarrassing."

I called my antidote to Luigi's Backwaiter System the Team System, for reasons that will become apparent. To reinforce my ideas I gave Susan a printed description of my Plan. This was the first time I experienced the Power of the Word.

### Backwaiters laid to Rest?

Susan called a meeting, which included all of her managers and me, because I was



presenting my new Service plan. Everyone showed up to hear my solution; Susan, Chef, Clarence,, Blair, the assistant manager, and even Bill, the Director of Room Sales. Everyone that is, except Luigi. A bad move.

Without Luigi there to defend his Plan his Backwaiter System was trashed. Clarence retreated, disassociating himself from the System. (Primarily for political reasons, as we shall see.) In the meeting all eventually agreed that the Backwaiter System had been a disaster for the Dining Room and it was agreed that it would be replaced by my Team System.

Besides pulling the plug on Luigi's Backwaiter Plan Susan also appointed Bill, the Director of Sales, to fill the coveted F&B position vacated by Silas in late August. (To show how unnecessary the position was, it had remained vacant for five months with no effect upon our operations.) Bill was one of Susan's favorite hotel managers - well dressed and calm - as in 'not emotionally erratic' like Luigi. Further a dictum had come down from Corporate that Bill needed to be replaced in the hotel operations because he had been doing a poor job with room sales. Rather than lose him Susan moved him laterally to become F&B.

This decision made almost everyone happy because Bill seemed to be sane, especially as compared with the Luigi/Clarence team. My Staff rejoiced, feeling that at last they had someone in charge who was emotionally stable, relatively firm but also considerate. Little did we know that this promotion was to have repercussions which none of us anticipated.

### **Stabbed in the Back?**

Of course not everyone was happy.

Next day Luigi confronted me: "I can't believe that you undermined me. I thought you were my friend."

Me: "I only spoke up for the good of Ma Belle. Your Plan wasn't working."

Luigi: "It would have if the Chef had cooperated like he said he would."

Me: "But he didn't have a Sous Chef."

Luigi: "But he promised."

Me: "Under different circumstances."

Luigi: "He still said he would expedite."

Me: "Besides you didn't even show up at the meeting to discuss your Backwaiter System."

Luigi: "I had other plans. Besides I knew what was going to happen. I knew I was going to be blamed for everything."

Me: "Don't blame me then."

Luigi: "It's not just you. It's also the lawsuit from Denise. And none of the waiters cooperated to make my System work. It would have been so good for everyone. But now you've made me look bad before Susan."

Silent because of my fear of confrontation, I thought to myself: "Thank God, Bill is here to protect us from Luigi and his Plans. Everything has been solved. The enemy has been defeated. Time to rejoice."

For the time yes. However nothing is permanent in this world of phenomena. Brain just tricks us into thinking so. I was to learn this lesson the hard way.

### **Problem Solved?**

With the endorsement of Upper Management we immediately converted to my Team System. It was relatively simple and very European. Instead of working separately the Runners and Bus were to work as a Team to support the Waiters. The Runners reluctantly agreed to pool their tips with the Bussers. This Tip Pool was to be

divided by a point system to be fair to our experienced staff. Further the Waiters, reluctantly agreed to give more money to the Tip Pool. Because of this merger of duties, the Runners and Bus began cooperating as a Team to provide excellent Service. Because the Waiters were tipping out more money the Back of the House collectively began making more money. More importantly the English speakers were back on the Floor rather being in the Back of the House. The weekdays also worked better than ever because the Expediter was now engaged in Service rather than just bringing the food out. It was evident to almost everyone that my Team System had improved our Service all days of the week.

Smugly I thought to myself: "I have solved Ma Belle's Service Problems for ever and ever. Amen."

Universe: "Next."

Always trying to hold onto the illusion of permanence - none of us saw the storm brewing - which was to wash everything away - helping us all to realize the transience of the external world.

## Chapter 42: Revenge is Sweet

Despite the return to Service sanity, the damage had been done. The chaos of January had driven most of our Runners to find new jobs or other weekend jobs. Antoine's excellent crew of Runners had been decimated by the January experiment. Only Slick and the newly hired Pelon remained to expedite and run food on the weekends. Pelon, which meant Baldy in Spanish, was so nicknamed because of his tendency to cut his hair very short. His father had died of electrocution when he was just an infant. He was going to play a strong supporting role in our little drama - fitting in perfectly with the rest of us fatherless boys - finding his lost family within our walls.

### Not European enough

But they weren't enough. It was during this employee exodus that Diablo began agitating for promotion to the Runner position - shorter hours and better pay. "My English is good. I can read, I know the table numbers and positions. Plus it's my turn. I have seniority." But he was Mexican, which didn't fit Antoine's Runner profile.

Antoine was adamant: "Diablo doesn't have what it takes. He doesn't have enough experience and his English isn't very good."

Clarence: "Good enough for a Runner. And we don't have anyone else."

Antoine: "He's got an attitude problem. I don't want him serving my food. And I'm the Chef. What I say goes."

Clarence: "But Diablo knows the System. He's been with us a long time."

Antoine: "Too bad. Hire someone else. That's final. No more discussion."

This was the second time that Diablo had been rejected by Management. This qualified him as one of our Rejects, along with Viejo. Thank the Universe that these stable employees held on through the Fall. Without them Service would have been catastrophic during our final days.

### Clash of the Egos

Patient Slick, the only Expediter remaining from the turbulence of January, began to proudly manage and train the Bus and Runners, maintaining our high standards. All the Bus and Runner Tips were given to him, which he distributed fairly through a modified trunk system.

Unfortunately, besides being a good Expediter, Slick had a big mouth which collided with Luigi's ego. Slick, conscientious in his Service, was not impressed by Luigi. Luigi did not dress well, while Slick was an immaculate dresser. Luigi did not deal with customers or staff very well, while Slick was a popular employee. Slick let Luigi know what he thought about his many Service glitches. This was not a good strategy for getting a promotion to Night Waiter, which Slick had been patiently waiting for.

Luigi decided to punish Slick for his insolence. "For his own good, I will teach him to respect authority - It will help him to grow up." It was the old Respect Battle - played over and over and over again all over the world. Is your species ever going to see through this destructive game? Unlikely.

Luigi to himself: "I'm certainly not going to give Slick any dinner shifts until he shows me some respect."

Slick to himself: "I'm certainly not going to show Luigi any consideration until he makes me a Waiter."

Each of them was heavily invested in the image of who they considered themselves to be. Both refused to let go.

Little Voice: "Why don't you guys attempt to serve Ma Belle instead of your own little egos. Luigi, Slick is a conscientious employee. If you give him the waiting shifts he deserves, he will become your ally. If you don't he will continue to resent you and undermine your authority."

Luigi: "Forget it. He needs to grow up first."

Little Voice: "Slick, it doesn't help when you blatantly laugh at Luigi behind his back. If you showed him some respect, he would be much more likely to give you the promotion you deserve."

Slick: "Kiss Luigi's butt? Never. I have my pride. He needs to earn my respect."

The situation stabilized at this point. Luigi ground Slick's ego for many months by not giving him his deserved promotion. True to his vow, Slick ground Luigi's ego by not giving him any respect. Locked in this death grip of egos, a stalemate was reached.

Both were blind to the Bigger Picture - lost as they were in their tiny part of it. It was certainly disappointing me - because I, Ma Belle, was being neglected. You humans hold on so tightly to our Pride, as if it were a part of your Body. In actuality Brain creates these symbols of Pride and the like and then builds up elaborate networks to support his imaginary theories. Sheesh! When will you ever learn?

Universe: "That's where I come in. Slick and Luigi were both so filled with this Pride generated by their Personal Egos that I arranged for them to come together. That way they could grind each other's Ego - doing my work for me. This Pride thing is just a mental construct that needs to be ground away before either of them could move to the next level. Hopefully they will learn from this encounter. But if they don't? Oh well. I'm patient. I'll get them next time around - either this life time or the next. One thing about me, I am relentless. I never give up. I care too much for my humans."

#### **Weekends, where it's at**

To set the stage for Luigi's next movement let's examine the Santa Barbara weekly business cycle. The tens of millions of people in the Los Angeles population basin take weekends off to visit Santa Barbara, as we are only a few short hours north by car. They fill up all the hotels and restaurants. Although the town is packed on the weekends it is quiet during the week because everyone goes back home to work their 40+ hours per week. Santa Barbara's tourist business pulses around the weekends. Some restaurants hire workers just for the weekends because it is so much busier. Hardly anyone involved in Fine Dining in Santa Barbara just works weekdays. Under normal circumstances anyone who is not available on weekends is considered part time. And part timers are usually not given priority in any profession.

José and Punky had both started working as Bussers with us while they were in High School. Because it was a relatively pleasant work environment they had continued for years, working their way up to Expediter. They both quit working weekends during Luigi's chaotic experiment with Backwaiters. Although they both found other weekend restaurant jobs, they had continued working with us during the week. Because of the Backwaiter nightmare, they had turned their employment with us into a weekday job - going from full time to part time. As such one might assume that they would have been given lower priority than our full time employees. Not so.

Luigi bent over backwards to appease these part timers, José and Punky, at the expense of Karen, one of our best servers. Let's find out why.

### **Luigi looks bad on you**

Although Luigi was under pressure from Susan to perform, she was under pressure from Corporate. She knew that Corporate judges a GM by the managers they hire, just as he judges his managers by the quality of their employee relations - both for similar reasons.

Corporate: "Susan, dear, while Profit is my Game, I do care about my Staff. Although I give my restaurant employees little in terms of perks, I want my experienced staff to remain. After all they are highly trained, minimum wage employees with no benefits whatsoever - the ideal employee for any Business. It is definitely a bad mark on a manager's record when these long term employees leave. We have already lost some good employees during Luigi's rule. With his damaged reputation he certainly can't afford to lose any more. And you chose Luigi as your manager. He is a reflection upon you. He is your responsibility. Do something."

*The shit moves downhill.*

Susan: "Luigi, we can't afford to lose any more experienced Staff. You already lost Jane because of your System, and she was one of our best Servers. Then recently we've had this Expediter exodus. This looks bad on your record. And your bad record looks bad on my record. Corporate eventually replaces Managers with bad records."

Luigi: "Gulp!"

Susan: "Even if they are not replaced, Corporate certainly does not give them promotions. Do I make myself clear?"

Luigi: "Yes, Susan. I'll be considered for a promotion if I don't not lose any more employees."

Susan: "And you must prove that you can deal effectively with the Staff."

Luigi: "Deal with the Staff? But they're the problem."

Susan: "No, you're the problem. They're the solution."

Luigi: "Me, the problem? But you're undermining my authority."

Susan: "Listen and learn. It's either you or me. Corporate has spoken. I hope you understand?"

Luigi: "Yes, Susan."

Susan: "Hopefully this puts the fear of Corporate in you. You're excused now."

Luigi to himself: "That's just great. If I am to move up the Corporate ladder, I can't lose any more employees."

Universe: "This is where I come in. Time to manipulate events to play with my Actor's minds. I love my job."

### **Getting even**

Independently, but simultaneously, Punky and José, threatened to give notice because they had been offered waiting shifts at their other jobs.

Luigi was alarmed: "*Great!* I will probably be blamed for their departure which will ruin my Corporate reputation. Then I'll never get my promotion. What am I going to do to retain them? Hmmm? Although Antoine and Karen say that my beloved System has driven away our best Expeditors, it wasn't my System that was the problem. It was the lack of upward mobility. If they had been promoted to Waiter, I'm certain they would still be with us. Hmmm? What can I do? I've got it! I'll make them a counter offer. I'll offer them one of Karen's shifts. After all she is working five shifts while everyone else is only working four. Why should she be getting preferential treatment? She is the real reason they left. In order to torture Karen, er I mean teach her responsibility, I will promote them to Waiter and let them share Karen's 'extra' shift. That will prove that my

System isn't to blame. As icing on the cake I'll put Karen 'On Call'. Revenge, er I mean, responsibility is sweet."

Being the 'On Call' Waiter meant calling in about an hour before the shift to see if an extra waiter was needed. Practically speaking the 'On Call' Waiter would only work if it was busier than normal. This was frequently during our short busy season of Summer and rarely during the slow season, the rest of the year.

According to plan Luigi promoted Punky and José to the position of Waiter and scheduled them to alternate on Thursdays. Simultaneously he took away Karen's shift and put her 'On Call'. Needless to say this cut in shifts and income did not make Karen happy. "Upset? Of course I'm upset. Who wouldn't be, if they found they got a 20% pay cut and lost all their benefits. I don't qualify for health insurance anymore now that I've been reduced to part time."

Punky and José, who had just graduated from High School, replaced Karen with 20 years of waiting experience in Fine Dining and lots of local connections. The star is replaced by the second string. From a business perspective it was a poor move. From Karen's personal perspective it was a horrible affront. From Luigi's perspective it was the perfect move. Besides assuaging his Corporate anxiety, he had been able to settle some accounts.

Luigi: "I'm so clever. Multiple birds with one stone. By promoting José and Punky to Waiter on Thursday night, I got them to stay. They've both been here over four years. They deserved to be promoted. It's only fair. This way Susan won't be able to accuse me of poor employee relations any more. She won't be able to say that I drive all the good employees away ever again. Plus I got even with that Karen for never showing me any respect. Always comparing me unfavorably with Lewis and Clark. Anyway she's the only one with five evening shifts. Who does she think she is anyway? Why should I show her any consideration? She never shows me any."

Ma Belle: "Obviously my welfare had nothing to do with Luigi's decision. Instead it was part Corporate, part revenge, but no parts me. This was yet another indication that Luigi didn't love me. He never thought about my best interests - only what was best for Luigi. I was just his stepping stone. This definitely irked me."

### **The Importance of Life Experience?**

Karen was certainly better for our Guests than either Punky and José. Besides being a conscientious server she knew a lot of them personally. Plus she had a lot of Life Experience - another Waiter qualification. No one likes to talk about it, but it certainly plays a part. Most of our Guests are middle to upper class - from about 30 to 100 years of age. Many are travelers, property owners, and college educated. Karen could relate on any of these levels.

In her late 30s, she had been raised in an upper middle class environment on the East Coast in Maryland and had also traveled extensively in Europe and around the globe on various excursions. No children. Two incomes. Why not? She had invested in the stock market and had bought property in Santa Barbara. Although not a college graduate she had taken many enrichment classes at the community college. She also loved to cook and enjoyed good wine. She was a true restaurant professional.

José and Punky, on the other hand, had just turned 21. Their friends only drank beer and tequila. If they drank wine, it was with 7-Up. They had just started to learn about wine. They had never been anywhere but Santa Barbara. They didn't know any of the local clientele. Of course neither did Luigi, who was rarely on the Floor anyway. They had just started college. They didn't even know which career they were going into. They were great kids; but just too young to have any significant life experience - a

definite flaw.

In addition to food and wine knowledge and attention to details (which Karen excelled at) customer rapport is an important feature of Fine Dining Service in California. Although many Guests don't want to have any relation with the Waiter, many do. And it is much easier to have rapport with someone who has had similar life experiences. Despite these factors the feature that irritated Karen the most was that José and Punky didn't even work when it was busiest - weekends or holidays.

Karen: "Why should José and Punky be given my shift, when they're working at rival restaurants on the weekends? Where does their real allegiance lie?"

Luigi: "I don't know but they deserve to have some waiting shifts. After all they've been here for 4 years now. I just want to be fair. So I'm giving them a chance. Besides why should you have 5 shifts when everyone else only has 4?"

Karen: "Because I'm the only one who wants 5."

Luigi: "That's not the way I see it."

Swallowing her pride, Karen: "Listen Luigi. I don't know what your game is but it's disturbing me. So if I seem a little agitated, its because my sense of justice has been violated. I'll try to deal with it the best I can. It might take some time. Forgive me if I'm a little short with you."

Universe: "Wow! Karen passed her Test. Instead of blaming Luigi, she looked inward for solutions to her emotional reaction. Three cheers for her."

Despite common sense to the contrary Luigi persisted with his new Schedule - continuing to endear himself to Karen. Unfortunately this wasn't his last attempt at placating those he had driven away at the expense of our full time employees. This was to have negative consequences, which emerged much too soon.

Ironically Clark had played the same manager game with me - giving my shift to Karen. Now, a few years later, our fortunes had flip-flopped through no fault or effort on the part of either of us. We were the same; only the manager had changed. Loved by one, hated by the next. Those of us who remained with Ma Belle learned to detach from the transitory restaurant world - or go insane with anger - or just make ourselves sick by holding it all in. Under the circumstances which would you choose?

## Chapter 43: A Growing Animosity

It should be evident that these shenanigans did not endear our management team to Antoine. In fact he viewed them with utter disdain. Luigi was already on his black list. Besides destroying Service, specifically his Expeditors, he had not displayed the type of professionalism that Antoine expected at his Temple of Fine Dining. Seemingly afraid of our Guests Luigi spent vast amounts of time in his 'office' presumably working on managerial duties, which is not bad except that it occurred during Service. He avoided the Floor as much as possible, which made it impossible to supervise the Staff and to ensure that the Guests were being taken care of. With his personality that might have been a good thing.

To aggravate Antoine's distaste for Luigi and Clarence it was evident that they were both drinking heavily on the job. Clarence was blatant about his alcohol consumption. "Of course, I drink on the job - but only for *professional* reasons - in my capacity as wine steward."

He drank with customers, who happened to be his friends - tasted wines with the endless stream of purveyors - sampled the myriad house wines to make sure they hadn't gone bad, especially the better ones - had private wine seminars with individual staff members. Of course his constant drinking with customers, wine merchants, and staff undermined his ability to do any real work.

With Luigi it was more subtle. He would come back after an extended absence from the Floor with glassy eyes, a smile on his face, and slurred speech on his tongue. Of course his disappearing act always occurred during the middle of the Rush. Drinking during Service did not endear either of them to Chef Antoine. "It shows an utter lack of respect for Fine Dining."

Further Clarence's love of chaos continually jeopardized Service. If we were perfectly staffed he would send the Expediter home without telling anyone. Or perhaps he might send the Waiter's Bus Assistant on an errand without informing the Waiter. Or he might send the Hostess home and then disappear himself. Clarence loved Chaos because it was the antidote to his internal boredom. He had delusions of grandeur which were constantly contradicted by reality. This threw him into a mental depression. If he created problems, he could lose himself in the ensuing Chaos and forget about his internal turmoil.

To compound matters Clarence and Luigi rarely attempted to work with Antoine; nor had they showed him any respect. In fact Antoine knew that Clarence had actually been attempting to undermine his position and recruit a new chef.

Clarence, after more than a few glasses of wine: "Francis, I want to be honest with you. Antoine has run out of steam. He has no more inspiration. He's burned out. He's not upholding your standards. For the good of Ma Belle, we need a new chef."

Francis Le Roi to Antoine: "I hear from Clarence that you're burned out - that you have no more passion for your work."

Antoine: "Because of what they've put me through. You have no idea."

Francis: "That's no excuse. A French Chef must love his Food no matter what."

Needless to say this exchange further aggravated the mutual animosity between Clarence and Antoine.



### **Antoine's Heart develops a Callous**

Of course Antoine was no angel. He was not exactly easy to work with. Due to the inherent moodiness of an artist combined with intolerance for lack of professionalism, many times he was downright rude. There was no question about Antoine's opinions. He pulled no punches. He was not a corporate yes man. He respected professionalism and hated the lack of it. There was no in-between ground. Those who threatened his Temple were his enemies, while those who supported it were his allies. Unfortunately his extreme mood swings, aggravated by the tragicomedy of managers and his aching wrist, resulted in him accidentally striking out at those who supported him.

To say that Antoine was not part of the problem would be an out-an-out lie. During this period he wasn't exactly inspired. To say that the string of incompetent managers contributed to his lack of inspiration would be an understatement. Let's see what happened.

Antoine: "Woe is me. Why am I so cursed? Living in the land of the Barbarians. They desecrate my Temple. I can't take the Pain anymore. It is too overwhelming. Must protect myself from these emotional atrocities perpetrated upon my Heart."

Heart: "I'm outta here. Too brutal. It hurts too much to see these pathetic excuses for humans profaning my Temple. First Luigi the Coward with his terrible people skills. Why was he ever entrusted with such an important role? Then Clarence the Drunk tries to undermine my position. Why does the Universe hate me so? The gods torture us with their cruel games. What's the use of doing anything creative? Service destroys it anyway. I'm leaving this painful world. See you later, when things get better. Brain, you're in charge."

Brain: "We're tough. Better than the rest. After all we're French. A French chef, at that. We shall overcome. They will not defeat us."

Little Voice: "Antoine. Open yourself to your Pain and let go of your Ego based Pride. It's paralyzing you."

Brain: "Don't waste your breath. He can't hear you. My callous protects him from harm. Besides it's important for him to have a big Ego - otherwise he wouldn't have been strong enough to persevere, especially with the managers he's been given."

Little Voice: "True, but Antoine also needs his Heart. She is the source of his Passion and Inspiration."

Heart: "Forget about me. Too painful right now. I'm enjoying myself behind my protective wall. I'm on antidepressants. Everything is very nice here."

Little Voice: "But without you Antoine has no vitality. He's just on automatic."

Brain: "Even on automatic Antoine is still head and shoulders above the rest."

Little Voice: "Perhaps. But without his Heart he's like a zombie - numbed to Life."

Heart: "Don't worry. I'll be back after the Barbarians have left."

Brain: "Surrounded by swine. I care for no one and no one cares for me."

Little Voice: "Rather than clinging to your puny little world, it's necessary to feel your pain. Align yourself with the Universe to express your unique perspective. Or else he will drain your vitality."

Brain: "Too late. The pain was too intense. Heart has retreated and left me in charge."

Brutalized by what was happening to his culinary art due to bad management, Antoine had inadvertently created an emotional callous around his Heart to insulate himself from the Service devastation. His Heart, the source of his passion, retreated into a shell, leaving Brain with his over inflated Ego to carry on. To say this emotional

callous had no effect upon his vitality or creativity would also be a lie. His morale sapped by floor travesties, his inspiration went into retreat, waiting for better times. Antoine became increasingly arrogant to those around him to mask the degeneration he felt inside.

This Mental suffering is a sign of the Person being torn from Being. Most of us hold on so desperately to our Person's expectations that we experience tremendous emotional pain when they are not met. Unfortunately the mental suffering stirs up the organs - causing the liver to create bile, the stomach to create acids and the intestines to hold onto shit. These physical side effects of the emotional state create a physical pain which aggravates the mental suffering. This was the downward spiral that Antoine entered.

His solution, as is normal, was to try to detach himself from the source of his Pain - Ma Belle. He tried to not care quite so much, for his suffering was proportional to his caring. Because of the constant mismanagement the more he cared the more he suffered. As a result he began minimizing his attachment to Ma Belle to preserve his mental sanity. As a Chef this detachment was not easy. As a French Chef it was virtually impossible. His desire for our Guests to have a perfect Fine Dining Experience was embedded in his gene pool.

An Indian yogi retreats to the Himalayas to detach from the troubles of the transitory phenomenal world, in the hopes of transcending the duality. The Buddhist attempts to escape this realm of suffering to reach enlightenment. A Taoist sage retreats to the mountains to gain immortality. A shaman retreats to the mountains to commune with the gods, to gain strength so that he could return to save the community. Ghengis Khan retreated until he could gather enough forces to defeat his enemy. In like manner, Antoine's soul retreated until the times were better. The result was a Antoine who took care of details without extending himself too much beyond the essentials. In light of what was to come next, it was probably just as well.

## Chapter 44: The Idea is Back! Unresolved Issues

Despite the lack of professionalism from our managers, our morale was high after the January debacle died an unnatural death. Although Service had improved tremendously, one dynamic had not been resolved. Karen and Antoine were still not happy with the Spanish speaking Bus. Karen, unbeknownst to me, began whispering in Bill's ear, now that he was in charge.

Karen: "When Lewis and Clark were here we had high quality Bussers on the Floor who spoke English. Now they don't. For a restaurant of this caliber it is disgraceful that the Bussers can't speak English. Antoine agrees with me. What happens when the Guests ask them a question they can't understand?"

Bill to himself: "Hmmm? Karen is an excellent server. I would like to make her happy. I will investigate her complaints."

Bill: "Antoine, some of the Bussers don't speak English. What do think about that?"

Antoine: "It sucks. No class. They should be required to speak English."

Karen to anyone who would listen: "A Busser that speaks English - Is that too much to ask?"

Thinking quietly to myself: "Maybe so." Afraid, as always, of my own shadow.

Note that neither Karen and Antoine wanted Backwaiters. They just wanted Bus who could speak English. However this mechanistic view of Service didn't take into account the Luigi factor. The Luigi/Clarence team, still fervently grasping their Idea with the faith of True Believers despite its problems in Reality, continued to believe that the reason that the Backwaiter System didn't work well in January was because the Backwaiters were not paid enough money.

Continuing his investigation Bill: "Luigi, why don't all of our Bussers speak English?"

Luigi: "Because the Waiters won't use my Backwaiter System."

Bill: "What?"

Luigi: "I've got this great System which would solve the problem of Spanish speaking bussers and upgrade service."

Clarence: "It's the Backwaiter System which they use in a lot of fine Dinner Houses."

Bill: "I've been to restaurants with Backwaiters. It is always very impressive. Why won't the Waiters use the System?"

Clarence: "Greed. Not enough money to go around."

Luigi: "The Waiters weren't willing to pay their Backwaiters well enough."

Bill: "Why not increase the size of the Waiter's Station. Then they can give out more money to the Backwaiters. We can use the Spanish speaking Bus to clear tables and give them less. That will make Antoine, Karen, and the Guests happy. A win-win situation."

Luigi: "Sounds good to me."

Clarence: "Me, too."

Bill: "With all the Managers agreeing, what could possibly go wrong?"

### **Fogged by Dreams of Glory, the Mirror distorts Perception**

Having decided to invest his mental energy in Luigi's Backwaiter System it became Bill's baby too. The three Minds of Bill, Clarence and Luigi became One, filled with an

even bigger Idea. Their collective Brain had an even more incredible ability to filter and distort their collective perception of Reality. The Mirror of their collective Mind had become very dirty, reflecting Reality like those in a carnival fun house. Mind's Mirror - when clouded by thoughts and polluted by the dust of the world - distorts and misinterprets the incoming information, while a Mind, which is clean of agenda, reflects Data accurately. Personal Agenda had turned their Minds so filthy that white seemed to be black.

As the Managers began identifying with their Plan, each one envisioned the glory of bettering Ma Belle and how this would advance their career inside the Corporation.

Luigi: "God works in mysterious ways. After all the opposition to my Plan I *will* make an impact on Ma Belle with my Backwaiter System. Supported by Bill the F&B the Waiters won't dare undermine my System. It will be such a success. Karen will never compare me to Lewis and Clark again. In time the Staff will recognize me for the genius that I really am. Corporate will probably give me my own hotel to manage."

Dreaming of personal glory, Luigi forgot all about the Problems which his System created the last times it was used.

Clarence: "I can see it now. Clarence - Sommelier of an elite French restaurant with layers upon layers of service. Only the best of the best will be allowed in. A waiting list pages long. - 'I'll do my best to get you in, Mr. Jones.' Many 'little people' for me to manage - to serve my wishes. My mother will be so proud."

It was admirable that Clarence thought so highly of our potentials, but he kept forgetting that Ma Belle was just located in a small coastal resort town, not in a big cosmopolitan center. Although he likened Ma Belle to famous restaurants in Paris, New York, San Francisco, Santa Barbara was just a weekend getaway for Los Angeles, not in its heart. Obsessed with Status Clarence didn't want to earn his sense of internal merit and self esteem by doing a good job. External prestige is just the icing on the cake of inner accomplishment.

Bill was also inspired to make an impact on Ma Belle. He wanted to make his mark - lift his leg so to speak - leave his scent - prove himself to Corporate.

Bill: "Corporate doesn't think I'm good enough. This will show them that I am a dynamic leader - able to implement a significant management decision on my own. This will prove my merit to Corporate. I don't need to seek any input from the Staff. They'll just complain. They are just the working class. They are not managers like us. We are thinking of the good of the Restaurant - not just greedily obsessed with tips - like those Waiters."

### **Despite Experience to the Contrary**

The Management, three in one now, plowed ahead figuring out the details of their collective Plan - becoming more and more personally invested. They conveniently forgot all the complaints from our Guests and that the unhappiness of the Backwaiters was independent of Money.

Slick, speaking on his experience as a Backwaiter: "We were just glorified Bussers. Mostly clearing and resetting tables. The Waiters didn't want us to take any orders unless it was absolutely necessary, which was not very frequently. The tips were no good either. I for one never want to work as a Backwaiter again."

Unfortunately once an Idea has been planted, it takes over the Garden of the Mind like a Weed. The Collective Filter watered by the logical Brain grows ever more powerful. A specialist in minimizing objections and maximizing strengths - forgetting

problems he doesn't want to see and imagining what he wants to see Brain's Filter chokes out the Golden Flower of Reality.

And the collective Idea was strong at this time and gaining ground. The Luigi/Clarence/Bill Management Team convinced themselves that the Spanish speaking Bus were a severe problem to Service - despite a rarity of complaints from our Guests. The main complaints coming from Karen and Antoine, were magnified and distorted into terrible monsters by the fun house mental Mirrors of our Managers.

Managers together: "All of Ma Belle's service problems are the result of the Spanish-speaking Bus. They are the reason that business is slow. If they were not here, we would probably be the best restaurant in the entire state, if not the whole coast, maybe the world."

Clarence: "The waiters aren't going to be happy with this new System."

Bill, disparagingly: "They're too independent. They need to be tamed. They are just greedy. We have the overall picture in mind. That's why we are managers. The problem with Ma Belle is that it is a waiter run restaurant. If it were a manager run restaurant - like it should be - it could rise to new heights."

Luigi: "With your support nothing can block my beloved Backwaiter System now. We Managers are united."

Together: "All for one and one for all."

Impelled by this Idea created by their collective Brain, the Newest Improved Backwaiter System was about to reemerge. However, this time Luigi's Plan was backed by both Clarence and Bill, who threw the weight and prestige of his position behind the Plan.

### **Back with Reinforcements**

In proper management fashion, Bill called a Staff meeting on the first Thursday of June to notify us of the Newest Improved Idea. :

After briefly summarizing their intent Bill: "We are excited. We have given a lot of thought to this new System and are sure that it will work. Any questions?"

Me: "If the Backwaiter System was so good, why did all the Runners leave last time?"

Clarence: "It was just a Money problem."

Luigi: "Yeah. If the Backwaiters had been paid more, I'm sure they would have stayed."

Bill: "We've addressed this flaw in the old System by devising a new tip distribution."

Me: "Money wasn't the problem. Backwaiters are just glorified Bus. The Runners don't want to waste their talents pouring water and resetting tables."

Clarence: "People will do anything for money."

Me: "Not. Most of us have standards."

Clarence: "Which evaporate in the presence of lots of Green."

Karen: "Where's the money coming from. I already tip out 40%."

Bill: "We've increased the station size to 9 tables. That way there will be more money to tip out. We've thought of everything."

Me: "I'm afraid that larger stations will depersonalize service."

Clarence: "That's the way we're heading. We want to get away from the idea of individual waiters. We want to move to the idea of team service."

Luigi: "Like they do in Europe."

Clarence: "Much higher class. With many people scurrying around taking care of the needs of our Guests."

Bill: "That is what my wife and I prefer. We don't care about our Waiter. We just want good service."

Karen: "But I like to give personalized service."

Angel: "So do I."

Clarence: "It's not about you guys anymore. It's about the Guests. And we think our sophisticated Clientele would prefer a more European style of service."

Karen and Angel simultaneously: "But ..."

Luigi: "No more buts. We are going to make this work. You guys are going to thank us for this in the long run."

Bill: "We've thought about this System a lot. We know it will work."

Seeing all the signs of Brain run amok - eyes slightly glazed with future visions - I decided to remain silent - biding my time until the tide turned.

Karen: "Who is going to work as Backwaiter?"

Luigi: "We were hoping to get Punky, José and Nathan to come back, but for some reason they said no."

Karen a sarcastic aside: "I wonder why."

Bill: "Because they weren't available, we decided to rotate the Waiters as Backwaiters. Any volunteers."

Dead silence.

Finally Angel spoke up. "I'll give it a chance."

Bill: "That's the spirit we would like to see. We shall begin using this System tomorrow night so that we will be ready to use it the next weekend."

Me: "On Graduation Weekend?"

Bill: "Yes, of course."

Me: "But that's the busiest weekend of the year."

Bill: "That's why we will work the bugs out this weekend."

Karen turned white and complained of an upset stomach.

## **Chapter 45: A Bartender walkout?!**

### **Nine Table Stations?!**

The day after introducing the Newest Improved Backwaiter Idea Bill gave two weeks notice. His wife had been transferred to a new city. Now it was Clarence and Luigi, who turned white and got an upset stomach. But the Idea had taken hold in Bill's Mind. He was desperate to implement it before he left. He had a Mission. With him as the driving force, their ill conceived System was instituted the week before Graduation Weekend, the biggest weekend of the year.

Friday night, as per Plan, certain Waiters were given larger stations; others were 'demoted' to Backwaiters. Certain Bus were promoted to Backwaiters, others were 'demoted to table resetters' - those who couldn't speak English, of course. Everyone was given larger stations with more staff assigned to each table. This proved a nightmare for all concerned.

Balancing nine active tables is much different than eight or the normal seven tables. Many fine restaurants only give their waiters six tables or even five or four tables so that they can narrow their focus upon the individual guests. Psychologists have determined that humans can comfortably hold 5 or 6 things in their short term memory at a time. Researchers have attempted to discover how waiters could hold more items than that in their brain simultaneously. It took some sophisticated language to force the multitasking Reality of the Waiter to fit their Theories.

Regardless, nine table stations sent our minds spinning. "Where am I? Who am I? What was I supposed to be doing? Who am I forgetting?"

Further there were so many tables that the Waiters and Backwaiters duplicated efforts. "May I take your cocktail order?" - "It has already been taken, thank you." - "May I offer you our dessert menu?" - "We already gave our order to the other waiter. You guys seem confused."

We were.

And Confusion is not good for the Fine Dining Experience. The Service Staff should never appear confused. This only reflects the confusion in the rest of the world, which our Guests are attempting to escape. With food, wine, and atmosphere as our tools we Waiters attempt to guide the Guest to the ultimate culinary Experience. When the Guide appears confused the Guest questions the Journey and is instantly yanked out of the Moment. Brain is awakened, immediately trying to figure out what the problem is. And whenever Brain is engaged Body's quest to lose herself in the sensuality of the Moment is thwarted. Ideally the Waiter/Guide attempts to still and neutralize Brain with the Art of the Food and the Spirit of the Vine. If Brain is reactivated to solve restaurant problems, the quest for higher conscious is lost, at least temporarily - sometimes for the entire night, especially if the Guest begins questioning the Service. Further if one Guest in a Party is upset, it tends to infect the entire Party. Too much confusion transforms the evening from an enjoyable sensual experience to a logical nightmare, immersed in analysis.

### **Let them find new Jobs?**

Needless to say we were all demoralized by this Newest Improved System. Everyone made less money and gave worse service. Angel, a fine evening Waiter, had volunteered to be a Backwaiter to give the Idea a chance. After one night, Angel refused to do it again. Not because it was demeaning. Not because of the money. It was just too confusing to give good Service. And Angel loved to give good Service.

To complicate matters when the Bartenders, Chris and Charles, got their Tips at the end of the shift on Friday night, they immediately threatened to walk out. They hadn't been informed about the Newest Improved System and weren't too happy about a 10% cut in tips. The managers assured them that this would be good in the long run, because the better service would mean increased business. They didn't buy it.

Notified about the dissatisfaction of the Staff, Bill responded in a normal fashion for one trapped by Brain's games. Although surrounded by pain, Bill said, "Let them find new jobs." The Idea reigned supreme. "The People, the Staff, who are making the Guests happy, don't matter. Only my Idea is important. We will make it work. It will become the new Reality."

### **Bartenders, a crucial part of our Team**

I tried to calm down the Bartenders.

Me: "Don't quit yet. Give me some time to talk to Susan. I'm sure she won't be happy when she hears you're threatening to walk."

Charles, the head Bartender: "We won't leave now. We like working together too much. But if the tip situation isn't resolved by next weekend we're outta here. I'm sure you understand. We just got a big pay cut. I'm not even sure it's legal."

Thinking to myself: "Great! Now I must do something - Again! Why me?"

Why was I impelled to action? Because of compassion for the Staff - the bartenders in particular? Probably not. Suffering and chaos didn't seem to motivate me - as witnessed by the January debacle. I was more concerned with the disruption of the Ma Belle Experience. A bartender walkout would certainly destroy the tranquillity of our Dining Room - for this one night, as well as many nights to come.

Although Wine is the primary alcohol of choice in Fine Dining, many choose to have cocktails instead. While the Cooks prepare the Food, the Bartenders prepare the Drinks. The Waiters could supplant Hostesses, Managers, Bus, Runners, and even Expeditors; but they could not do the Bartenders job, easily. I knew that if the Bartenders bolted that our Guests would really suffer. This was true on any busy night, but especially Graduation Weekend, the busiest weekend of the Year - when all the college graduates and their collective families celebrate this milestone with, what they hope to be, an impeccable Fine Dining Experience.

Of course with Service suffering complaints would rise and tips would fall - a lose-lose situation. Not only would I make less money but my peace of mind would be shattered by Brain's many thoughts - triggered by the agitation of our multitude of disturbed Guests. More troubling was the fact that this mental chaos would linger for days beyond the troubled evening. This is common experience shared by conscientious Servers everywhere. Just as the Guest happiness is our happiness, similarly their pain is our pain. To explain this lingering agitation long after the event I speculate that Brain is motivated to solve what went wrong and what could have been done about it. Even if it is all past and nothing can be done he wants to prevent future incidents of a similar nature. So I was probably motivated to do something to protect the Guest Experience, to preserve my peace of mind and to maximize my Tips.

### **Getting involved, in spite of myself**

After this chaotic weekend with the larger stations, I woke up early Sunday morning, my Mind full of Thoughts - as to be expected. I was worried; three opponents with managerial power was more than I had tackled before. The Idea had obscured the Mirror of the Minds of Clarence, Luigi, and Bill. Each of them, wrapped up in their own notion of personal glory, held on tightly to their Idea as the key to their personal



success.

I sharpened my swords, practiced some forms, then went into a deep meditation, patiently waiting for a hole to appear. In a flash a plan emerged. "Bill is leaving. A position is opening up. Dive through this opening before it closes."

Although Susan was rarely available over the weekend, the Universe had arranged for her to be available this particular Sunday. She had invited the Hotel Staff, which included the restaurant employees, to her post wedding party. Although I would normally avoid these functions like the plague, I arrived early to make my pitch. Fearful of the continuing Service devastation due to Luigi's obsession with Idea and Clarence's love of Chaos, I urgently made my request to Susan.

Me: "Now that Bill is leaving why don't you make Blair the Maitre'd."

Susan: "Blair?"

Me: "Everyone loves him. His expressed goal is to make someone laugh every day, He's perfect for the job. He's worked his way up through the Ma Belle System. So he knows all aspects of the job. He is already working as Assistant Manager two days a week. The Staff will rejoice if you make Blair the Maitre'd."

Susan: "What about Luigi?"

Me: "Promote him upstairs to the vacant F&B position - to get him away from people, whom he despises. As he says, 'I love people - as long as they don't get in my way - which they always do.'"

Susan: "Great idea! I was wondering what to do."

Pleased with myself, I slept well that night - thinking that with Blair in charge all the wrongs would be righted. How naive I was.

## Chapter 46: Still more to be done?

Going into work on Tuesday, I saw Susan interviewing someone for the Food and Beverage position. The enthusiasm of their conversation indicated that it was a done deal. The mystery man came into dinner that night to enjoy a special menu created by Chef Antoine. I waited upon him, enjoying his laughter and vitality. But his entry into the Management scene raised more questions than it answered.

### Reality interrupts My Project

As might be expected I woke up early Wednesday morning with my Mind full of Thoughts - again.

Me: "Hmmm? Where does this leave Luigi? With Blair as Maitre'd and this guy as F&B, what's left? Is this Luigi's end? It's hard to believe. But wait. This confuses things tremendously. The new guy will probably pick up where Bill left off, which means the Backwaiter System is still in place. *Great!?* The Backwaiter System alive and well - The Bartenders still threatening to walkout unless something is changed - We are still heading into the busiest weekend of the year with a flawed system in place - Bill is still in charge. - But his last day is Friday, the first day of Graduation Weekend - Yet he has a Mission. He has become married to the Idea and wants to see it continue to live. He has spent a lot of time thinking about this System - investing much of himself into its creation. It is his baby. He doesn't want to see it aborted. He is committed. No use talking to him. Luigi and Clarence - heads still full of dreams - No use talking to them - When is Susan making Blair Maitre'd? - Will it be soon enough? - Anyway with Bill still in the picture - standing behind Clarence & Luigi's System, Blair is hopelessly outnumbered. Darn! My work is not yet done."

Brain: "Yikes! Our project is going to be interrupted again. The restaurant keeps getting in the way of our prodigious mental creations - our true Mission in Life."

Me: "Yes. Our True Mission. That sounds good."

Little Voice: "Don't be blind, Space. We only operate in the eternal Now. Your mental projects are clouds - showy, but no substance. They can wait."

Brain: "But we're in the midst of creating a revolutionary new mathematical system. We can't allow Ma Belle's trivial world to break our momentum."

Me: "True. Can't stop work on my revolutionary new mathematical system."

Little Voice: "But Space, you are being honored by the gods. They have placed you in a position where you can make a difference."

Brain: "Who cares about making a difference in the lower world? We don't want to be bothered. Instead we feel cursed and annoyed that this menial restaurant stuff is interfering with our Divine Inspiration. Must detach from this external world of illusion."

Me: "Yes. Must detach."

As you can see, I can't take too much credit on this one. Obstinate I wanted to ignore Ma Belle's real problems for my empty Project. However the Universe had other plans - plaguing me with thoughts enough to disturb my sleep, my Tai Chi and my Project. As usual Mediation was the only solution.

### Doing Nothing means Speaking Up

Me: "I'm trying to detach, but I can't concentrate on anything except Ma Belle and her problems. I can't take this verbal battering much longer. It is destroying my Inspiration. What shall I do?"

Little Voice: "Yield to the propensities of the situation. Do something. You are

worshipping Idea just like the rest.”

Me: “Which Idea?”

Little Voice: “The Idea that you should be detached from the external world.”

Me: “But it is such a good Idea. I’ve read about it in a lot of books. It makes lots of sense.”

Little Voice: “Yeah, it is a great Idea to protect you from involvement - from facing your fears.”

Me: “But my Divine Inspiration.”

Little Voice: “I am your Inspiration. And I’m withdrawing from your project until you follow my directives.”

Me: “Gulp! What should I do?”

Little Voice: “You need to communicate to Susan the GM about the approaching service problems.”

Me: “But that would be doing something. I’m a Taoist. I’m into non-action.”

Little Voice: “Just another Idea that you’ve corrupted. Your Full Mind is doing something by holding you back from following your inner urge to get involved. Doing nothing means speaking up. That is the internal urge that is demanding to be heard.”

Me: “But that’s scary.”

Little: “Precisely. Because of your fear of involvement you are neglecting the immediate Reality for your mental creations.”

Me: “But I’m a create-oholic. I can’t help myself.”

Little Voice: “Just another label to mask for your fear.”

Me: “Aaeiii! But my projects.”

Little Voice: “They are just a big hole that you’ve dug to climb inside and hide from the world.”

Me: “But it’s so comfortable in my little cave.”

Little Voice: “Not for now. I will mentally torture you until you follow my advice.”

Me: “But what about non-action?”

Little Voice: “You are so obsessed with this Idea.”

Me: “It’s a very good Idea.”

Little Voice: “Which you have totally misinterpreted to hide your neurosis.”

Me: “How so?”

Little Voice: “Non-action occurs when you do not block or redirect your inner urges. It is based upon an Empty Mind. Action is when the overactive Brain is in charge with all his hidden agendas. All you have to do is quiet your thought generating Brain, and you will naturally do the right thing. This is non-action.”

Me: “I don’t believe you. I’m staying in my closet.”

Little Voice: “Sorry Space. I’m having none of that. You must act. If the bartenders walk, and they probably will, you will have a Service nightmare on your hands. Not only will your tips suffer, but you will suffer emotionally from numerous complaints. I’ll send nightmares. I will continue to plague your thoughts with what ifs. You must do something. Everyone is counting on you. You promised. You can’t let us down.”

Me: “You’re right. I must speak up for the good of Ma Belle.”

Little Voice: “Finally.”

### **A Mental Civil War**

Sensing defeat Brain began filling my Mind with Thoughts, creating objection after objection: “Space, you have more important things to do. Anything you do will probably backfire. You are not the manager anyway. Why concern yourself with this

world of illusion. You are beyond that.”

Little Voice: “Wrong. Ma Belle’s pain is your pain.”

Me: “Her pain is my pain?”

Brain: “No it’s not. Hers is the world of Maya - the transitory world of illusion. You must detach.”

Me: “Yes. Must detach.”

Little Voice: “Wrong again. You have been with Ma Belle long enough to have merged with her on certain levels. You and everyone else will suffer if you don’t do something - Guests, Staff, and consequently Ma Belle. Not only that but with no experienced bartenders, everyone will continue to suffer until new bartenders are hired trained. And this could take a long time. You must act for Ma Belle’s greater good.”

Brain: “Ma Belle is just another mental attachment. Let go. Everything has a way of working itself out. This is your Little Voice speaking. Don’t get involved.”

Me: “My Little Voice?”

Little Voice: “Don’t get tricked Space. Brain is just pretending to be me to press his agenda. Get involved for Ma Belle’s sake.”

Brain: “Don’t be misled. Brain is just tricking you by masquerading as your Little Voice. I’m the real one. I have your best interests in mind. Getting involved will be a big mess. Let your Muse take you to world’s beyond imagining.”

Little Voice: “No. Think of Ma Belle and her welfare. A little push is all that is needed - not an inordinate time investment. You’ll still have plenty of time left to spend with your precious Muse.”

Me: “My head feels like its going to explode from the battle going on inside. And I can’t tell one from the other. How am I supposed to differentiate truth from falsehood?”

Brain: “Trust me. Leave Ma Belle’s petty material world behind to enter the ecstasy and bliss of divine channeling. This is your Little Voice speaking.”

Little Voice: “Remember Space. I only emerge from quietude. Still your thoughts and see which message emerges from the Void. Brain only enters the picture after the Universe has spoken - frequently to corrupt, and sometimes to help out, as he’s supposed to. Cultivate silence to differentiate the true from the false.”

Brain: “No, listen to me. Retreat into the Womb.”

Me: “All this Mind chatter - back and forth. I’m developing an uneasy feeling. My Little Voice tells me one thing and Brain another. Neither will let up. More importantly I can’t tell one from the other. It feels as if there is civil war going on inside my head, which is upsetting my stomach. I need to go even deeper into my meditation to calm everything down and see who remains. In - Out - In - Out - Ommm!”

Focusing upon my breathing and body structure I was finally able to still the verbal chatter and enter the silent Void. Shortly thereafter a solution emerged spontaneously, loud and clear, with a unified field that was irresistible.

Little Voice: “You fashion yourself a writer?”

Me: “Yes, a very creative writer at that.”

Little Voice: “If you’re afraid to speak up, at least write something to Susan the GM. She is the only one who could have an effect upon the Managers. She is their boss. She, although absentee, doesn’t want there to be any problems. The Word is your Sword to fight injustice - righting wrongs and slaying dragons.”

So once again I took pen in hand and wrote a letter to Susan the GM. This is what I wrote.

## Letter to Susan

Dear Susan,

June 17, 1999

We are approaching the busiest weekend of the year, Graduation Weekend, and the Bartenders are threatening to walk out due to a new untested Service system.

To understand why let me bring you up to date on recent restaurant happenings.

Three to four weeks ago I mentioned to you that morale was at an all time high. Comment cards reflected the happiness of our guests; 95% of the comment cards rated the service as excellent, 5 on a scale of 1 to 5.

This last weekend a new system of service was instituted. Now morale is at an all time low. The staff that has carried the dining room through the last season is discouraged and depressed. The bartenders are threatening to walk out; the bus are downcast and demoralized; the waiters are wondering if they should seek new jobs. Everyone who was so proud to be part of the Ma Belle team is suddenly jealous of the stability of other restaurants.

What has happened? The Management Team in a self-proclaimed 'carefully thought out plan' has given all the loyal staff a pay cut through a tip reduction in order to upgrade service by bringing in outside help.

What is their conception of upgraded service? Angry bartenders, discouraged dining room managers, anxious waiters, and demoralized bus people certainly don't upgrade service. They have deliberately given the waiters larger stations in order to depersonalize service. Having had absolutely no dining room experience or guest interaction, they think that good service has primarily to do with proper etiquette. They feel that as long as the customers have their material needs satisfied that they will be happy.

Although proper etiquette is an important ingredient in service and should never be neglected, it is secondary to guest rapport. Any waiter, who has worked in this coastal town, for any length of time, understands that a large percentage of the guests want personalized service, not depersonalized service. Although many guests just want their material needs satisfied, a larger portion want some type of interaction with their server. Although some guests enjoy the layered effect of impersonal servants, more guests want their own waiter who is responsive to their needs.

They want a waiter who can validate their excitement, which comes in many forms. Sometimes they are celebrating an anniversary or birthday. Sometimes they are visiting our beautiful city for the first time or maybe they are excited to be dining at such an exclusive restaurant. If the waiter can focus on this excitement and magnify it, the customer is extremely appreciative and rewards the service staff appropriately. Conversely if the etiquette has been perfect, while the rapport has been non-existent then the reward is average or under average.

Most tourists come to our city for an intimate experience with loved ones. A huge proportion of these tourists come from the huge population centers which surround us. Many of these people experience depersonalization on the freeways, in their jobs, and in their stores, simply because of the millions of people coexisting together. The last thing they want is a depersonalized restaurant experience. The first thing a customer will complain about is rude, snooty, or over-busy waiters, and the impersonal service this creates. Way down on the list of customer complaints is etiquette, unless it is extremely bad.

At the last restaurant I worked, we experimented with the European, big city style of layered service for about three months. The front waiters were given larger stations with more help. We had backwaiters, bus, expeditors, a sommelier, hostess, and maitre'd - similar to the new Ma Belle system. We abandoned it after about 3 months because of numerous customer complaints that they didn't know who their waiter was.

In summary the new system instituted by the Management team has destroyed restaurant morale and depersonalized service. Bill the F&B, whose last day is Friday, instituted the System. He has virtually no Fine Dining Experience except as a Diner; his primary experience is with the impersonal service of catering and banquets. For these reasons the system should be rejected as soon as possible to restore restaurant morale and re-personalize service on this busy weekend.

If service is to be upgraded, the managers need to learn to manage through constant training and supervision rather than by instituting a system which they think will manage for them. To maintain and upgrade service standards the managers and sommelier need to be on the floor interacting with guests and staff, not going out to lunch, thinking up schemes which will absolve them of their duties.

Thanks for taking the time to read this letter.

From one who is heavily invested in guest satisfaction.

Sincerely,

Space

a waiter with 6 years of experience at Ma Belle  
and nearly 30 years of waiting experience  
in fine restaurants in this town

## Chapter 47: The Rebellion

### Cold Feet

Even with this letter in my hand, I still resisted giving it to Susan, dominated as I was by the pattern of avoidance established by Brain. Habituation is hard to break.

Brain: "Susan's probably too busy - She probably doesn't care - You'll probably get written up like Karen - Or worse you'll be given the Breakfast shift as punishment - Maybe you should just drop the whole project - Things have a way of working themselves out - Detach - Non-action."

Me: "I'm so afraid."

Little Voice: "You're such a spineless coward."

Me: "That's not a nice thing to say."

Little Voice: "I'm just trying to tear away the Person you think yourself to be. These cloud-like misconceptions are preventing the real you from shining through."

Me: "I'm still scared."

Little Voice: "Listen, if you're frightened of face to face interaction, just take the letter to work and slip it in her box."

Me: "All right. Then if it is meant to be, she will read it and take action."

However the Universe was not to be denied. Not wanting to leave things to chance He arranged for Susan to show up unexpectedly that night to have dinner with a friend - in one of her rare appearances in Ma Belle's Dining Room.

Little Voice: "Give her the letter, Space. The Universe has obviously arranged for her to be here for a reason."

Even with this obvious Sign I hesitated as Brain constantly created objections.

Brain: "It's not polite to interrupt her Fine Dining Experience. No need to bother her with your stupid little letter. It will probably not make much difference anyway."

Not giving up or letting up for an instant the Little Voice yelled at me: "Space you have the letter. All you need to do is slip it to her. It's meant to be. You will get no mental rest if you keep resisting my directives. I'll enter your dreams to torture you about lost opportunities. You will have a hard time detaching from my fury."

With this threat looming I finally gave my letter to Susan on her way out.

Me: "Well that's the end of that. She probably won't even read it."

Brain was still projecting problems up until the very end.

### **Susan reluctantly takes action**

To Susan's credit, she called me the next morning. This was the second time I experienced the power of the printed Word.

Susan: "What's this about a bartender walkout?" She too was sensitive to the fact that bartenders are an essential part of the Fine Dining Experience at Ma Belle.

Me: "Their pay has been cut under the New Improved Backwaiter System and they don't like it."

Susan: "What new System?"

Me: "Didn't your managers tell you about it?"

Susan: "Just a little. Not really." Corporate GMs are always noncommittal; it's safer that way. "But we can't have a bartender walkout. What shall we do?"

Me: "Return to the old System. It worked just fine."

Susan: "But what about my managers?"

Me: "What about them?"

Susan: "I can't contradict them in front of the staff. It will undermine their authority."

Me: "Too late. Why don't you make the decision?"

Susan: "I'm going out of town this weekend."

Me: "If you don't do something we're looking at a major restaurant disaster. Empower Blair as Maitre'd now and we can deal with it."

Susan, thinking to herself: "Space can't do anything; he's just a waiter. However with Blair as the Maitre'd he would be in charge of service in the Dining Room." Aloud: "Good idea. I will talk with Blair immediately. I will empower him to prevent this crisis. Why don't you get together with Blair tomorrow to decide what to do. But I don't want the bartenders walking out."

### **A Spontaneous Employee uprising**

Somehow many found out about our meeting and decided to attend. This included Bill, Clarence, most of the waiters and the bartenders. Unfortunately Bill and Clarence had not been informed by Susan that Blair had been made Maitre'd or that he had been empowered to avert the bartender walkout. Therefore they viewed this as an employee uprising, which in some ways it was - a spontaneous revolution inspired by the threat to the well-being of our Guests. In other words we were fighting to protect Ma Belle. During the whole meeting the managers glowered at us as if we were inmates who had seized control of the prison.

Universally no Waiter liked the New Improved System.

Angel: "The Backwaiters are taking too many orders. I feel as if I'm losing touch with my guests."

Karen: "The stations are too big. I have too many tables to take care of properly."

Me: "Service is becoming depersonalized."

Unaware that Blair and I had been empowered by Susan, Clarence defended their Plan:

"This is part of the point of the new system. We are trying to create the image of being taking care of by the System rather than by an individual waiter."

Karen: "My customers like it when I do everything for them."

Me: "I get confused when I have too many tables to think about. I can't give the service I'm used to."

Angel: "With so many tables I can't get to know my customers."

Me: "Most people like having 'their waiter' so they know who to go to."

Bill: "We gave bigger stations so that there would be more money to spread around."

Then came the clincher.

Angel: "I would prefer to make less money and have a smaller station than to have the Backwaiter system."

All the waiters immediately agreed.

Me: "Do we all agree then that we will return to the old system?"

Unanimous: "Yes!"

Blair: "OK. It's decided then. Backwaiters rule."

We all glowered at him.

Blair: "Just kidding."

Bill: "You can't do this."

Me: "We just did."

Bill: "Susan is not going to be happy when she hears about this."

Me: "She told us to prevent a bartender walkout."

Bill, sarcastically: "Right!"

Blair: "No she did."

Bill, still attached to his Idea, placed a curse upon us: "You will regret this action. Mark



my words. You are doomed to mediocrity. Your Service will never live up to its potentials."

After he left, Charles: "What's with him?"

Me: "He's delirious from Person fever."

### **An Ode to Management**

To illustrate the depth of affection between Management and Staff at this point here is a poem someone wrote to commemorate the occasion.

Waiter, this Wine is Bad.

Damn, stepped in some shit.

Waking up in a cold sweat.

Thank God, it's just a bad dream.

How long for ...

    The bad taste to leave our mouth,

    The stench to leave our nose,

    The bad thoughts to leave our minds?

Hopefully the growth is not malignant.

A friendly warning:

    Please don't come back

    For someone with surely spit in your food.

        with Affection,

        the Staff

## Chapter 48: A Group Bonding

Here I am analyzing this event over 7 years later - in the midst of my ninth rewrite - and finding that it still has much to reveal. Although we weren't aware of it at the time our worker rebellion bonded us as a Family Unit with Ma Belle as our Mother, the focal point of our revolt. Risking our jobs we collectively stood up to protect the Harmony of her Dining Room - resisting the common tendency to queue up behind Leaders - no matter how idiotic their directives are.

Our resistance distanced us from Corporate's patriarchal hierarchy, including his Managers and united us behind Ma Belle's welfare. Due to their desire for upward mobility management was distinctly aligned with Corporate. When Corporate spoke they jumped - as witnessed by the Merger mess of the previous June, where Ma Belle was sacrificed in the service of Corporate desires.

Disobeying Corporate's representatives was akin to disobeying the King's commands. We rejected the Man with his craving for wealth and power and instead aligned ourselves with Ma Belle - the Mother - embracing her standards of Beauty and Sensuality. (Of course this alignment was somewhat natural, in the sense that Corporate provided salaries to the Managers while Ma Belle provides those of us who worked the Floor with Tips - with Corporate's minimum wage just covering our taxes.)

This was a huge break from normality. Initially any restaurant is just a job, designed to generate income to pay bills and satisfy desires. As such each employee fulfills the function he is intended to and goes home. There is no loyalty to business or staff except as it provides income. This is where many remain through the course of their lives - self serving, unattached to the whole. With this act of rebellion Ma Belle became more than just another job, where one shows up, fulfills responsibilities, and goes home. With this act she assumed an identity, independent of income. Needless to say part of the motivation was based upon obvious self interest - such as Bartenders protecting their tips and me guarding my peace of Mind. However our concern for Ma Belle's Experience was what ultimately united us all behind a common goal.

Who is this Ma Belle that we were striving to protect? Just like any other living organism, she represents a complex of notions and parts. Ma Belle is the building, the useful emptiness inside, and the beautiful view from her picture windows. She is her Guests and her Staff. She is the Gourmet Cuisine, the Cocktails and the Fine Wine. Further she is the execution, both Service and Cooking. Just as it is I who holds my Body and Brain together - with their multiplicity of parts, Ma Belle is the one common thread, which links her diverse elements together.

And just as I transcend and am more than my parts, so does Ma Belle transcend the elements which make her up. And just as many refer to the 'I' that transcends my Body and Brain as my Soul, we might refer to the Ma Belle, the whole who transcends her parts, as her Spirit. So when I refer to Ma Belle, I am referring to her Spirit - not her building or business, just as when someone refers to me they are not referring to my Body or Brain, but the unidentifiable, unnamable, indescribable essence, which seems to be me. (Of course the Buddhists say that even this 'me' doesn't exist, but that doesn't concern us here, except to the extent that this Idea corrupted my behavior.)

Certain of my parts are crucial for my survival as are Ma Belle's components crucial for hers. Just as each living organism fights for self preservation, employing its variety of elements to protect and defend its vital parts from attack, in a similar way it could be said that Ma Belle employed her parts, i.e. us, her Employees, to defend her from attack. Note that this Group urge for self preservation is not unusual in the slightest as

witnessed by the multitude of countries that are constantly at war.

In this case, the part of Ma Belle that was threatened was her Service. This complex of factors - some material, some spiritual - drew us together in a way that none of us suspected at the time. It strengthened our Bond much more than if there had been no attack. I guess this is what binds tribes, communities and even countries together. Faced with an external attack the Group hangs together as One to fight off or defend itself from attack. With this action one identifies an Us & a Them.

So with this act of defiance we stood together as a Team, a Family, a Tribe. We strove to protect all elements of our finely tuned Machine, which was providing excellent Service to our Guests, who are Ma Belle. So this act crystallized boundaries, which had been nebulous and ill defined previously. Corporate and her representatives were on the outside. We were on the inside with Ma Belle at our center. However, as mentioned, none of this did I realize until years later due to the Universe arranging for me to edit this work. Bless him and his machinations.

## Chapter 49: The Ego Grinder

To avert the crisis for the Big Weekend, we went back to the Team System that had been working so well. Those entering our Temple for their Graduation celebration enjoyed her Experience at whatever level they were capable - partially inspired by those of us on the Floor, who were beaming with relief and gratitude.

### One Glitch

Everything went smoothly except that Slick, our best Expediter, walked out. Slick had been at Ma Belle for about four years. He had worked his way up through the System - working as Bus, Runner, Expediter, Day Waiter, and Evening Waiter. His professionalism was of the highest caliber. It was he that trained the new Runners and Bus, attempting to make the Back of the House operate at peak efficiency. Let's see what happened.

At a manager meeting before the big night:

Clarence: "We've got so many reservations that we need an extra waiter."

Luigi: "Not Slick. He's got attitude problems. Besides we need him in the Kitchen."

Clarence: "He can expedite the big nights better than anyone else."

Luigi: "He's certainly better than Josiah, who's the only other one we have. So Slick will definitely have to expedite."

Clarence: "If he's expediting that leaves Josiah waiting tables. Slick will be mad."

Luigi: "Tell him it will be for the good of the house."

Clarence: "We've been telling him that for months."

That night.

Slick: "Is it true that Josiah is working as Waiter tonight?"

Me: "Yeah."

Slick: "Why him? It should be my turn."

Me: "You're too good at your position. It's harder to find a Good Expediter than a Waiter. They should have been training someone to take your place."

Slick: "Well now they're going to have to!"

Me: "I understand how you feel. I've been in a similar position before where I was continually passed over for advancement. It's frustrating. Sometimes extreme actions must be taken. I had to threaten to get a new job before they would promote me from Bus to Waiter. I was the only Bus. It was much easier to hire a new waiter than to train a new Bus to take my spot."

Slick: "I'm not sure I want to stay. Too much water over the dam. Hey you know I think I forgot something in my car."

Me: "It's been great working with you."

We shook hands warmly.

That was the last time we saw Slick on the Floor.

### **An aborted promotion cycle**

Why did we lose such a fine employee? Slick's expectations were not met. Because most of us think that we are our Person, we suffer when our Person's plans are thwarted. We yell. We scream. We stomp up and down. At Ma Belle, as at most restaurants, promotions, and the lack thereof, frequently causes this reaction. Unfortunately one of the by-products of constant management changes was that the promotional dynamic was continuously upset.

Our promotional ladder was quite clear. After a period of working Breakfasts and Lunches, a Bus is moved to Dinner. Eventually the Bus expected to move up the ladder to become a Runner, as a prelude to becoming a Expediter, then Waiter. If this did not happen as quickly as the employee wished, this caused mental suffering. If someone else, who had been there a shorter amount of time, was moved ahead more quickly, it caused even more emotional pain. Frequently good employees would find new jobs, if they were passed over for promotion too many times. This is what happened to Slick.

Slick: "I can't believe they gave Josiah the waiting shift - on Graduation weekend no less. It was my turn. I earned the position through 4 long years of service. Besides he's just a Lunch Waiter - no experience working Nights. It's just not fair that they promoted him ahead of me. I deserved the promotion. And then they expected me to expedite. Well forget it. Luigi, that asshole, has fucked me over one too many times. Never again."

And why was Josiah given the prized position even though Slick had seniority? One reason. Josiah got along with Luigi. Slick didn't. Slick and Luigi had continued grinding each other's Ego over the respect Game. Luigi had ground Slick's Ego too deeply this time and he bolted.

Luigi and Slick fell into one of the most dangerous of Brain's traps. Brain creates a Game and then becomes incredibly disturbed if he begins to lose the Game that he himself has set up. These Games are maintained and strengthened by the imagined Brain Games of other People. The collection of Brains creates a Group Game for everyone to play. Or course each Brain imagines slightly different Rules to their own Game, which, of course, varies from Person to Person from time to time.

Unfortunately the Universe doesn't always cooperate - frequently breaking these artificial Rules through circumstance. This is when we scream bloody murder, whining: "Rule breaker! Cheater! This is no fair. I won't stand for it anymore. It is beyond endurance. Stop the World I want to get off."

This is what Slick felt when Josiah was promoted above him. His Brain had created rules and Luigi and Clarence had broken them. Slick decided to quit this Game and go find another Game, where everyone played by his rules. A fool's dream, of course.

### **The End of the Golden Age of Expeditors**

Slick was the last of Antoine's fine Expediter crew to go. Punky, José, and Nathan had already found other jobs during the chaos of the January Backwaiter System. Only loyal Slick had remained to expedite the busy weekends. And now he was gone. There was Pelon, but he hadn't been there that long, certainly not long enough to expedite by himself on Saturday night. But he was all that was left. Furthermore Antoine initially rejected him for the position because, as a Hispanic he did not fit his ethnic profile. Pelon - another Reject - who stuck by Ma Belle in her darkest hours.

And who was going to assist Pelon as a Runner? That is when it really got thin. With Luigi hiring mainly Latino bus help, none of the best Bus spoke English or were too young. The best of the potential Runners was Alfredo, a surly High School student who spoke English softly with a thick accent, which was hard for my Guests to understand

and impossible for the French to understand, especially Antoine. The Chef buried his head in his arms. Luigi's Backwaiter Idea had finally completed the obliteration of his fine crew of Runners and Expeditors.

Chef Antoine: "Aurgh! We live in a world ruled by idiots, who are threatened by the competent. The good are leaving, while the incompetent remain."

After so many casualties our Service was just limping along. This devastation of Antoine's Expeditors, not only weakened the Back but the Front of the House as well. The Expediter System was a great way to train new waiters. They became well acquainted with both the Service and Antoine's dishes from serving and describing it regularly. Normally they had worked intimately with the Kitchen for months or sometimes years. Sometimes this was not enough for a promotion, as was the case with Stick. Although some Expeditors didn't have the talent, courage, or patience to be Waiters, many fine Waiters had been graduated through the System. They had worked first as Bus, then Runner to Expediter to Lunch Waiter to Dinner Waiter. Blair, the new Maitre'd, who had worked virtually every aspect of service, was an excellent example of working his way up through the System. (I, too, worked briefly in each of these capacities to complete my training.) Many who had worked as Expeditors were now waiting at other restaurants in the area. It was obvious that Francis Le Roi's Expediter system graduated many fine waiters from its training program. Now that we were short of talent in the Runner and Expediter category we were also thin of talent in the Waiter department, as well.

Chef Antoine's stable crew had been demolished. A short six months ago it had been the strongest it had ever been. Now it was the weakest. Antoine would have shed a tear, but he's not that kind of guy. Instead he got a headache, became depressed, and his wrist began to hurt even more.

## Chapter 50: Not another system!

Having successfully stood up to Management to defend Ma Belle and her Experience, we were elated. And while disappointed by Slick's departure, we were happy that Blair, everyone's friend, was now the Maitre'd. Further Bill, the supposed instigator of the last Backwaiter system, had left, and we were back to our beloved Team System, which worked so well. All was well. The enemy had been vanquished. The cream had risen to the top. And we were all to live happily ever after.

Little did we know what trials lay ahead of us. Evidently Luigi had come up with yet another System.

### Retaliation

Brain: "To reassert control we must punish those who participated in the rebellion."

Luigi: "Yes. Must punish."

Brain: "First Space."

Luigi: "But he's my best waiter."

Brain: "He was the instigator. He must feel the consequences for disobeying."

Luigi: "Yes. Consequences. But what?"

Brain: "Let's get him where it hurts the most."

Luigi: "Financially?"

Brain: "That too. We'll get to that."

Luigi: "Then what?"

Brain: "His beloved daughter, Pacifica."

Luigi: "What can we do to her?"

Brain: "Move her to the Breakfast Shift from the Dinner shift. She has been working as Space's Busser on the weekends for nearly a year."

Luigi: "Yes, a Father - Daughter Duo."

Brain: "How sweet. Putting Pacifica on Breakfasts will really make Space suffer to pay for his part in the insurrection."

Luigi: "Perfect. What about the rest?"

Brain: "Here's my Plan. Double the Waiters and halve the Bussers. That'll hurt the Waiters in the pocketbook - where it really hurts."

Little Voice: "Why do you always have to tamper with things? Why can't you just leave things the way they are? Everything is working just fine."

Brain: "We need to teach those rebellious waiters a lesson. How dare they defy Management by revolting against our great System? We must retaliate against this worker's rebellion or else leadership is undermined, which will lead to chaos and dissolution."

Luigi: "Must retaliate against those who rebelled."

Little Voice: "But what about Service? What about the Guests?"

Brain: "What about them?"

Little Voice: "Won't the confusion of less Bus and more Waiters cause confusion - disrupting service for our Guests?"

Brain: "Damn Service. Damn the Guests. We must crush the rebellion to establish that we're firmly in charge. That way they won't think that they got away with something. A very bad precedent."

Little Voice: "But Ma Belle."

Brain: "Who cares about Ma Belle? We're talking revenge, er I mean teaching a lesson, er reasserting control."

Little Voice: "Uh. Listen Luigi. You must break free of Brain's domination. He's leading

you down the wrong Path."

Brain : "What do you mean break free? We are one and the same. Right, Luigi?"

Luigi: "Right, Sir."

Little Voice: "Don't get tricked, Luigi. You are separate from Brain. He is just meant to be your Servant - not your Master."

Brain "What's this Servant - Master garbage? That implies two, while we are one - unified against the world - an integrated whole."

Luigi: "Yes, an integrated whole."

Brain: "Ignore her. She's not making any sense. She's not the Voice of Reason like we are."

Luigi: "Right, the Voice of Reason."

Little Voice: "Luigi, listen carefully. You should listen to all of your Advisors - not just Brain - before making your choice. After all you are meant to be the Decision Maker, not Brain. He's just your helper."

Brain: "Ignore her New Age babble. I'm the one who, er I mean, we make all the decisions around here. After all we're logical."

Little Voice: "But you miss the whole picture from your limited perspective."

Brain "Who cares. We've got Reason to analyze things. We can manage just fine on our own. We don't need any assistance or extraneous advice, especially yours. Right, Luigi?"

Luigi: "Right, Boss."

Brain: "So back to my Plan."

Luigi: "Whatever you say, Sir. You're the One."

Little Voice: "But Luigi ..."

Brain: "Shut up. We've got everything under control."

Luigi: "Perfectly under control."

### **Regression or Where's my Bus?**

On the first Saturday after Graduation Weekend, always a busy night, I didn't see Blair when I came in to work. This evoked an ominous mood.

Investigating I asked Karen: "Where's Blair?"

Karen: "He and Jen went on a fishing trip."

Me: "Why do I have an uneasy feeling?"

Angel: "Don't worry. Everything will be just fine."

Me: "I hope so."

Sky: "Why do we have so many waiters on tonight? And where are all the Bus?"

Karen: "Luigi said something about sharing Bussers."

Me: "Sharing? But that means each Bus has twice as many tables."

Angel: "Look on the bright side. At least we don't have the Backwaiter System."

Me: "And where's Pacifica?"

Dee: "She's scheduled for Breakfast."

Me: "Aurgh!"

Confirming my premonition of evil, Luigi had scheduled an extra Waiter and two less Bussers. To understand the repercussions for Service let me speak a little on the evolution of the Bus duties. When Ma Belle opened Francis Le Roi set up the Service System with traditional Bussers. They provided water, coffee, bread and butter to the Guests; they also cleared and reset tables with all the polishing of glassware and silverware that this entails - the same duties that Bussers in Fine Dining establishments always perform. For the first five years they had worked as an amorphous team, serving the Waiters as a group. Under this initial System there had been less Bus than



Waiters.

Arriving together in our fifth year the Lewis and Clark team successfully improved service by assigning one Bus to each Waiter so that they could work together as a team. In connection with this partnership the Bus duties were expanded to include selling mineral water, bringing pre-appetizers, setting down silver for the courses, and presenting dessert menus. Because of their increased responsibilities they were given a bigger share of the tip pool. So under this System each Waiter had his own Busser. With his move Luigi eliminated the Waiter/Bus team that had worked so well and degraded the Bus duties to what they had been originally, when they had worked as an amorphous group.

Unfortunately no one had been notified. The Bus were still working in the same way as they had before - trying to fulfill the specialized duties they had performed when they had been paired with one Waiter. But now each Bus had two Waiters, instead of one. The Waiters still needed the assistance to maintain the upgraded service standards that we have mentioned, i.e. pre-aps, bottled water, silverware and dessert menus. However each Waiter had to share a Bus with another Waiter instead of having his own. Further although Pelon did marvelously for his first time expediting on a Saturday, Slick's absence in the Kitchen was sorely missed.

Needless to say there were numerous Service complaints because of the downgraded system. Confusion reigned - not good for the Fine Dining Experience. Instead of peace, quiet, satisfaction and a sense of At-one-ment, our Guests felt anxious. "Will anyone give me water?" "Who's going to clear my table?" - "When is someone going to offer me coffee?" - "What am I going to eat my dessert with?" - "Where is everyone?" - "What is going on? I'd heard this was a fine restaurant." These were just a few of the questions which plagued our Guests, denying them the ultimate in Fine Dining.

The Bus made good money that night, because there were fewer of them., However they hated it because of the anxiety and confusion.

Me: "You guys must have had a good night."

Pancho: "Too confusing. Too many tables. I like doing good job. Don't care about Money. Money takes care of itself."

Me: "More money, but less pride. You guys prefer the true pride of a job well done?"

Pancho: "Si."

Universe: "I gave the Bussers a Test. They passed with flying colors. Beware of the personal costs of more money. How many of you would pass this Test?"

### **A Double Agent**

Having abused the Waiters intentionally and Ma Belle inadvertently, Luigi was elated. Seeing that I was discouraged by this latest setback to Service combined with my daughter's fate, he decided to throw some gasoline on my fire.

Luigi: "I assume that you knew that Blair was behind the Backwaiter idea. It was his idea to cut the Bartender's tips."

I tried to keep my cool, but I shuddered involuntarily. My shoulders rose as if to protect myself from attack. Luigi knew that he had hit his mark.

Luigi: "Wanted to tell you, as a friend. Thought you'd want to know the truth."

Me: "Yeah thanks."

My head dropped forward and my spine curved into the posture of defeat.

I asked Charles, one of Blair's best friends, for confirmation of this unwanted news.

Me: "I heard that it was Blair's idea to cut your tips."

Charles: "Yeah. I couldn't believe it. My best friend and all. But at least he admitted it.

The rest of the managers were voting for a more drastic plan."

I felt as if a cold dose of reality had been dashed in my face. But my trials weren't over yet.

Pacifica: "Dad, I'm giving notice. Luigi has put me back on Breakfast shift again."

Me: "What?"

Pacifica: "I'm fed up. I worked Breakfasts when I first started. I'm over it. Besides the restaurant turbulence is having an effect on my school work."

Me: "Wait! Don't give notice yet. I'll do something. Anything."

Pacifica: "Sorry, Dad. I'm going away to college soon and don't need the stress."

Me: "Aaeeeeii! Why me?"

Universe: "I love doing these things in threes. Space was getting a little too pumped up for his own good. Feeling a bit too much Pride. I needed to deflate him, before things got out of control. I figured a triple should do it. Another degraded system, Blake the double agent, and Pacifica giving notice. That should be enough to unbalance him. Let's see how enlightened he really is. I love my job."

As we've seen before the Universe is a sadistic fellow.

## Chapter 51: Ignited to non-action

Although it further depressed my mood to discover that Blair was a double agent and that my daughter Pacifica was giving notice I was primarily discouraged by Luigi's latest attack upon Ma Belle. Like Antoine I was attached to Ma Belle and her Fine Dining Experience - wanting the best for her Guests. Both of us suffered mentally when this Experience was disrupted in any way. And we both wanted to run away from all this pain. Brain began filling my Mind with hopeless futures.

Brain: "Every time we get things balanced, they screw it up. Everything we do is doomed to failure. Blair, who we thought was our main ally, is on their side. Luigi has gotten back at us by putting Pacifica on Breakfasts. Now she's quitting. Why did we ever get involved. With so many managers plotting against us, what can we do? Why do anything at all. It is all hopeless. We may as well run away from it and detach. It is just too painful. All these setbacks. Ouch! I told you we shouldn't get involved."

### The Deeper Meaning of Sword Training

The next morning I practiced sword forms with my partner, Ann the Gardener, as was my routine. In between forms I vented.

Me: "Why am I always the one who has to do something. Why can't it be someone else for a change? I have more important things to do."

Ann: "Such as?"

Me: "My writing. I can't neglect my writings. After all they might have a big impact upon the world."

Ann: "You might consider that your role is just to ease the suffering of those around you. After all the world is a pretty big place. Besides the world doesn't care anyway."

Me: "But why me?"

Ann: "You think all this sword work is just for fun?"

Me: "I always imagined I was just doing it for health."

Ann: "You could have done Yoga for health. Or taken up jogging - Lifting weights at the gym. But you chose sword work. Doesn't that tell you something?"

Me: "Concentrating on my sword point increases my intentionality?"

Ann: "Let me give you a hint. Who else uses swords?"

Me: "Warriors - knights."

Ann: "And why were they trained to use swords?"

Me: "To defend their community, their culture, their people from attack."

Ann: "I rest my case."

### Another Meditation to still agitated Thoughts

Blown away at this new-found responsibility I aligned my Body through intensive form practice - including swords, of course. Then to empty my Mind, which was still full of Brain's Thoughts I entered another meditation. Sinking into quietude, I was hoping to reach the place of no thoughts so that another Plan could emerge spontaneously from the Void.

I tried to center myself by regulating my breathing: "Breathe in - Breathe out. - Concentrate on the turning of the Breath - Pacifica giving notice - Blair secretly against me - Luigi still destroying the harmony."

This was not enough to still my Mind, but I began to hear a small sound.

Little Voice: "Brain is overactive, creating imaginary obstacles. Simply ride his

Thoughts as if they were a wild horse that needs to be broken. Just hang on. But don't let them run away with you. "

Brain babbled on for awhile: "Hopeless. Give up. Abusive relation. What's the use?"

Little Voice: "Don't give these Thought Trains any extra energy. Just watch them as if they were Clouds passing by. You are the eternal sky; these Ideas are just temporary obstructions."

With no extra energy to sustain the emotional momentum, Brain finally gave up. At last I began to abide in the Void between Yin and Yang. Residing here for awhile, I bathed my Mind in the Non-Duality. This cleansed my Mirror of Polarities generated by Brain. After a time, a Plan emerged from the Emptiness - a proposed action into the Potentialities of the Situation. The Little Voice had spoken and I knew what I had to do. But as usual I didn't want to do it.

Emerging, uncalled for, from the Void, the Little Voice: "Space you must write a History of Service at Ma Belle for Kay the new F&B. This way he'll understand the context of the present conflict. Then he can make a somewhat independent decision."

Me: "Oh great. Not again. You always tell me to do things I don't really want to do. Why me?"

Little Voice: "Because I like you. Besides you're afraid. It'll be good for you."

Me: "No, I'm not. I am in the midst of some mind-boggling mathematical discoveries. I don't want to interrupt this magical flow to focus upon the mundane arena of restaurant work."

Brain: "I agree. There are a million reasons why this restaurant history is a waste of time. Space, you have more important things to do than squander your valuable time on the restaurant. Ma Belle is just there to provide an income to support your creative work."

Me: "Right, of course. No use wasting my time."

Little Voice: "This history is not a waste of time; it is *the* Waste of Time - something to leave behind. What a great opportunity to mix your imaginary and real worlds. Sometimes they do intersect - these orthogonal universes."

Brain teased me: "You've written histories of Astrology, Tarot, Yoga, China and Scotland - sublime topics to be sure. And now you are spending your sacred time on this mundane topic. The restaurant business. How low can you go?"

Little Voice: "Not low, but higher than ever. Ma Belle and her world is your Field of Action."

Brain: "No it's not. Ma Belle's world is one of the lower Bardos from the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Don't be reborn there."

Little Voice: "Space, he's just trying to confuse you with intellectual garbage that he is misapplying."

Me: "Too many voices. Must seek quietude. Ommm! Hmmm? My anxiety about Ma Belle is still there, but Brain's messages have disappeared. Am impelled to write Ma Belle's Service history."

From this mish-mash of messages, I was finally ignited to non-action - acting from emptiness without emotional investment - just doing what had to be done without mental resistance. Leaving my beloved math behind I turned on my computer to write 'The History of Service at Ma Belle'. The Little Voice had spoken and I had heard, listened and was acting. Nothing could get in my way. No objection. No obstacle. As with water on the dam, when the crack opened up, I was there. Writing furiously -

seven pages in two days - I finished the history of Ma Belle's Service and handed it to Kay on his first Friday night.

### **The External History of Service at Ma Belle**

Me: "Here is the History of Service at Ma Belle that I just wrote."

Kay: "What are you? Some kind of computer geek?"

To myself: "Uh Oh! An anti-intellectual. Not a good response." Aloud: "Whatever. I am just motivated by the well-being of the Guests and Staff of Ma Belle. This gives you a brief overview of the service issues related to the restaurant. Seeing as how you are just beginning. I thought it might be helpful."

Kay: "Thank you. I'll give it my consideration. But I am not making any promises."  
Spoken like an effective corporate climber.

The History talked about the Bus transition from amorphous duties, to their Waiter partnership, to Backwaiters, to partnership, to amorphous duties again. It talked about the value of Expeditors and the chaos of the Backwaiter System and the harmony of the Team System. I ended up with this plea.

This brings us pretty much up to date. For some reason the Managers are holding on to their concept of more waiters and less bus, although the entire Service Staff feels that the Waiter/Bus Team is the best System. The Bus takes care of the Back of the House while the Waiter takes care of the Front. This way each of our Guests is taken care of completely and efficiently. If the customer is to be given any more attention, it should be from the Maitre'd or Sommelier, not from an unnecessary Backwaiter.

I hope I have held your attention in this long winded exposition on the History of Service at Ma Belle. Thanks for your attention. I tried to keep it as factual as possible.

Sincerely, Space

### **Kay responds to the Word**

Kay read my paper, then showed it to Antoine for confirmation. He then called a staff meeting to introduce himself.

Kay: "My name is Kay. As many of you already know I'm the new F&B. To clear the air we are going to return to Ma Belle's original Service System, which has proved to be so effective for so long. There will be no more Backwaiters. When possible each Waiter will be paired with a Busser to work together as a partnership. Also the promotional scheme of Bus to Runner to Expediter to Waiter will be restored. I promise that as long as I'm here there will be no new Service Systems."

I felt tingling on my Crown. This was the third time that I had experienced the Power of Print. Our entire Service Family cheered. Both Antoine and I sighed with relief. The Wicked Witch was dead and we could return to normal. The White Knight in the form of Kay had come to restore order and sanity to our chaotic world.

We thought we had reached our goal, our destination - a permanent Service System. Right!? Although Kay restored order to our Service, his reign was to present trials and tribulations beyond our imagining.

It is in the nature of Consciousness to refine and perfect her Material Component. As such Ma Belle was constantly trying to order herself - continually going through refinements to find some sort of stability. Unfortunately the Universe is also continually changing. Thus the Target is continually shifting. Any apparent stability is all an Illusion based upon short memories. The Reality is a constantly changing dynamical

system. Any Ego, which held onto stability, was going to be ground down, until only pure Being was left. This is a lesson that those of us who remained with Ma Belle were to experience over and over and over again.

As the Moon rises in the eastern Sky,  
Circling around the Earth one more time,  
I reflect upon how many have joined us here -  
Workers and Guests alike -  
Their worries and cares, joys and triumphs,  
Fading as the reflected light of our celestial lover  
Disappears at daybreak -  
Overwhelmed by a greater truth.

## Chapter 52: Choosing my Author Too good for me?

Coincidentally, if you believe in 'random' occurrences, the tide-turning paper which Space wrote for Kay provided the framework for the story you just finished reading. Impressed by his rendition of my Service history I decided to honor him by choosing him to write my story. As a member of my Staff, who sometimes writes - both histories and stories, I thought it appropriate that he be my ghost writer. After all I am the restaurant at which he works.

Although I chose Space to write my tortured tale, his Mind was too befuddled with Thoughts to really hear me at this time. At first he resisted my quiet urges - thinking himself above that. He normally didn't 'lower' himself to write about restaurants.

You might wonder why Space thought that my restaurant realm was beneath him - even looking down on it. It's because my world includes much pain and suffering. Not externally induced, mind you. No whips and chains. No imprisonment or physical torture. All the pain and suffering is mental. All the torture is imaginary - self induced. Although the suffering is mental it challenges Space's safe, secure little world.

This was especially disturbing because Space imagines himself an enlightened being and hates to be exposed as a fraud. And this occurs regularly - every time he is thrown off balance by his Ego attachments to my material world, which he considers to be illusory. Simply put, Space hates my world because it forces him to grow and he hates that. It is sooo painful letting go of the Chains that have become welded to his Soul. "Ouch! That hurts." That was just the Universe - ripping down the barriers which separate him from me - attachments and expectations.

Anyway this is why Space looks down on my world, because it reveals him to be the phony, he is. I love tearing way his defenses - leaving him naked and exposed before the World. He looks so cute that way.

Space: "Hit me again. Harder, Darling. It hurts so good."

### **An Ego Appeal**

Despite his resistance to my *inferior* world I enticed him to begin writing my history by appealing to his lower nature. Speaking through his Little Voice, I appealed to his Ego, always a great way to manipulate men, who are heavily invested in themselves.

Little Voice: "Space, honey, now that you've written Ma Belle's external history, why don't you go on to write her internal history."

Space: "Sorry, but I've got more important projects. I don't choose to waste my valuable time on the inferior restaurant world."

Little Voice: "But you can be the star - her hero."

Space: "I'm not ready to start a new project. It takes too much energy to get started."

Little Voice: "But you've already laid the foundation for Ma Belle's story with the Service History you've given to Kay. Plus you already have some momentum going. It would be easy."

Space: "But what about my timeless and permanent Science?"

Little Voice: "Let it rest for the time being. It's not going away."

Space: "Hmmm? The star? True. I could use the paper I wrote for Kay as the base for the story of how I saved Ma Belle from Luigi's Plan."

Little Voice: "Don't get too egotistical. Instead call it - '*When Idea Collides with Reality*' so that anyone can learn from it. Don't worry. You'll still be the star of Ma Belle's internal history."

Space: "Internal - external history, what's the difference?"

Little Voice: "An internal history deals with psychological events beyond independent confirmation which are surmised from external behavior and events. Alternately an external history only deals with facts and events that can be confirmed by a variety of sources. No emotions or transformations are revealed."

Space: "I get it. *The History of Ma Belle's Service* is an external history. While somewhat objective, it is dry, lacking life. So now you want me to write Ma Belle's internal history. While subjective it will delve into the personal transformations underlying the dry facts."

Little Voice: "Exactly. Ma Belle's external history was an objective account of real events, while her internal history should be a story with character development and growth."

Space: "I don't know. Restaurants are so trivial."

Little Voice: "Not so. You would be like the ancient Greek and Chinese historians, and even the authors of the Hebrew Bible, who blend external facts and internal transformations in a seamless fashion."

Space: "Hmmm? I would be in the company of these classic historians?"

Little Voice: "Exactly. But remember these ancient accounts are more like a historical novel than a modern history. This should also be true of Ma Belle's history. Use the facts to tell her story. Record the conversations as accurately as possible."

Space: "But my memory is poor."

Little Voice: "Don't fret it. Your words can't be exact anyway. Just try to convey the intentions as closely as you can."

Space: "I'll attempt to be as historically precise as possible and as truthful as I can."

Little Voice: "Don't get lost in precision. You already have a built in bias. Even if you attempt to base Ma Belle's internal history upon true events, they will be filtered, interpreted and exaggerated by your perceptions. As such allow it to become a subjective story rather than an objective history. And remember a good story can't be inhibited by too much truth. Let this work become your personal Fantasy, which is based in Reality."

Space: "My fantasy? I thought this was Ma Belle's story."

Little Voice: "It is, but you're the one telling it."

Space: "What about lawsuits?"

Little Voice: "Simple. Change the names of the characters to protect the innocent."

Space: "Actually the not-so-innocent. The innocent have nothing to hide."

Little Voice: "The French call this *roman á clef*, literally 'novel with a key' - where real people appear in a novel with fictitious names."

Space: "But why would anyone want to read the biography of a restaurant?"

Little Voice: "Ma Belle's story bears telling because she is the Cauldron of Transformation. Her tale is one of personal growth, amidst much shedding of skin. She cooks up a human soup - integrating the ingredients slowly over an open fire. Her stock simmers for a long time to separate the essential from the unessential. Then she skims off the Fat, leaving only flavor and the nutrients."

Space: "Fat skimmed off from the Human Soup?"

Little Voice: "The Minds of most Humans are Fat with Ideas. In fact you humans are obsessed with them, even thinking they are your Ideas. Unfortunately these Ideas fill up your Minds, obscuring the bright light of Reality. Some call these Fat Ideas your Ego. This is the Fat that Ma Belle strains off."

Space: "Sounds positive."



Little Voice: "While assimilation is her goal, she needs you humans to retain your individual spice, your essence, to give flavor to her Soup. Those who are lucky enough to be part of her Soup go through personal transformation and growth. You shed your skins to become a butterfly soaring above your petty lives."

Space: "Wow! I had never thought of it like that before. Maybe I should call this *the Sacred Nature of the Restaurant Business* instead."

Little Voice: "No. That's a little too spiritual for a down-to-earth girl like Ma Belle."

Space: "True. Hmmm? '*When Idea Collides with Reality*' ? I guess that would be more universal."

Little Voice: "Exactly. So how about it? Besides the Muse is on my side."

Space: "The Muse? Whoa! How can I resist with her behind it. She's the source of my inspiration. Besides this seems like a worthwhile way to spend my time. I'll get to work on it right away."

Shortly after this prompting Space started writing my history. Although he was under the illusion that he was in control of this venture, it was really me who was pulling his strings. Obsessed with his pseudo science, he lost steam after a few weeks and filed my incomplete story in his Fragments Folder.

Space: "Nobody will ever want to read this anyway."

It took me years to get him going again. I eventually made him an offer he couldn't refuse. In short I blackmailed him, 'either write or else'. But I'm getting ahead of myself. And I don't want to give anything away. If you're interested in what challenges, degradations, and transformations were in store for us you'll have to read the next volume of my restaurant trilogy, entitled **Rising to Power**.

**The End**