

Exploring Rabbit Holes:  
Musings of a Cheerful Existentialist

Madeleine Howenstine  
California Institute of Integral Studies  
April 23, 2015

*Key words:* spiritual; autobiography; consciousness; existential.

Rabbit holes!!! One comes across them unexpectedly in life. Sometimes one trips in them, sometimes one is shoved, and sometimes one joins Alice out of sheer curiosity. They say curiosity killed the cat and satisfaction brought it back. I have always been curious but then my curiosity brought me to a rabbit hole where the Buddhist koan on the wall read “Only Don’t Know.” So much for satisfaction.....

I had driven to a Korean Buddhist monastery in Smithsfield, Rhode Island, along with my eldest sister who has a Master’s degree in Movement Therapy, to attend a dance therapy workshop. It was to be a fairly small group of participants, around twenty-four. I had decided that I was, for a change, going to learn the names of all the participants of a group as I was introduced, rather than letting the names go in one ear and out the other, as was my normal approach. Names never seemed to stick with me until I had multiple interactions with someone and had begun to get a sense of their person.

Wandering around the monastery prior to the first lunch I noticed that there were sporadic posters on the walls lettered with various Buddhist koans on them. The one that caught my eye read simply “Only Don’t Know.” My internal response was “but I want to know! I’m curious!”

At the lunch that was offered before the first session of the workshop, I was careful to note and repeat the names of the other participants as I was introduced to them, occasionally looking around the room and identifying each participant, in order to get their names to stick in my mind. By the end of the lunch I was fairly confident I could name all of the other participants who had already arrived. We then proceeded to the first session of the workshop. The facilitators, in their wisdom, started the session with an ‘icebreaker.’ This was a presumably an attempt to get us familiar and more comfortable with each other in preparation for the start of the actual movement sessions. The icebreaker took the form of our sitting in one large circle. Each person would state his or her name. Then we went around the circle each repeating that person’s name. After each person said his or her name, all of the other twenty-three participants along with the two facilitators would also say it, one at a time. Then the next person would say his or her name and we would go through the process of repetition again. By the time we finished with all twenty-four names of the participants sitting in the circle I had no idea which name went with which person. “Only Don’t Know!” making itself felt. I gave up on my effort to match names to people before I got a sense of who they were personally and went back to my former way of letting names slide past me.

And the koan “Only Don’t Know” stayed with me, taking many forms and leading to new ways of accepting not knowing as I journeyed down that rabbit hole.

\*\*\*\*\*

As I sat down to write this essay I held the question: Where to begin this narrative of mine? I wrote what follows, then as the title made itself felt, I found the starting point was somewhere else. Like many of my dreams, several threads are emerging concurrently, each enfolded in the other. Teasing the threads out into a coherent narrative, with some necessary sense of linearity and flow is difficult. The images arise entangled, overlapping, and whole, all in the same seemingly infinite moment.

It seems, in this particular moment, I shall start with what is currently the late middle phase of my life (with the middle constantly shifting later as the years pass). Oddly enough, given that this is the story of the development of a cheerful existentialist, the thread into the story begins with the somewhat dark title of an unwritten novel, "In the shadow of the Mountain." So I will start in the middle where the deepest shadows lie and then allow the light from either side to penetrate the tale.

"In the shadow of the mountain," was a title in search of a story. It came into being as a result of a workshop, "The Way of Story," that I attended in the course of my sojourn at CIIS. The workshop, led by Catherine Ann Jones, focused on narrative and fiction as ways of expression and healing. My only prior interest in and attempts at writing fiction were in my childhood, when as an avid reader of fiction, I strove to write a couple of short stories. I was then probably about ten years old and the stories, I seem to recall, were about a poodle. Even I could tell that they were unsuccessful efforts. After that my interest in writing lay dormant save for one creative writing essay in eighth grade that we wrote during class period, listening to classical music. That essay had do with nature and being in the woods and I thoroughly enjoyed the process of writing

it. Then my interest in writing, in authorship, waned once again, not to resurface until my late middle years when the shadows fell deeply upon my life.

The story lurking behind the title was a tale, of sorrow, of loss, of the aloneness of widowhood, the elements of my own story, but in different dress, someone else's tale. But it was to remain untold. Fiction was not to be my "way of story." So it remained a title without a story, lying dormant. Yet, now, in the present, as I begin to sort out the threads that weave the tapestry of a cheerful existentialist, the journey of my life, the title finds its place as a way into the tale, the place where the ground underneath me quaked and deep shadows fell upon my life.

And yet, as I write, I find I am not yet ready to step back into those shadows, as pivotal, life and world changing as they were. The light from the years before and the peaceableness of my life in the present have pushed the shadows back, letting them lie fallow for a bit, before they reveal the disorientation they provided.

\*\*\*\*\*

I was considered a cheerful, sunny child: the youngest of four, I both charmed and irritated my older siblings as the baby of the family. I learned from watching their interactions how not to trigger my parents and how to slide under the radar, never pushing the boundaries too far. By doing so I found I could go my own way without too much interference from my parents. When I realized that I did not know proper etiquette, I began to say that I wasn't 'brought up,' I was simply allowed to grow up.

Oddly enough, in my own mind, I sprang into being at the age of three. For as long as I can remember, my first memories were of my third birthday party. It was a marker event, taking place as it did on the day before my family boarded an ocean liner, bound for a year in Rome. I shared my birthday with my maternal grandmother, having been born on her sixtieth birthday. On this occasion we were at her home in Chappaqua, spending the last few days in this country before moving to Italy for my father's sojourn at the American Academy in Rome. My grandparents put on a joint birthday party for us and it is the first event of my life that remained in my awareness. I still can vividly remember the molded ice creams we had along with the cakes. Mine was a train engine, formed out of chocolate ice cream. All of my siblings also received presents to take with us on our journey. My sisters and I received Ginny dolls, with my eldest sister receiving the more sophisticated Sessette doll (her knees bent—Ginny's did not). I have no memory of what my brother received. That day and the next, when we boarded the liner amidst long, colored streamers and torrential confetti, remain vivid in my mind.

It wasn't until I was in high school that my internalization of my mother's chronic anxieties made itself felt. Working one summer at the tender age of fourteen, for a weaver in Paris, my natural introspective nature and the internal sense of anxiety about not knowing how things worked in the 'outside' world, led me to spend most of my free time just walking the streets of Paris, content to observe the rich flow of life around me. My forays into museums and to destinations outside of Paris, taking the metro or trains, only occurred as various cousins showed up in Paris on their own trips and took their young cousin to the places that I would not enter on by myself. I was more comfortable on my own, wandering the streets and looking at the sights.

Confronted with negotiating ticket booths, museum entrances, and interacting with unknown people in general was too daunting for me.

This deep sense of anxiety underlay and pervaded my life for the next ten or so years.

Functioning in the outside world was often an effort. Life was a struggle between the urge to be a recluse and being a responsible adult, moving back and forth between contentment when being alone and functioning in an external social reality. And then, through a curious set of events, I unexpectedly found my way out of that tangle.

It is sometimes hard, looking back, to decide what were the initiating events for change. Was it my inborn curiosity as to the nature of reality? The object in the sky over Fisher's Island that soundlessly zoomed past, not identifiable by a psychologist, a boat designer, and two highly intelligent women? Or was it my sister's immersion in the world of Lyme disease, her hospitalization and reading of Shirley MacLaine's book, *Out on a Limb*, and the conversations between us that ensued from this? My husband's interest in Christianity, which led me to pick up the book *Communion* as a stocking stuffer, even as I knew it was about UFOs and not religion? The People magazine issue that reviewed three books on UFOs around the same time? All of these factors came into play in the subtle yet profound shift in my experience of life that allowed this constant internal tension and sense of anxiety to drop away.

These differing threads intertwined to revitalize my interest in the nature of reality. I began to explore the world of UFO literature, feeling that whatever these experiences were, they were, at the very least, a window into the nature of reality and consciousness. Many of these books were

available at a 'new age' book store in New Haven, where I happened across a book that my sister had mentioned in our conversations: Robert Monroe's *Journeys Out of Body*. That led me down the rabbit hole of altered states of consciousness, and from there to exploring meditation as a way of inducing altered states.

*Flash backward:* During my junior year of high school, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi came through New Haven giving talks at Yale. His disciples were available to train novices (at a price) in the TM technique. In spite of the expense, I was intrigued and signed up for a session only to find that they had scheduled me with a time that conflicted with the dress rehearsal of a high school play in which I had a minor role. When I asked if I could change the time of the session in order to honor my commitment to my peers, the facilitators were absolutely rigid in their response. They would not consider seeing if there was another time possible in the schedule for me and said that I should give precedence to the TM session over my commitment to the other students relying on me for my role in the play. I decided that I was not interested in a method that proffered that kind of rigidity and lack of respect for one's relationships to others. I decided to let the idea of learning to meditate go by the wayside.

*Flash forward:* From my early experience with the world of TM, I was not interested in exploring that particular avenue. Instead, I read all of the books on meditation that I could find, exploring many different forms. I eventually settled on an amalgamated form of my own design. Each night as I lay in bed, I would spend fifteen minutes, watching my breath, counting backwards from four repeatedly when my mind began to wander and perseverate. After two weeks of this simple undemanding practice, I suddenly realized that the tension and deep anxiety



that I had internalized from my mother and had carried all of my adolescent and early adult life was just simply gone. It had dropped away completely on its own. I still became, and still become, anxious from time to time in specific situations, but the underlying chronic anxiety was entirely gone and has never returned.

\*\*\*\*\*

I remember a morning, as my fascination with time and the nature of reality began to take precedence in my days. So much I was reading about altered states of consciousness, near death experiences, out-of-body experiences and UFO abduction reports, called into question the nature of time and space. On this particular morning, the phone rang around 6 a.m. This was not an unusual event. My mother-in-law, a Freudian psychoanalyst living in Geneva, Switzerland, would call at her lunch hour, having once again become stuck in the process of word processing a paper or presentation on her computer. Somehow, I had become her information technology consultant. I would sit at my computer in the small town where I lived in Connecticut as she sat at her own computer in her office in the Vieille Ville in Geneva. I would try, from her description over the phone, to figure out what she had done and what she was trying to do, and then give her instructions as to where she needed to 'click' next. This time I was sound asleep when the phone rang. As far as I can tell, between the initial sound of the first ring of the phone and the completion of that particular ring, I experienced an entire dream sequence, that when I thought about upon waking, appeared to unfold over time. Yet the entire sequence was dependent on the ring of the phone as the culminating moment. I no longer remember the content of the dream, just the sense of having received the dream as a whole. In *Journeys Out of Body*, Robert Monroe describes something similar with his sense of direct mind-to-mind,

telepathic communication with other beings. He felt that he received the communications as a whole, as if he had been handed them in a ball, and then his conscious mind would unroll each communication in a linear way. He referred to these holistic communications ‘rotes.’ I felt that I had experienced the dream as a rote, in between the beginning and end of the first ring of the phone.

After getting off the phone, I wandered down to the kitchen to join my husband for breakfast. The first words out of my mouth were “now I understand how time is an artifact of perception.” Needless to say this did not go over very well with my husband before he finished his first cup of coffee. He was in fact quite cross with me. I left for the stables for my morning riding lesson giggling on the way over at his grumpiness at the thought of time as having no intrinsic reality.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sometime early this morning I awoke contemplating that I would spend at least part of the day writing. Then I drifted off to sleep again. As I came out of the next sleep cycle, a phrase emerged in my mind: “The sentence holds the door open.” I have noticed of late that I have fragments of phrases or images like a snapshot in the hypnagogic and hypnopompic states. Mostly these phrases and images do not feel as if they have any import. I felt the same about this one and told it with some amusement to my partner. Yet, as I began to think about writing, it seemed to hold a message: This writing is significant to me. Perhaps this is because rather than making my thoughts more solid, it is letting them emerge as a process, in a fluid, changing manner that keeps possibilities and potentials open.

\*\*\*\*\*

And then a return into the shadows of that mountain...I wonder what the mountain is....all that has gone 'wrong,' not as I wanted or expected in my life.....all the lessons in 'only don't know'? Meditation: What a great gift that was! I continued to meditate and to investigate the nature of mind and reality through explorations of consciousness, learning to lucid dream, attending workshops at the Monroe Institute to explore how technology assisted audio interventions could open windows to altered states, reading, always reading....UFOs, spontaneous human combustion, crop circles, psychic phenomena, personal stories of shifts in consciousness, modern physics and quantum theory, wanting to know, to understand, to grasp knowledge, not heeding the admonishment of the koan, "Only don't know." The anxieties that pervaded my being in my early life remained dissipated and I was thoroughly enjoying exploring what altered states could show me about the nature of reality, exploring clairvoyance, experiencing non-local realities and knowings. I began to have experiences of knowing at a distance.

We were traveling in Europe, my husband, sons and I, on a visit to my mother-in-law's. We were taking a train from Geneva, Switzerland to Rome, Italy, while my daughter and her boyfriend were planning on catching a slightly later train from Geneva to Paris. When the conductor came through and looked at our Eurail passes he said that we were supposed to have had them stamped at the Geneva train station and there could be a fifty Swiss franc extra fee per person because of the lack of the stamp. He waived the fee for us but I found that I was very worried and tense as to what would happen with my daughter—I was not sure they were carrying the extra funds to cover the charge. After a while I suddenly noticed that something inside myself had relaxed. I

looked at the time and saw that it was probably just about the time the ticket collector would be going through their train. I thought to myself, ‘they must not have had any trouble with their tickets.’ That evening when I got to Rome I called them in Paris and confirmed that this was true. It seemed that I had ‘known’ something non-locally.

Yet I also began to experience the dark side of knowing. As time went on, frequently when I closed my eyes in meditation or in preparation for sleep, I would see emergency vehicles, knowing that somewhere in my vicinity some tragedy was unfolding, though not knowing where or any details. These images became frequent and persistent enough that it became unpleasant to close my eyes. And then I began to feel ‘dead,’ non-existent, whenever I sat to meditate. It was a very strange feeling or lack thereof. Instead of relaxing into a deep calm, I just felt deadened, lifeless...I did not understand what was happening to me. Meditation was becoming an unpleasant experience. Around the same time I had two very dramatic dreams. In the first dream I was in an airplane flying high above the land. Someone opened the door of the airplane and I could feel the wind rushing past me. As we looked out the opening a woman named Becky shoved me out of the airplane. As I started plummeting towards earth, I knew that this woman wanted me not to exist. I awoke shaken.

About a month later I experienced another intense dream. This one felt like I was both within the dream, experiencing more than one of the characters’ points of view, and also viewing the dream from the outside as one would a movie. There was a large ferry docking; inside the ferry my brother-in-law was being pursued by a murderous young girl-woman with a knife. And on the dock was a young girl who slipped between the ferry and the dock as the vessel rolled away

from the dock and then rolled back. The young girl's legs were crushed between the boat and the dock. As I awoke I thought, "I am being threatened by a younger woman and being cut off at the knees."

Both of these dreams were so vivid that I remember them as a felt sense of experience to this day. I told my husband about the dreams, asking him if he was having an affair with a woman named Becky. He denied this.

I continued to experience the sense of deadening in meditation. This combined with the ongoing experience of seeing emergency vehicles and other disasters as I closed my eyes at night made me consider stopping meditating, and reinforced the idea of not knowing and just letting things be as they were. I realized that, for me, there were times when 'knowing' was not helpful and only disturbing.

A year later my husband confessed that, yes, he had been having an affair with Becky (who I had met only once at a party and did not recall). He said he was now ending the affair. I was devastated but also somewhat relieved and intrigued to find there was a possible explanation for the way I felt as I sat and meditated. I felt that meditation had made me vulnerable to her wish that I not exist, allowing a non-local connection that I did not want.

Finally, the sense of assault from all the dire images when I closed my eyes and the deadened sense of being when I sat to meditate caused me to decide to stop meditating. I began to understand the admonishments that occur in the literature on altered states, and in the trainings

offered at the Monroe Institute: to create a safe container and only invite in energies that hold one's best interests. Altered states were fascinating but in the hands of a novice, allowed vulnerabilities to other less desirable experiences. This was a rabbit hole that I now found I did not want to explore further.

\*\*\*\*\*

Yet, there again was a way out of this rabbit hole. For a decade a book had sat on the shelves of the bookcase in the front hall. It was a short and seemingly simple little volume, entitled *Emmanuel's Book*. My psychologist husband had acquired it after going for a reading from a psychic. He had had both a supervisee and a patient who had readings done by this psychic and had been very impressed with her grasp and understanding of the dynamics that influenced these two people. Because of this, he went for a reading of his own. He found that her reading helped him understand his own dynamics and he bought the book she had written of the transcriptions of some of her trance channelings. He recommended that I read it but it did not reach out to me in any way so I ignored it and left it on the shelf.

Then one day, more than a decade later, as I was trying to find my way through this bizarre sense of deadenedness and assault, I walked past the shelf and my eyes were drawn to the book. I picked it up, now curious for some reason, and sat down to read it from cover to cover. The author, Pat Rodegast, had transcribed recordings of her speaking in a trance state as an entity named Emmanuel. The gist of the book was very simple: Behind every negative state, i.e. anger, despair, unhappiness, etc., lies fear, and essentially the fear is the fear of the loss of love. The book encouraged one to look through one's own negative emotions to find the fear behind them,

and then to let go of the fear and choose love. Both seemingly simple and seemingly impossible. Yet, somehow it landed in me.

At the time, my husband was in a very dark place, clearly contorted inside. I would lie next to him at night, tense and afraid of what was going on in him and in our lives. Then during one transformative evening, I took the words and import of the book—no fear, choose love—to heart. I found myself lying in the bed fearful of his darkness and just as I was about to turn away from him, I changed my mind. I deliberately turned towards him and put my arms around him, choosing to turn towards him in love rather than away from him in the fear of the loss of love. It allowed me to accept him in his dark state in a way that I had never done before. And the acceptance on my part allowed him the space to begin to move out of that darkness. Without my resistance to his darkness, and with my acceptance and willingness to stay present and love him as he was, he no longer felt backed into a corner. By letting go of my fear of the loss of love, he was able to release some of his fear as well.

The shift in my being was subtle yet profound. Though the transformation in our relationship unfolded over time, the shift in myself took hold immediately. Similarly to what had occurred earlier in my life as the result of meditating, when I took the words to heart I found I had permanently moved into a new way of being in the world. I found, by living by those words and the wisdom in the book, always stepping back and looking to what lay underneath an anger or fear response, and then choosing to meet the occasion with love, that there was a sense of grace that dropped into my daily life. Light began to fill the shadows of the rabbit holes.

\*\*\*\*\*

Somehow there is an interface between the “only don’t know” and the choice for love.....my thoughts and feelings on this are not yet clear, yet have something to do with love and acceptance and their relationship to being willing to stay present to the unknown, to “only don’t know.”

There is another intersection between “Only don’t know,” expectations, acceptance, and simply being with what is. This became clear to me during my sojourn one August in Mongolia. I had gone to Mongolia for a week on horseback, moving a herd across 150 miles of steppes. Since I had never been to the Far East, I arranged to spend nearly a month in Mongolia, allowing time to be in Ulan Bator and also to visit the Gobi desert during my stay, on either side of the main adventure of driving the horse herd. With no personal experience of the Far East, no experiences of longer than several hours on horseback, and only general knowledge of Mongolia, I found that though I was deeply curious as to how this adventure would turn out, I also had no expectations or images as to how it would be. I did not spend any energy anticipating the journey other than basic preparations: going riding for longer periods of time to train my body; gathering the supplies that it was recommended I bring; getting plane tickets and assuring that the travel and accommodation preparations were in place.

As a child, before a trip, I would spend a great deal of time imagining what the experience would be like, wanting to know how it would be, generating a sense of excitement. This anticipation also created a sense of anxiety, running all the ‘what if’ scenarios, worrying about what I did and did not know about whatever was upcoming. With the lessening of anxiety as a result of



meditation, and the practice of acceptance that meditation engendered, I now found that I could prepare for a trip without needing to know what it would be like, not needing to anticipate all possible problems and/or pleasures. This time, since I knew so little about what I was getting myself into I was very comfortable sitting with ‘only don’t know’, willing to go down this rabbit hole simply with a sense of curiosity. And as the trip unfolded I found that without having created a prior expectation I was simply open to events as they occurred, with a sense of wonder and delight, the benefit of having settled into cheerful existentialism. The trip did not need to be meaningful in any particular way. I could observe, participate, and learn without any need to meet any necessary outcome. Somehow as my life has lost any sense of expectation and meaningfulness, I am left free to wonder in the full range of human experience, not being invested in outcomes, free to plunge into the process as it is.

\*\*\*\*\*

And then back to the shadows...Perhaps the deepest and darkest rabbit hole was one I was catapulted into and through which I stumbled somewhat blind for over a decade. The initial descent began when my husband suffered a stroke. We had had a very stressful evening with an altercation with a boyfriend of my daughter’s who was living with us at the time. When that was finally settled we poured ourselves drinks and then gratefully fell asleep. In the early hours of the morning I awoke. Richard was banging his leg against mine and mumbling something. Thinking that he might be hypoglycemic (he had had insulin dependent diabetes since his mid thirties) I brought myself fully awake. He was trying to get out of bed. When he spoke I felt that I really had stumbled into the world of Alice. His voice was a bit high pitched and he slurred his words sounding like a cartoon character. Then he reached over with his right arm and picked up his left that had sagged between the waterbed mattress and its frame. He looked at his left arm

strangely and then said, “Is this something the dogs brought in?” It took me one terrifying moment to understand what was happening. Then I realized he must not have any sensation in his left arm and that he must have had a stroke. As it turned out he had suffered a small bleed in the right-side of his brain from a congenital anomaly.

The descent into the most difficult span of years I have experienced began here. Over the course of the next two years his health continued to deteriorate and eventually led to his death. This was followed by a truly dark time as my children struggled on the brink of adulthood with the loss of their father and a mother stunned by the sudden change of trajectory in her life. The skills I had learned through meditation, through the acceptance of ‘only don’t know’, and the admonishment of ‘no fear, choose love’ helped me keep going through those deeply shadowed years as I struggled to keep the family intact and to pick up the pieces of my shattered life. During this time I made close acquaintanceship with the deep internal experience of trauma. I understood how the homeless become homeless, separating themselves from their communities through feeling so essentially other and disconnected to what used to be; that which still appeared to be for those around one, normal reality. The holidays and family affairs that I had so enjoyed were now meaningless, going through the motion, events.

A friend, a sociologist, handed me a book she was using in a course she was teaching:

*Everything in its Path: Destruction of community in the Buffalo Creek Flood.* The book was one of the first to examine post-traumatic stress at the level of community. As I read the personal descriptions in the book, I resonated with them, recognizing my own internal sense of disconnection and unreality. I felt that I was moving in a parallel reality to the world that I had

known and the world that most of my friends and relatives continued to inhabit. Breathe deeply, put one foot in front of the other... It felt that after the deep awe that I felt as I watched my husband take his last breath surrounded by parents, siblings, children, and dear friends, grace had abandoned my life. I was stunned, deeply alone even while I knew I was surrounded by those who loved me. As I write this, that deep sense of trauma reveals itself yet again, apparently quiescent but not quenched. 'Only don't know' yet again.

\*\*\*\*\*

The other day I was driving back to Sausalito, over the Richmond Bridge, after dropping an old friend off at the Oakland airport. The marine layer was piling up against the Marin Headlands and dropping tendrils of fog into the sun on the Bay side. The cool moist air from the Pacific, flowing over the hills and being pulled into that huge evaporative pump that is the Bay. What extraordinary beauty there is on this planet... I found myself falling in love with the world as it is, including the asphalt ribbons, the houses on the slopes of Mt. Tam, and the human species in all its suffering and distress that inhabits this breathtaking beauty. I felt transported by it, taking the choose love, no fear admonishment, creating and allowing space for things as they are, to a new level of experience and relationship. To approach my relationship to the world, to the earth, with the same grace that I attempt to bring to my interpersonal relationships. Acceptance, presence, wonder, without the need to know.

\*\*\*\*\*

Here another childhood memory surfaces. We were at Compo beach in Westport, Connecticut, on a beautiful July summer day. As the afternoon wore on we suddenly heard thunder off in the distance. Looking west we could see a fast moving storm approaching. My five-year-old self watched with awe. The skies above me were bright silvery blue. Where the leading edge of the

storm met the clear air, there was a sharp demarcation line between sunshine and torrential rain, with lightning bolts streaking down to the water. We grabbed our towels and ran for the car as the wall of water approached and overwhelmed us. When we reached the car we were soaking wet, but the storm had already moved on, leaving a bright blue skies and a beach washed clean. Awe and wonder at the transience of nature. From moment to moment, from eon to eon, things change.

\*\*\*\*\*

Somewhere in these musings I suppose I should illuminate the emergence of the phrase “cheerful existentialism.” It developed out of an online chat with my eldest sister following a conversation with Peter Russell about a term that he had come up with: antimeaninglessness bolsterism. He used the term after he had returned from a dinner party where he found himself frustrated with his friends' need to find positive meaning in humanity's role in the current planetary situation. Pete, himself, has come to a place where he is quite existential about it: it is happening; it does not have any particular inherent meaning attached to it; the best that we can do is live out our lives thoughtfully, with a keen awareness of ourselves and our embeddedness and relationship to the rest of the world. It is not dissimilar to my own experience of reality. Historically, there seems to be a darkness and a flatness attached to existentialism, that without any greater meaning life is devoid of depth and richness and it doesn't matter what one does. The conversation made me aware that though I am existential in bent, what is simply is, I maintain a sense of wonder that the world around me and the consciousness within (and without) me exist at all. A particular meaning or intention is not necessary for me to experience delight in being--my own and the rest of the world's. It led me, after this conversation, to identify myself as a 'cheerful existentialist'.

\*\*\*\*\*

This tale remains unfinished. There are other rabbit holes that could be explored. Yet perhaps some are too fresh to wander in for concerns of collapse. As it is, this tale moves back and forth between the light and the shadows, examining, revealing, exploring, wondering what the next rabbit hole will be. Rabbit holes....Only don't know.....So what does one do with a mind that remains curious yet accepts not knowing as a way of being? I have let go of the need to know the future, to understand the past, living in a present that no longer needs to have meaning and is wondrous in its beauty, its pains, its sorrows, and its joys, simply because it is. What greater wonder can there be?

Bibliography

Erikson, Kai T. 1976. *Everything in its Path*. New York: Simon and Schuster

Maclaine, Shirley. 1983. *Out on a Limb*. New York: Bantam Books

Monroe, Robert. 1977. *Journeys Out of Body*. New York: Doubleday

Rodegast, Pat and Stanton, Judith. 1985. *Emmanuel's Book*. New York: Some Friends of Emmanuel

Strieber, Whitley. 1987. *Communion*. New York: Harper Collins