

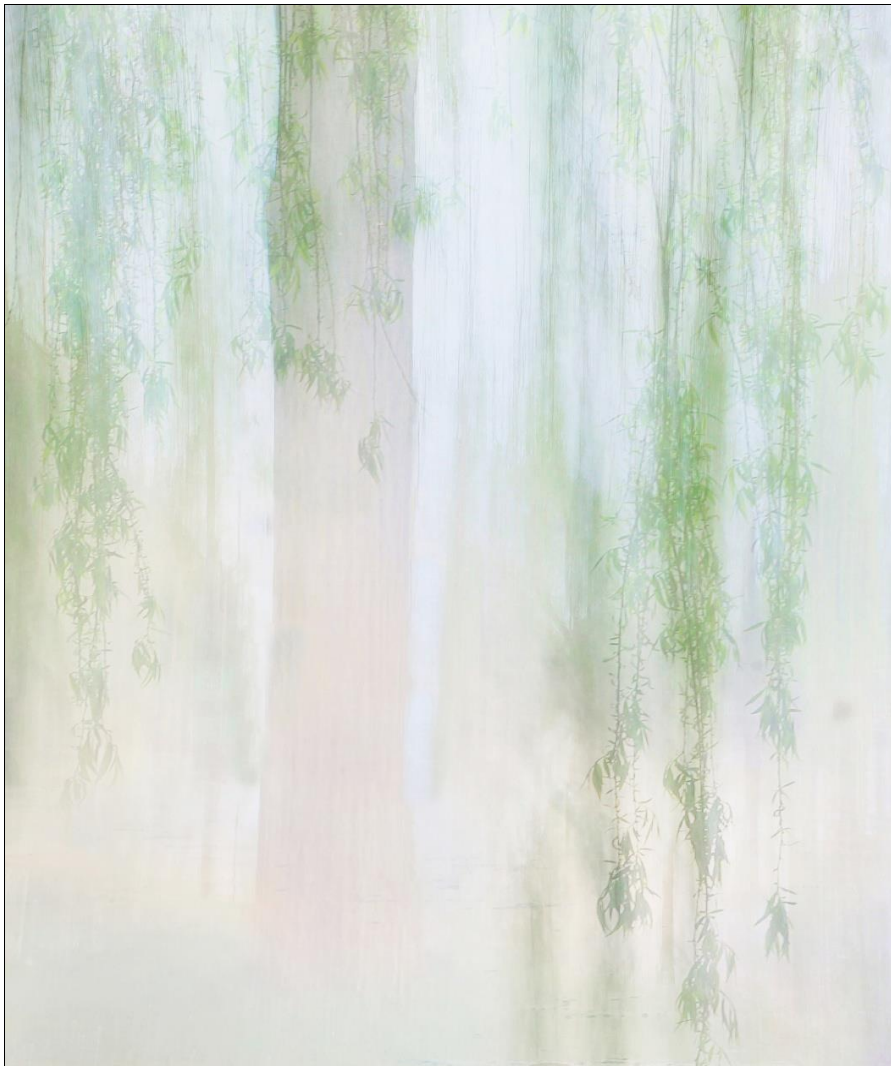
IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #42

April 2025

from

FREEMAN PATTERSON





SPRING

This year Canadians east of coastal British Columbia, which is most Canadians, had had quite enough winter by the middle of February, or to be strictly honest, that was the case with all the Canadians with whom I've been in touch. "Will this never end!" was a common refrain, as we were pummelled yet again with ferocious blizzards and seemingly unending bone-chilling cold, often combined with sustained gale-force winds and even more powerful gusts.

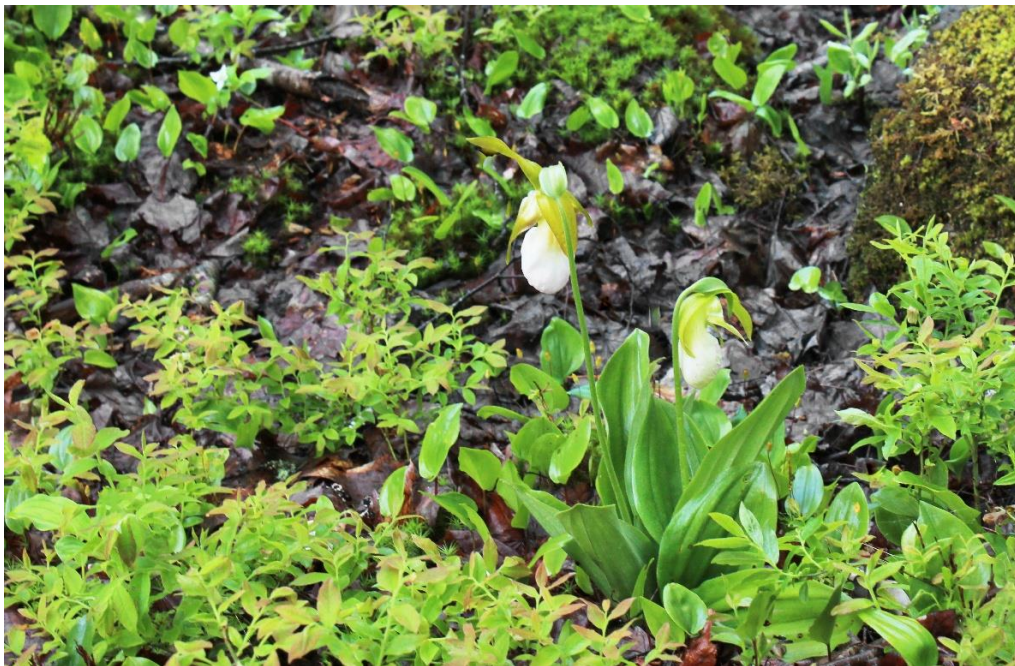
Trapped indoors day after day by drifting snow that made walking and driving difficult and often impossible, I had to abandon my plan of going to a gym three days a week. So, it was Amazon to the rescue! A treadmill was delivered to my front door and I combined my use of that with other exercises. Even so, spring couldn't come fast enough and, now that the transition has finally begun, I feel as if I've been released from prison.

Here in New Brunswick, spring is an extended season – nearly three months – and there is nothing I enjoy more than watching the succession of spring ephemerals, all those plants living on the forest floor that have to grow and bloom before the deciduous trees "leaf out," greatly reducing the amount of sunlight that reaches them. One of the ephemerals is bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*,) shown in the picture above. I've found it only in one spot on Shampers Bluff, but fortunately for me it's in woods near my house.

Another favourite is the starflower (*Trientalis borealis*), a much more common plant on the forest floor, shown here growing at the base of two white birch trees along with some leaves and yet-to-open blossoms of wild lily-of-the-valley.



The woodland orchid (*Cypripedium acaule*), occurs in hues from pure white to deep pink and prefers quite open woodland. When we cut dead trees, we remove the logs when the ground is frozen to minimize damage to forest-floor vegetation.



Several years ago I found a small trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*) plant growing in a woodland area where I'd been removing dead trees for firewood. I quickly realized that it would not survive for long in its new brightly lighted circumstances, so I moved it to a heavily shaded mossy hummock where it has quintupled in size, forms a large mat of leaves, and bloomed every year since. (The picture below shows a small part.)

No other woodland flower has a more heavenly scent than trailing arbutus. In early May I lead good friends to the hummock where we take turns dropping to our knees in order to bury our noses in the intoxicating fragrance.

The plant is rare here now because of this fragrance. Every spring when I was a child, several vendors in the Saint John city market offered small bouquets of trailing arbutus for sale, but in order to do that they had to rip up the trailing, rooted vines on which the blossoms appear. Thus, both sellers and buyers killed the thing they loved.



DREAMING, DREAMS, and DREAMWORK

Facilitating the INSCAPE workshop with Margery Nea and David Maginley is always a highlight of my year, and a highlight of the highlight is Margery's presentation on dreaming and dreamwork, a combination of prose, poetry, photographs, and music, which she assembled with her good friends Connie Evans and Harriet Ritchie.

After her presentation the workshop participants and facilitators refill their coffee cups and adjourn to either an indoor or outdoor lounge at the St. Martin's Country Inn for our first session of dreamwork. Margery always begins by telling the group that because every aspect of a dream represents the dreamer only the dreamer can interpret their dream. However, everybody else can help.

This is always an exciting time and there is never a shortage of volunteers to "tell a dream." Margery asks each person who volunteers to tell their dream and then to repeat it. (The two renditions are never quite the same when spoken, rather than written.) Then, everybody else can ask questions of the dreamer, which always helps the dreamer to recall buried or forgotten aspects of the dream.

For example, if I tell a dream about riding a bicycle through a city street, somebody may ask, "What was the colour of the bicycle?" The chances are that the colour of the bicycle is not something I'd remembered, but when asked I recall that it was red. (Obviously, it could have been any other colour, but it was red. Why?)

Somebody else may ask, "Was the traffic heavy or light?" and suddenly I recall that I have no memory of the traffic at all, only that my bicycle had such a strong pull to the left that I had to fight to keep going straight ahead? (Why? Why did I have no memory of the traffic and why didn't I mention the struggle I'd had to keep going straight ahead?) A third person may ask if this was a recurring dream or a "one off."

When nobody has any more questions, Margery reminds us that only the dreamer can interpret the dream, so everybody who has thoughts or comments to offer about the dream must begin by saying "If this were my dream,"

For instance, one person might say "If this were my dream, the fact that it keeps recurring suggests that there's a very important issue in my life that I'm unwilling to acknowledge consciously, so I'm not facing it. Also, the fact that I only remember the bicycle I'm riding, but forget all the other vehicles, which are like other issues in my life, suggests that this one issue is consuming all my emotional energy."

Then, perhaps a second person jumps in with "If this were my dream, because my bicycle is red and the colour red symbolizes blood and energy to me, I must realize deep down that I have the strength to identify the issue and work through it, whatever it is."

Sometimes that's enough. The dreamer may thank the group, knowing that she or he has the ability and the willingness to proceed alone. Other times, after a series of "If this were my dream" comments, a dreamer may suddenly apprehend the main meaning of the dream, breaking into tears or a broad smile.

However, during her original presentation and in dreamwork sessions, Margery always emphasizes that dreams have many layers of meaning and that it's always worthwhile to continue working with a dream after the initial "Aha!" moment.

Margery shares Carl Jung's philosophy that dreams and art are messengers of the unconscious. With her clients, she works with dream and photographic images as portals to the sacred. For the past 25 years, she has been a member of a dream group that meets weekly. Knowing dreams to be a rich source of wisdom, she continues to attend dream conferences with teachers including Jeremy Taylor, Alan Jones, Jerry Wright and Marion Woodman (before her death.)

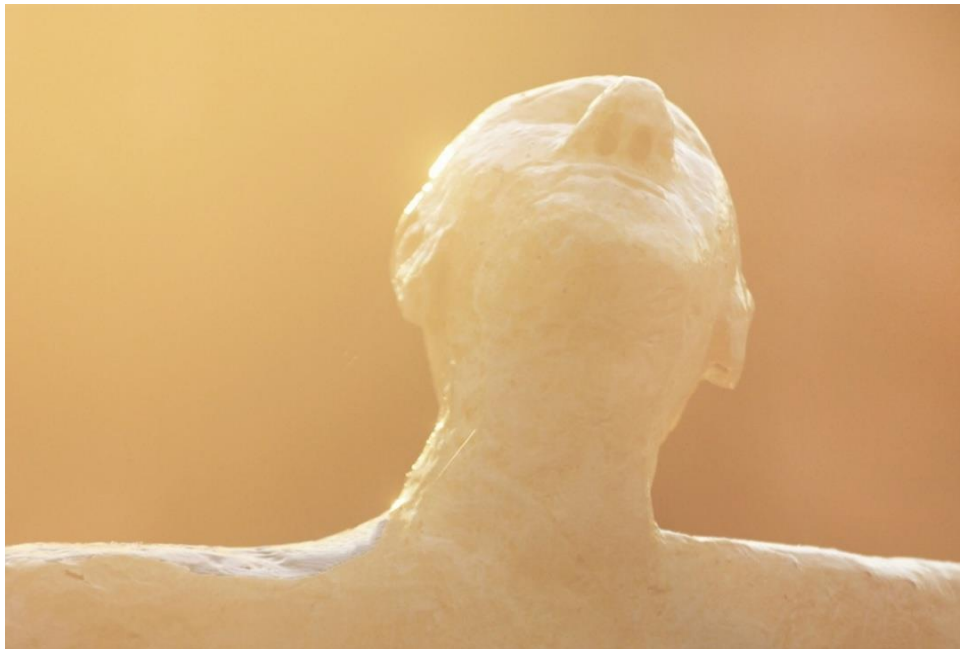
In our western culture, we tend to be very dismissive of dreams, assigning them little or no value. Yet, in the course of mammalian evolution, in addition to acquiring ten fingers, ten toes, ears, eyes, and memory, we also developed the ability to dream. As evolution never develops and then retains organs and functions that are of no compelling use to the organism, it's common sense to make use of what we have been given – including dreams.

Personally, in my late 20s I had the great good fortune to do dreamwork with an eminent psychiatrist for a nine-month period. One thing I discovered right away is that when you begin to pay attention to your dreams, your dream recall spikes. Ever since those early years, I remember a dream or dreams after I wake from every nap, snooze, or longer sleep. It's quite wonderful really. Whenever I crawl into bed, I know I'm headed off into an adventure and that adventure is me.

Because I had an early start, so to speak, I realized the value of working with dreams and have made it an on-going practice, keeping a computer file especially of dreams accompanied by strong feelings, but also of others that I want to revisit. Every now and then, sometimes years apart, I'll have what I call a "confirming" dream, one that makes clear to me that I'm "on the right track" or that I've finally resolved a long-lasting problem.

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"In dreams we enter a world that's entirely our own." *Anon.*



Two excellent, very readable books on dreams, dreaming, and dreamwork are Robert Johnson's Inner Work (the first half) and Jeremy Taylor's The Wisdom of Your Dreams.

Beware of books that offer simple explanations of dream symbols. For example, if both you and I have a dream of confronting a lion or a grizzly bear, the animal in both dreams may signify that both of us have a big issue to face, but your issue and my issue are personal to each of us.

One last thing in this brief discussion of dreams and dreamwork is that dreams are almost never predictive in a literal way. For instance, if you dream about being horribly injured or killed in a collision at an intersection through which you always drive on your way to work, the dream is likely symbolizing your emotional or psychological circumstances. In other words, your unconscious is not warning you about your impending physical death if you continue to use that intersection, but about the likelihood of an emotional bust-up if you continue on your current life path.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) – The Technology Now Front Of Mind

Like many people who make photographs or write, I'm being asked frequently about what use I make of AI and for my views about how it's already changing our lives.

Some camera clubs, especially those that hold regular competitions, have resorted to "Well, you can do this, but you can't do that with AI and still call it your own photograph." However, trying to establish rules about the use of AI for competitions, etc. doesn't address a far more important consideration: "Who am I making pictures for anyway?" Literally, who's calling the shots? This question is relevant not just for AI, but for all new technologies that we employ in the pursuit of living our lives and expressing ourselves effectively.

Let me rephrase the question in this way: "What do I lose or give up when I use a new technology?" Here are a couple of non-photographic personal examples.

1/ I have a very keen sense of direction, which was formed when I was a child. Every now and then my sister and I would inform our parents, "We're going to the woods!" Although about 300 acres (121 hectares) of the 400-acre (162-hectare) farm was forest, I don't recall either of our parents ever suggesting that we do something else or shouting an idiotic "Don't get lost!" They trusted our intelligence and the fact that we knew where our food supply was.

Without being especially conscious of it, Doris and I learned to read direction not simply with our eyes, but also with our nose, ears, and skin. Sometimes we'd find our way home by changing our trajectory when we realized that we hadn't come through an area of woods that was this cold and damp. Other times everything smelled right and we'd keep going until we recognized a grove of trees or a big rock. These naturally-acquired skills have served me well in many habitats – ranging from the great sand dunes of Namibia to New York's subway system.

Most people today use a GPS, which certainly helps us to get around easily, but we can no longer navigate by the stars on either land or sea and wouldn't dare enter a large forest without a guide. What have we lost?

2/ I love writing on a computer, but I wrote my first six books at my kitchen table – all in cursive handwriting. Using a computer does not mean I have given up cursive or its advantages, which relate to memory retention, learning, and reading. Today students are not taught cursive and in at least one country not how to print or write at all. It's all digital keyboarding. Have we thrown the baby out with the bath water?

I approach AI in the same way. It already offers both individuals and society huge new opportunities; however, I'm not going to ask DeepSeek or ChatGPT to write this letter for me, even if it were to do a good job. And, when I use Photoshop to process my digital picture files, I'm the one who makes the decisions about the final appearance of my photographs, not the technology.

The old adage, "Use it or lose it," usually refers to physical exercise, but it's true of mental exercise as well. AI will interfere with that only if we permit it.

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"Age ... doesn't matter, unless you're a cheese." *Billie Burk*

CONSCIOUSNESS and AI

Artificial intelligence cannot be regarded as consciousness any more than ordinary intelligence can be equated with consciousness. Intelligence and consciousness are very different things.

There may be nothing that science has so failed to penetrate as the mystery of consciousness, especially what and how the vast unconscious knows what it knows. Let me give you three personal examples, all related to my liver disease and my two liver transplants in late January 2000, about which I wrote in my last letter.

1/ In March 1970 (when I was 32) I was on a wildlife safari in East Africa. One night as our group of 15 was sitting around a campfire on a hillside overlooking Lake Tanganyika we celebrated the 33rd birthday of Barbara from Missouri, who was travelling with her husband. Earlier in the day members of the safari had decided to dream up a personal gift we each could give to Barbara. The gifts ranged from a neck-and-shoulder massage, to camera instruction, to reading Barbara's palms – offered by the most elderly and most respected member of our group, the lovely Miss Tiffany.

An hour later Barbara went into Miss Tiffany's tent for her palm reading only to emerge 15 minutes later "as white as a ghost." "You will be divorced within five years," Miss Tiffany had told Barbara. Although she was shocked at the time, Barbara soon discovered that her husband was both a secret gambler and a secret alcoholic. They divorced in four years.

I was so impressed with Miss Tiffany's honesty at the time that next morning I asked her if she would read my palms, something in which I'd put no credence, nor have ever had done again. As we sat in her tent, Miss Tiffany took both my hands in hers and stared at them for an extraordinarily long time. Finally, she released them and said, "The reason I looked at your hands for so long is because there was a vital question for which I couldn't determine the answer, but finally I found it."

"You will have a very serious illness in your mid-life, so serious that it could kill you." Miss Tiffany told me and then added, "For a long while time I couldn't tell whether you will live or die. However, you will live! And then you will go on to have a long and happy life."

Thirty years later, almost to the day, I was allowed to waken from the several weeks of induced coma that followed my second liver transplant."

2/ During the long coma I had a sequence of dreams, which traced my journey from near death to new life. I remember them all, but especially the last.

In this dream I was one of a small group of men who had volunteered to work with a medical team at a large hospital that was endeavouring to do the impossible – get a guy pregnant. Every evening we went to the hospital to donate our sperm for the medical team to use with the other volunteers, the men who were willing to see if they could carry a baby.

Then, one day we received a call telling us that our services were no longer required. A guy was pregnant! The impossible had happened. And I woke up!

A few minutes later my transplant surgeon came by to tell me that my chances of survival had been less than one percent, that I shouldn't be here.

3/ The following January I returned to the hospital for the first of five years of annual inspections. While I was there I visited the physiotherapist who'd spent seven weeks teaching me how to stand up and to walk again. Then I went to the Step-Down unit to express my thanks and appreciation to the nurses and others who had worked with me during several of the weeks I'd been in the coma. Finally, I went to the Intensive Care wards, where I'd also spent a good deal of time, but of which I had no memory whatever.

When I gave the receptionist my name I told her that I didn't remember anybody who worked in the department, but asked if she could enquire of those currently on duty if anybody remembered me and, if so, could one spare a couple of minutes to meet me, as I wanted to give my appreciation to somebody who would also pass it along to everybody else who had worked with me.

After I'd waited about five minutes in the hall, a door opened, a nurse took a long look at me, then charged across the room, wrapped me in her arms, and kept repeating, "I can't believe this, I can't believe this!" Although I knew from her accent that she was from Newfoundland, I had to admit, "I have no idea who you are."

"I'm Marlene Ashe," she replied, "I was the nurse on duty with you the night before your second transplant. I came on at seven o'clock and studied your charts, which were horrible. At eight o'clock, the transplant surgeon, Dr. McAlister, arrived and said, 'Marlene, you keep this man alive until seven tomorrow morning; that's when his liver is due to arrive.'"

Marlene replied, "I can't promise you any such thing, because I've looked at his charts, and the possibility that he'll make it through the night is very remote." McAlister replied, "I'm not asking you, Marlene, I'm telling you! Keep him alive!" He even phoned her later from his home and re-issued his order.

Marlene then said to me, "Freeman, I'm an experienced nurse, I know what I'm doing, and although I pulled out every trick in my arsenal to keep you alive, what I did wasn't enough. Why you lived through the night, I'll never know. Then, at seven in the morning Dr. McAlister returned to tell me that the liver had not arrived and I would have to stay on. Finally, at eleven o'clock, the liver was delivered and, after having worked a 16-hour shift, I went home to bed."

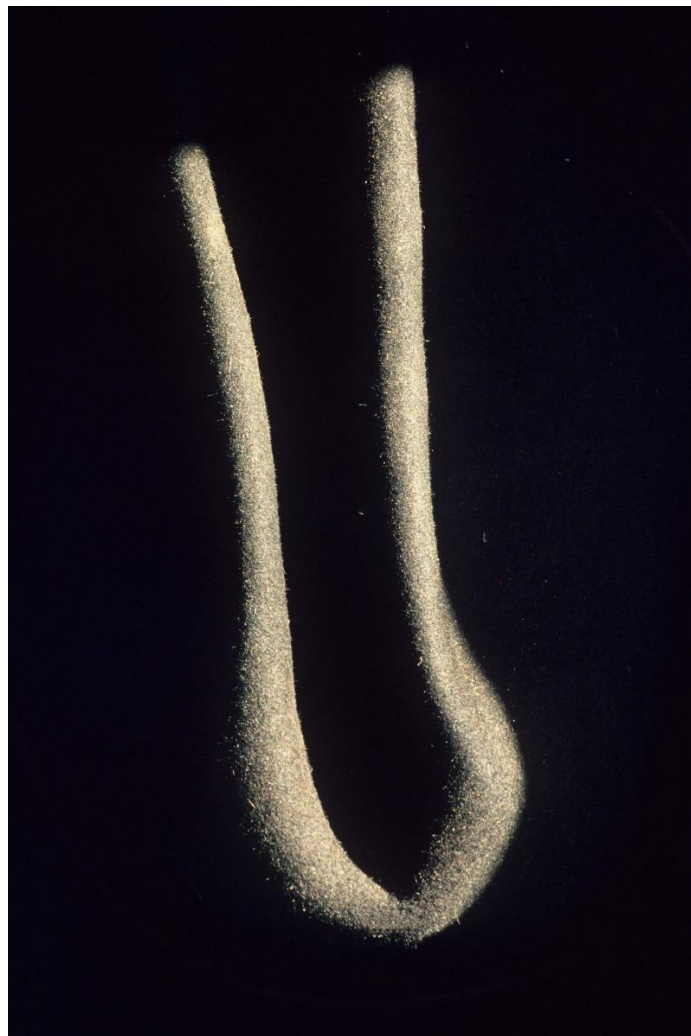
"Late in the afternoon I was preparing something to eat when I heard a loud knocking on my front door. I can see my front door from my kitchen window, and a man wearing a black Fedora or a Stetson was standing there. It took me about 15 seconds to reach the door but, when I opened it, nobody was there. Nobody was on the steps, nobody was in the driveway, and there were no footprints in the snow."

"I rushed to my phone, called Intensive Care, and asked, 'What happened to Freeman Patterson?' " The receptionist exclaimed, "It's very strange that you should call now, as he's just been wheeled back from surgery." "What's his prognosis?" Marlene asked, and the receptionist replied, "Well, it looks as if he may make it!"

Then Marlene said to me, “Freeman, I never thought I’d ever see you again, but do I have a question for you and I’m going to ask it!” I broke out in a cold sweat, as I knew instantly what the question would be. “Do you have a black Stetson?” she asked. “Yes,” I replied, “and it’s been hanging by my front door for more than 20 years.”

Although we use terms such as “the ego” (our self as distinguished from another self or the world,) “the personal unconscious,” and “the collective unconscious” to talk about consciousness, most of us live out our days in our ego, paying little or no attention to the fact that our unconscious drives many of our actions. However, every now and then some of the great mysteries of consciousness are impossible to ignore.

I believe that in my state of profound unconsciousness that night, I somehow knew that Marlene was pulling out all the stops on my behalf and, when the surgery was over, I and only I knew that I was going to live, and I came to her house to tell her.



Sunlight catching the crease in my Stetson, as it hung on a hook near my front door (1990 photo)

WORKSHOPS

Some openings are available on INSCAPE, the photographic workshops at St. Martins with André Gallant and me, and the two artists retreats at Kingsbrae Gardens, St. Andrews. For complete information, see my web site www.freemanpatterson.com.



My walkway to a place where mysteries abound - upland bog, Shampers Bluff, early spring

Seëninge van die seisoen

Bénédiction de la saison

Blessings of the season

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