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MY DINNER WITH MICHAEL

By David Sibbet

Michael Doyle rang the doorbell of our offices at 832 Folsom at 7:30 p.m. The sun was low over the western side of San Francisco, heading into the great Pacific. Everyone else was gone. Tomi had left at 7:00 having finally translated all of the English on the ARC Vision painting into Japanese. I was tweaking the painting.

When I opened the door he just stood a second, looking at me. His energy was low. He'd just driven from the peninsula. Black suit, black loafers, black satchel, gray beard, eyes and face looking ageless. Michael the old soul, the bear, the challenger of systems and their leaders, the visionary process consultant, old friend, was actually here. We were heading out for a dinner date--arranged three weeks ago when both of us realized we would never get together unless we just put a hold on our calendars.

He nosed into the office, sweeping his gaze from side to side, looking for visual berries to eat. Down the hall into the sky room, he walked in right to the center, looked around, saw the Vision painting. Without reacting he carefully put down his satchel on a chair, then walked up to inspect. He didn't say much, but asked a lot of questions about ARC, the organization for whom the vision was painted, after a year and one half of meetings in Japan and the United States. Then he sat down and just looked, looked at the small black and white portable image copier reproductions on the table, back to the painting. It swirled like the galaxy across the 4' x 6' canvas, arms of light radiating out in deep perspective from a vibrantly blue ball of the Earth. The arms contained a cornucopia of people in little vignettes--training events, teams, discussions, crowds, swirling around the Earth, getting bigger toward the front of the painting, pulling the perspective out. The arms represented the path of activities originating in Japan and the ARC Life Dynamics operations, and the path originating in Denver, the US Training operation. I had worked on it all last week. It's the first painting I have done since college, and a real harbinger of more to come.

"Your work is so good" Michael finally said. "I like it." His tone of voice felt polite, reserved in some way. "I'm writing a book on visioning," he continued. "I have several chapters, have hired a researcher. We've got interest from Addison Wesley, and Josey Bass, but they're not the ones I want." I wondered if he was having a competitive reaction, then noted the second level flicker in my

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own mind that routinely flags projections from my own issues (for I am surely competitive with Michael) and decided I was simply hearing tiredness.

Soon he was up and sniffing around the rest of the office. In the Team Room he spotted the ASTD Vision Painting--the much smaller version I completed for the Vision Video that Lenny Lind and I did on a rush several months ago. Michael was leading this big process and had invited me to come and facilitate a culminating meeting of the Board of Governors so that he could participate. The resulting focus had generated a request to help them illustrate the vision document and create a video that would serve as a conversation starter at subsequent chapter meetings. At the time the project was hailed a success.

"What happened with the video?" I asked.

"It was real controversial," Michael said. "Some people really liked it and some didn't. There was spotty usage. I can't really figure out what happened. I thought there would be a lot of response to the vision, but there hasn't been. Maybe they just aren't interested." The weariness was there again.

"Are you tired or annoyed by something?" I asked as we walked down the hall toward my office and the door. "This is the end of eight straight days of work--I'm very tired," he said. "I just finished the two days at J.F.Kennedy University this weekend, and lots of old friends and colleagues showed up. It turned out to be a hugely moving event. We talked about the shadow side of vision work, I told the story of Interaction Associates publicly for the first time. People were crying by the end of the sessions."

The topic had been on Mastering Change from a Global Perspective. Michael is without a doubt one of the great innovators in the field of organization development and transformation. His business card reads "Master of Change." Since leaving Interaction Associates five years ago, he has traveled around the world, rarely resting, guiding people through their collaborative processes together. Much of it has focused on vision work. He wades full speed into the heaviest turbulence, becoming invisible in spite of his size, and gets people to look at themselves and tell the truth about what they are passionately interested in having their lives mean. Working with Irish Catholics one week, going to Ghana to work with the wife of the President the next, helping Arthur Anderson envision a new worldwide organization the next, he works like an icebreaker, creating a swath through which hundreds of subsequent collaborators can navigate. He has done more than any other single individual to demonstrate the viability and magic of true collaboration. The Bay Area process consulting community that gathered at JFK was hearing from one of the pioneers, and was listening. I had planned to go, but the Headlands Center for the Arts moved its retreat to that

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weekend so tonight was my chance to hear about the main themes, though knowing that like any truly great jazz performance, one would have had to be there.

Michael in the 1970s

Michael and I met each other in 1971, when Interaction Associates moved into the top floor of 129 Ninth Street next to Coro Foundation's San Francisco Center for Public Affairs, which I was directing. He was a radical, environmentally oriented architect at the time, having led a group of young Turks at Larry Halprin and Associates in challenging the orthodoxies of this highly creative firm. The young Turks lost and he left--to live in a loft and lead the opposition to the Transamerica Pyramid building being built so close to the much smaller scale and diverse North Beach and Telegraph Hills communities. Interaction Associates subsequently became the vehicle for 15 years of experimentation with group process and personal empowerment, virtually creating "facilitation" as a professional third party strategy for business and other organizations to use to manage meetings and other processes.

Michael's office shared a wall with mine for a while, and he was always around on the top floor. We taught a course together on General Semantics at Golden Gate University. I remember the evening he stripped to the waist and proceeded to enroll several of the most fetching members of the class in washing the feet of everyone who was coming to attend a "non-verbal, silent dinner" as an experiment in experiencing the role of language. The bulk of the participants were policemen! He takes my breath away with his fearless moves into new territory.

In 1976 it was Michael who really gave me the encouraging shove that got me to start my own business. I was working on special programs for Coro at this point. Richard Butrick had changed roles with me to become the executive director. But the shift wasn't smooth. I hadn't really let go of my involvement as Executive Director even though I had said that I wanted to move back into programs because it was my first love. Dick really needed and wanted some room to create his own brand of more conservative organization. I was publishing the Corospondent on an infrequent basis, conducting businessmen's seminars (one of which was exploring how the Transamerica Building got approved), and beginning to facilitate and problem solve on a limited basis. The group graphics approach had already begun to achieve some definition, and I was offering workshops in the method that were designed to be compatible with Interaction. "You've been at Coro too long," I remember Michael saying. "Just do it."

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We worked together for 18 months on the New England River Basin's Commission energy siting task force when I first went out on my own. This project seeded many of the strategies that have grown in both our practices in leading large-scale collaborations.

So as Michael walked into my personal workspace on Folsom and now swept his gaze around the walls, looking at all the images, these memories reeled by in fast forward. Michael the Sagittarian. David the Gemini. Michael the Jesuit. David the Presbyterian. Michael the priest. David the minister. Michael the Ronan samurai. David the family man. Without really intending to have it this way, he had become an alter ego. That part of me that seeks approval and knows that all fulfilling life involves having an authoritative father figure booming his criticism and approvals from the pulpit of our friendship found in Michael the perfect foil. That newer part of me that is taking my own experience seriously and is trusting my "trained intuition" as my mentor Sam Bois advised, sees Michael as an invaluable friend, mirror and teacher if I only open and accept, concentrating on just being together.

We drove separately from South of Market to Michael's house on Union Street on Russian Hill. The red taillights of his black Mustang convertible winked like hawk wings as we threaded the fading traffic. We passed by the huge hole that is the Yerba Buena Project, convention center construction. The massive Marriot hotel, rising for all the world like a huge jukebox with its arcing panels of glass and mirrors, drew our eye. We laughed and pointed in our mirrors. My Isuzu Trooper, back country vehicle--Michael's Mustang, downtown—an automobile he helped create by leading the redesign of Ford's entire design operation in the early 1980's. As we parked he said. "You were shaking your head back there, thinking look at Michael in his Mustang?" Actually at the time of our communication I had been imagining that Michael was thinking about his old days trying to stop the Transamerica Pyramid and was shaking his head at this latest symbol of the relentless ability of developers to get their constructions approved. But this was not what he was thinking, He was thinking of our relationship, as was I.

Visiting Union Street

Michael took me all over his two buildings at 910 Union Street, which are upside down with construction. He's spending thousands of dollars "earthquake proofing" them and creating a structure that can allow more expansive windows, skylights, and a myriad changes which he pointed into existence as we toured. I couldn't really see it all, but could see Michael, living alone here, never marrying, having affair after affair with incredible women, working on the foundations of his life. Down in the bowels he has laid a World War II bunker's worth of cement and rebar, into which he will tie 8" I beams forming a sort of roll bar for the three flat rising above. He was radiant

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about this project, and the excitement of showing it to me. "There are four kids living in this building. I'm not going to have at risk from the thing coming down in an earthquake. I believe the whole of Russian Hill could slide down and it would stop here now," He said.

On the top floor where he lives he took me on a whirlwind tour of his art collection--new Warhols, Rauschenbergs, and Picassos. Every room was a collection of papers and stuff, in a functional but unkempt bachelor array. On the wall of his office hundreds of post-its outlined the new vision book. In his hall he pulled out the vision cartoons he and his team have been doing for Arthur Anderson. The full Graphic Language vocabulary was there, with colored shading, arrows, and visual language everywhere. He showed six, each different but similar, and shared the processes he was using.

"We have 150 people breaking out into small groups identifying elements of their vision. They bring back drawings before lunch, and over the break we pull it together into giant cartoons that they then confront and edit in the afternoon. Some insist we don't change a thing. Other's want to tear it all apart--but invariably they end of up signing the edited chart in a great ceremony of agreement. They then get translated into these smaller versions and published back."

In the living room he pulled out a vision book--about 160 pages of materials, with models and diagrams abounding. "These documents get sent out, edited, reacted to, and then redone--churning over many months until a vibrating, pulsing, compelling vision emerges."

The scale of Michael's work and focus washed over me like surf on Kauai. I let it in. Here was raw, visionary energy at work, contributing to the field, the whole planet, and me.

Dinner at Yoshida Ya

"I don't believe in light visions any more than I believe in light beer," Michael continued over our table at Yoshida Ya of Union Street in the Marina. "That's the way I started my talk this weekend. A heavy vision takes months and years. It takes four months just to get people into the future, prepared to do visioning," he said. "We took two hours just to set expectations out at JFK. No-one asked why or whether it was appropriate, they just jumped in."

By this time Michael had changed. His tiredness had left. We were old friends talking. "I so much admire what you have done with your business," he enthused. I still sensed a kind of social politeness around his communication. I wanted more. I wanted full excitement and acceptance and the camaraderie of two seasoned paradigm warriors.

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"I'm working more and more like an artist," I said to Michael. I was thinking about the Headlands, and the amazing two days that I had just spent at the retreat, particularly the part listening to four of our artists talk about what their work means, how bringing all their sensibility into play in a regular work situation is in fact their art, that just conducting real research, asking truly original questions was enough.

"You always bring so much of yourself to clients." Michael said. "I see that as a big difference in our work. You and the client co-create something that is left behind. You like to leave your mark. I on the other hand like to leave no footprints. I conduct these large processes but the clients after a while doesn't even realize I'm there."

I bridled. I work hard at elfish, invisible, generous type facilitation. I don't toot my horn about it, and the work at Apple, Lucasfilm, ARC International, California Leadership, The Oakland Tribune and other places goes largely unnoticed by my peers. Yes I leave charts, but a mark? Then I thought, Michael knows me through my big drawings and through my newsletter, which is aimed at the workshop part of my business and all the graduates who come and then want to learn what I have to teach. In this domain he is right. I try to pass along as much seed material as I can. I do want to share tools. But leave my mark on the client??? I asserted back. "You worked at Lucasfilm after I did, did you see any marks." He didn't realize that I had worked with Doug Norby and entire top management for the first two years of the very first real management meetings. I had worked behind Ranny Riley and had been truly invisible to them. They didn't quite get why their meetings worked, or why they up and decided to do strategic planning with someone like Michael. I knew why. They had an experience through which they could learn by themselves, and didn't experience any attachment to me as a source.

Michael sat quiet now. I imagined him soaking in the story like a method actor, letting it wash through his intuition. Michael has always held the energy of the great medicine bear to me. Fearless in the wild, it uses its entire hulk to sense its world. It spends enormous amounts of time in the dark of the winter touring the inner regions of deep consciousness and emerges in the spring renewed and ready to explore a new terrain. No wonder the Native Americans revered the bear. For it is fear that keeps us from sensing and feeling.

We ordered several appetizers--sushi, fish cakes, and a type of Japanese pot sticker. I became very aware that this was the first time I had contemplated really eating in over a week. In my own experiment, I had decided to work on the ARC vision AND spend the week in a kind of urban

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vision quest, juice fasting and not talking. I did go to work but would only communicate in writing. Things slowed WAY down, with many amazing insights, and a completed vision drawing.

So now, still in this slow rhythm, I relished the chance to talk with Michael in this spacious way.

The back of my mind bubbled with things I wanted to say. I wanted to talk about my thoughts for the Presidio and taking a group of folks in there to volunteer. This idea has been growing but I don't seem to actually have any time. The pressure to keep money coming in is continuing. I wanted to talk about my dreams about publishing, and wondering if Michael would like to get involved financially. Several months ago I had been fantasizing about bringing on some financial partners to support the product business. Michael is one of the few I would consider getting involved.

"I've worked on process theory long enough it's now a whole system of understanding that I can use to integrate a whole tool set across a long line of products." I explained. "The Team Performance System is just one application, and it's almost ready to go. We are talking licensing with several companies now and it looks promising." Michael gave a big two thumbs up gesture.

But these words didn't feel right. As I started to talk I noticed the withdrawal. I wanted to keep present, to keep it going. I dropped back to listening, to the silence, to the desert my spirit guides, and feeling the wind horse rise.

Sushi and Dr. Niek's Twenty-Two Dimensions

No sooner had I stopped talking than I found Michael leaning forward, holding his face in the unmistakable expression of someone with a great secret that he is about to share. "I have found someone who may easily be one of the four or five most conscious people on the planet," he said. "I know this may sound crazy, but let me tell you about Dr. Niekolas Brouw."

I felt like I was putting in a raft at the top of the South Fork of American River in high spring runoff. Joan McIntosh, our close mutual friend had told me about this man a bit, enough to wet my appetite. I was ready to hear what Michael had to say. I thought I knew what it would be about-- that Niek has a cosmology that was very similar to Ron Whittal's Mind Forms and Arthur Young's Theory of Process. That Niek's sense of earth knowledge and earth consciousness, universal knowledge and universal consciousness was the ancient fourfold raising its shape once more.

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I was wrong. Michael reached into his bag and pulled out two pieces of paper and a small brochure. "Mine is the shortest quote," he pointed out, showing that he was printed up as an endorser. Joan McIntosh, Jean Houston and some I didn't know were on the brochure. I subsequently found that Michael and others had formed a Nordsee Institute to raise the funds to bring Dr. Niek to the Bay Area and that Michael himself had contributed \$10,000.

The two pieces of paper held a greater communication. "Niek has a cosmology that describes the connections between 22 levels of awareness linked to areas of the human body. Michael began explaining using points on his own body. My mind raced. The distinctions were very close to those that Arthur Young makes in the stages of process in process theory, calling them "kingdoms" instead of dimensions. But they didn't quite match.

Dimension 1 was "*direction.*" (Arthur started with "potential" at Stage One.)

Dimension 2 was "*social; surface*"--length and width. (That's stage three for Arthur.)

Dimension 3 was "*length, width, and height*"--the content of the here and now.

Michael was pointing to his hara, his belly. "Direction is out here" and he whooshed his hand forward. "Space is conceptual, perceptual. Three is connection with your body, what is content and real for you," and he points to his gut. My mind stretched as I tried to filter all this through process theory. I wasn't sure any of this made sense. Abstractions only come alive when they resonate with personal experience and I was an anvil chorus of associations. But physical is four! Center and gut is three. "Just accept this and listen" an inner voice said.

Dimension 4 was described on Michael's paper as "*clock time, organization and planning*" (that's five--the Arthur Young voice persists).

Dimension 5 was "*acceleration,*" thinking faster than words.

Michael is pointing to his upper chest and arms. "You are that way, you think faster than words," he said. I thought about Ron Whittal saying I spin, that I take and hear things and just know what they mean and where they go. Could this five now be the five of process theory? My mind raced over what I knew about the chakras.

Dimension 6 was described as "*architecture and space.*"

Michael pointed to his voice box and throat area--the thin part of the neck that holds the head up.

Dimension 7 is the "*future-past bridge*" and he was pointing under his nose.

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"But this isn't the magic," Michael said. "This pattern repeats all over the body, always starting with #3, the manifest form. Three is the shoulders. Four the main muscle of the upper arm. Five the elbow. Six the forearm, and seven the wrist. And the pelvis is three, the upper leg four, the knee five, the calf six, and the ankle seven. These are all linked to the higher dimensions, on an octave of five. If you have a problem in your wrist (#7), then you might be having problems in your future-past bridge. Now this is linked to dimension 12, 17 and 22." I was rapidly getting lost.

Niek as a Healer

Michael shifted to talking about Niek's abilities as a healer. "I met him after Joan pestered me for a long time to have a meal with this amazing doctor from the Netherlands. Within ten minutes of sitting down I knew I had to work with this man. He's little, likes beer and smoking his pipe, a real introvert, but he has an amazing presence and ability to sense what is happening. He immediately said to me 'you aren't on this Earth are you. I bet you are having trouble with intimate relationships and in feeling anger. Because you don't have enough anger you probably go around getting others to be angry around you so you have enough.' Well I got furious at Joan and Hansine, thinking they had told this guy all about me. But Niek insisted they hadn't. He said he could tell what was going on with me just by the way I was holding my body."

Michael described the psychometric exercises that Niek has people engage in his workshops. Because all the points in the body are linked up, one can work not only on the physical dimensions, but also on the more advanced ones. "So stretching the anterior and lateral muscles can activate adjustments on dimension 16 or 18" Michael said. He was speaking a foreign language. I went back to the single sheet of paper.

"Niek says that most illness comes from being out of balance with our true selves." Michael was saying. "We are born in balance, but over time things get out of balance. It happens on all different levels but shows up in our musculature. These are results from holding our emotions in a certain way. It's all a balance between spirit, soul, and mind." Michael went on to tell me about Niek's use of red, blue, and green to help a person self diagnose what they were having problems with. A person arranges a display that reveals certain amounts of each color, and then gets a diagnosis. Red indicates anger; blue— good feeling; green—depression--the good, fog bound morning mist kind."

Michael went on to explain the higher dimensions. He was in a state. I could follow some but others seemed very esoteric. Finally he got to the end and I reconnected.

Dimension 22 was "moving" again. "*Creating wholeness in Earth consciousness and cosmic consciousness.*"

My inner mind is a cascade of associations now. I saw the torus, the familiar donut shaped energy pattern at the center of the universe that is Arthur's symbol of wholeness. I know this dimension. Maybe the others are like so many facets on a jewel. Is that how I spin? Is this why Arthur and Ron's and now Niek's work makes so much sense? I often think about how the center and the void, the light and the dark, the middle and edge are part of one whole circulating oneness. I could sense it wasn't the conceptual understanding of this 22—dimension system that called me, but the prospect of seeing and living in a holistic way. This is the dream that is my home.

The Shift

I begin to focus on Michael's face. It is old and open. The sake has loosened his tired energy. He flowed with teacherly compassion. I saw a person of great depth and ancient knowing emerge from the quirkiness. He is talking the truth, I thought. His energy had shifted. I had never seen Michael like this.

"They cried when I ran my seminar at JFK" he said. "I said how can a person guide others in change if they haven't experienced it, and how can you really know about change if you haven't faced death, if you aren't willing to tell your clients the truth and lose your job, if you aren't willing to look at everything without attachment and in balance."

He wound into a story about talking to the new President of Ford Motor Company who has taken over from Peterson and is being groomed for chairman. "I understand you know something about visioning, he asked me," Michael said. "Could you spare a few minutes to listen to mine. We've worked on it for about six months and I think it's pretty good." "Sure" I replied, "what is it?" "Ford will be the number one low cost provider of high quality automobiles in the world" the man said. "I shut my eyes and thought about it. There was no passion here. This didn't sound like a heavy vision." "Are your people excited about this" I asked. "Oh we haven't communicated it yet." was the reply.

"Do you want to hear what I really think," Michael asked. "Yes," came the reply. "Well I don't think that's a vision at all. I think that's just a description of fact. You are already the world's number one provider of high quality autos. So you don't have a vision, you have a fact. A vision has passion. A vision to change a company like Ford must be mighty and felt by the whole organization. And it's not the management's job to come up with the vision. It's the management's job to facilitate a process whereby the whole organization comes up with a vision that they really feel. Then it's

management's job to help them get the tools to realize it. This is a process that takes a couple of years. The one we put together in the early 1980's led to Ford's recent successes (Michael facilitated Ford's redesigning their entire design process then, in a massive collaboration that ended up very successful and in getting Michael fired by one of the top managers with whom he crossed wires) but visions only last for 7-8 years before they wear out. You need another one and you need a real vision."

Michael said the fellow was rocked. He asked if Michael could help, but Michael is busy and wasn't sure. The man who had fired him was now chairman. "And I really didn't care." Michael said. "Something has shifted in me. I just don't want to work with the light eaters any more. I call the type of people who need to be around people of light, light eaters. I've always had enough light so I kept trying to help the light eaters, but Niek has shown me that it may be better to work with other light producers. Like you David. You are light. Why do you hang around black holes? I never figured that out. I know you had plenty of light not to get sucked in, but I just shake my head when I see it happen."

"So I made 1.3 million already this year and work 25% for free." And he leaned back, opening and stretching like a solar flare. Michael has no problem eating the berries when he finds them. He has that marvelous attitude that they are there for him."

We went on to talk more about Niek, to talk about friends, to talk about our little things. Mostly we were just being together and really enjoying it.

Michael Gives Good Counsel

"What do you think are the blocks in MY way," I asked. Michael closed his eyes and went in.

"All your concepts and systems and paraphernalia. You keep on this mask, and think you need all these ideas and operating systems and everything to be accepted. What if you already knew all you needed to know? What if you were just yourself? Maybe you don't need all the words, and stories, and chatter. You are enough. Just being with you tonight is enough for me."

I felt the communication enter my body. Michael's face took on an ageless quality, open, relaxed, guileless quality again--, full of attention. Something dropped. I smiled. I shifted.

"You should see yourself" he gleamed. "You are beautiful. You don't need those masks."

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The energy of these feelings glowed in my body. I laughed. I laughed again. He laughed. I could see in my inner mind the line of masks that go from Michael's front door all the way up three floors of stairs to the top landing. He speaks from his own knowing. And I let the love in. I let the feeling of my father loving me in. I felt the feeling of Michael loving me in. I felt the feeling of me loving me in. And it felt giddy. It felt wonderful. And the thought that I don't need Arthur Young, and don't need Fletcher, and don't need Ron Whittal, and don't need process theory, and general semantics, and mind forms -- but that maybe I am a very old soul here to bring forth some needed wisdom from the future, that maybe everything I need is there in my intuition and my work and my openness and that maybe it's time to trust and be and act and work and love from a full sense of just being David rushed over me like a summer wind--and we laughed. We laughed as we paid the bill. We laughed as we walked out into the night at 12:00 having shut down the restaurant. We laughed as we hugged and felt what it's like to be old friends. And we howled as Michael threw himself on the sidewalk right under the growing moon to demonstrate right there on Union Street how Dr. Niek had taught him to project a pentagram from his body into the heavens as preparation for taking off on a voyage of reuniting with all that is. A cabbie screeched his cab, thinking someone had collapsed on the sidewalk. We howled with laughter.

"Call me anytime. I'm here for you," Michael shouted back as he walked away.

"When do you go to Ghana?" I shouted back.

"In a week. I'll be gone until mid-July."

We parted. This time the kick in the pants was spiritual. We've moved. We are working on the real work of just being ourselves in our times--responding with what we have, asking questions out of what we have, being unafraid to walk into the big questions.

The stars together tell stories in the heavens. Alone they are points too small to command imagination or pass information. Together they describe galaxies. Apart they are mere points.

"We live in a time of incredible opportunity. It's a window where the Earth is open to receive a large amount of very important knowledge and wisdom. We might even be able to reverse the darkness and ignorance of the last centuries and turn the planet in a direction that can continue and survive." Michael had said at dinner.

With help from the masters, God willing, and friends like Michael.