

Al Renton 1950 — 2012



I met Al on January 13th 2000. He was a new student with the Vancouver Gurdjieff Foundation. At dinner he spoke and I was really surprised how much he knew, but something pissed me off about him. I later realized he was a reflection of me. A guy with a deep wish to understand this life that comes off as a “know-it-all”. Being both “head people”, we hit it off early and shared a lot of information. He spoke often about his childhood and what a shit show that was. He had a lot of unresolved emotional issues and a rigid sense of right and wrong. He had trouble— letting go and letting God. He was generous and pulled for the underdog. He had a great analytical mind and I am grateful for the many insights he gave me. My thoughts of Al will always be fond ones. *Dave Goodwin*

What you said touched my heart. I have known Al for slightly more than a year during a time when both he and I lived in my son’s house—June 2010 to July 2011. He lived in an apartment on the ground floor and I on the upper floor. We did not interact very much, because we kept to ourselves, both enjoying the quiet solitude of the house next to the forest.

I sometimes watched Al from the windows upstairs when he conversed with several deer who came to visit him. He also loved to feed the birds and they would hop around him enjoying the seeds he gave them. He seemed a quiet, pensive man, and the few times we talked I was struck by his wisdom and esoteric knowledge.

I marveled at his wonderful collection of books, stacked on several bookshelves, some on tables, and some on the floor. Most of them seemed to deal with esoteric matters, and he seemed particularly interested in Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.

I gathered that he did not have illusions about world systems, particularly with regards to politics and economics, and he would often make satirical comments about the ways of the world. What I appreciated about him was his total lack of pretentiousness or airs.

He seemed to welcome the quiet serenity where he lived, and clearly loved nature. I knew he had a personal relationship with the huge cedar tree beside his front door, which he admired and loved.

I thought he was a bit of a hermit, so I am pleasantly surprised to discover that he had a circle of friends, as far as Salt Lake City, who cared very much about him. *Marleane Sinclair*

Al was interested in megalithic stones & we had a big discussion about them, I know he was hoping to come to England & see some before the Canterbury conference. He also had some interesting theories on the Movements & how they seemed to relate to the stances of Egyptian figures & statues of Pharaonic times. I was looking forward to hearing more. *Debbie Elliott*

I am sending notes from Al to illustrate his affection for the birds he so loved to feed. He also liked to watch the sky, and was looking forward to the moon eclipse on May 20, 2012. *Marleane Sinclair*. Notes from Al:

I’m doing a little experimenting with the little ones. Every week I stop in at that store kitty-corner from Safeway and pick up a few assorted bags. I’m putting handfuls out in a row outside and seeing where their taste buds lead them. Millet’s winning hands down so far, and flax seed is the big loser - which surprises me for some reason. Got a good assortment for the weekend though, so we shall see. Take it as easy as you can and see if you can find some awe once in a while :) =Al

The only birds that really enjoy the small black thistle (nyjer) seeds are the finches, but adding some of that to the mix is not a bad idea if you want to hear their beautiful songs in the spring. I read somewhere that most birds will eat almost anything (some even suggest meat leftovers!), and while that may be true, they most definitely have their ‘druthers’. So far I’ve tried vegetable flakes, pearl barley, tapioca pearls, shredded coconut, flax seed, shelled sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, walnuts, millet, millet and millet. Eventually they’ll eat it all if I hold off on the millet, but I start to feel like a grinch, so I’ve made up a big batch of almost half millet with all the rest tossed in and they seem to do fine - the juncos and the finches. By the way, feeder number two did the tumble in a wind storm last week - the little square green one - so only one left on the eave. But that little green one could be good for the patio for now- at least it’ll keep their food dry. =Al

I met Al in Rock Creek 43 years ago. His gorgeous mind was my great gift.

Al was a powerful, magical genius who had a very clear understanding of this planet Earth. If he was more social than I am, he was still truly a hermit, as you sensed. I'm grateful to know something of the natural beauty of where he lived his last days, as he had spent his holidays in 2011 at my hideaway near Rock Creek, in the guest trailer. I hadn't seen him for years before that, as our paths had diverged for awhile as they often did. I was preoccupied with the final accounting on my mother's estate while he was there. But I had enough time with him to call it the greatest reunion of my life. His brilliance, compassion and insight were so welcome and he was in such good shape spiritually, that news of his death, even a year late, was ok. He was ready. I just wish I hadn't spent since last Aug. 10th when he failed to arrive for his 2012 holidays wondering if it was something I said! I didn't go hunting for him, as I wouldn't dishonor him that way. But I had often felt sad wondering what on Earth had happened to him.

Others on the list I emailed have written about Al to me. As usual, each one's insight is entirely different. But Al was a last-timer on this planet who could traverse many realms of thought and divergent personalities with grace. His alliance was, as you noted, with Gurdjieff, and I will never forget the windy, stormy night we spent at a wild lake, him reading Gurdjieff to me over the howling wind, and I finally grasping what Gurdjieff was doing, teaching the way he did. It wasn't my style, but Al loved it, and that night I finally understood it. After that we celebrated by singing "They Call the Wind Maria" in two-part harmony across that wind-whipped lake.

Later, in the middle of that night of camping and extraordinary mindfields, I wrote a poem about him. It began, "If war dogs must be suffered, Know their phalanxes are thinned By the organ kundabuffer And a candle in the wind..."

How I loved that being. And I am very happy for him, that he died with such quiet beauty around him, in his bed, and that he had time to get himself together in space before the humans arrived to molest the body.

Al is very much alive. His work here on Earth is done. There are other games to play in other universes. I'll meet him there.

My love goes with you forever, brother, *Joey Walker*

This picture of Al was taken by Debbie Elliot, April 23, 2012, just following the All and Everything Humanities Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah.