



Richard and Linda Nathan  
on their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary

# WORDS OF DEATH, WORDS OF LIFE

by Linda Nathan

## FALSE PROMISES

A lone man walked the streets of San Francisco, praying for its lost souls. But for the most part, he was unnoticed and even unwanted. For there was a new sense of awakening in the air, a call to a different kind of life.

Young people hearing the siren call of the sixties were pouring into the Haight-Ashbury District from across the nation. Like fantastic flowers blooming in a hothouse, hippie pads designed to catch the new rain were springing up everywhere.

It was 1965, and Richard and I had been living in the District a few years. Originally a quiet, residential neighborhood filled with interesting shops, old Victorian homes, and bearded Italian men playing Bocce Ball, the Haight had become transformed overnight into a counterculture Mecca.

At first every morning was like waking up at the circus—a promise of childhood come true! In our secluded second-story Victorian apartment across from Golden Gate Park, we watched as gigantic, spontaneous “be-ins” bursting with “flower children,” loud bands, guitars, free food, and drugs overflowed the park and streets. We only had to walk out our front door to experience firsthand this luxuriant community fantasy gone wild. Sometimes we wandered in a psychedelic high through the milling circus ourselves, sometimes retreated into meditative states and practiced our own brand of spiritual psychotherapy. For we, too, were seeking new life.

Although we had attended the University of California in Berkeley during 1962 and ‘63, we left for Europe just before the riots of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement began in 1964. Nevertheless, the massive procession of hippies and anti-war protestors that came marching up Fell Street that summer of ‘65 in the Haight more than made up for it. They came right to us, singing, arguing, and demonstrating under our windows, and all we had to do was watch, high in our tower.

Only a few blocks away on Haight Street, shops were blossoming overnight, pushing the new consciousness with a chaotic profusion of artsy clothing, handmade crafts, and drug paraphernalia. It was a brief flush of what felt like innocence.

## INTO THE VORTEX

Richard’s Bohemian family had seemed so romantic when I first met him that spring of 1962 in San Francisco. My mother had grown up there before moving to Seattle after her marriage, and my childhood had been full of colorful stories of the “City,” as well as one wonderful visit when I was ten.

But none of that prepared me for the sixties.

A tough Marxist revolutionary who had known Mao Tse Tung prior to the communist takeover in 1949, fought against Mussolini in the Italian underground, and organized cannery workers from Monterey to San Francisco, Richard’s father, Julius, now supported the local anarchists (a very disorganized group) through Ye Olde Anarchiste Bookstore in the family’s dingy Ocean Avenue apartment. At the same time, he provided for Richard, his older schizophrenic brother Michael, and young Nick.

To Richard though, the harsh atheism was impossibly dreary, and drugs and paganism seemed a brighter path. The carved lintel over City College of San Francisco summed it up for us: “*The truth shall set you free.*” Obviously, we concluded, anything that promised freedom also brought truth.

It took me many years, and nearly cost me my life, before I learned—and understood—the missing part of that verse:

***“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”***

But I didn’t know Him then.

Swept up by the maelstrom that hit San Francisco in the sixties, we plunged wholeheartedly into the new psychedelics—LSD, Mescaline, and marijuana—and, in the years that followed, became fervent “evangelists” for them and the world they opened—a world of occult mysticism complete with its own false “born again” experience.

## PSYCHEDELIC SEAS

Strange dreams and powers broke my little vessel loose from old moorings in those psychedelic seas. Vivid visions and teachings from spirit beings, turbulent emotions, and long-repressed nightmares threatened to swamp my sanity, but they also stimulated my thirst for creative freedom. While all around us society was collapsing and being remade, I walked a delicate balance in a surging inner tidal pool.

For fourteen years, we explored everything promising freedom that came our way, from humanistic and psychospiritual therapies to Eastern religions and “white” witchcraft, while I sporadically pursued studies for my degree in psychology.

We followed the false teachings received through LSD and Eastern meditation and eventually became psychic “channelers” and “healers” in a California New Age church. As “Lady Linda,” I became eligible for minister’s papers, gave psychic readings, had glorious visions of “past lives,” “cleansed auras” and “healed.”

*Surely, we thought, we were on the cutting edge of new revelation for humanity!*

## WORDS OF DEATH

Meanwhile, the early convulsions in San Francisco were mere birth pangs for the explosive rise of the New Age Movement. For, by the early seventies, many of these seeds were growing and mutating into an interlocking philosophical and spiritual root system that was crowding out the old crumbling social-spiritual structures.

What in the early sixties still were viewed by many as San Francisco eccentricities soon ignited a movement that leapt like wildfire through every level of society—and is still expanding and coalescing at an incredible speed worldwide today—though it has become so mainstream it no longer is always known as “New Age.” In fact, in forty short years, we have seen a monumental paradigm shift in our nation, away from its original basis in Biblical morality toward the embrace of blatant neo-paganism.

## THE “NEW-OLD” MOVEMENT.

The doctrinal and experiential glue binding this movement together consists basically of a rebirth of **ancient Gnosticism** in modern form and a **counterfeit spiritual conversion**. *Gnosis* [“no-sis”] is the Greek word for knowledge, and the Gnostics taught (and still do) that the path to God was by secret knowledge from an enlightened teacher, not by faith in Jesus Christ. It denies basic Christian teaching, such as the Incarnation, the resurrection, the atonement, and Christ’s deity. The battles the early Christian church fought with ancient Gnosticism were among the fiercest recorded.

The movement’s experiential aspect, its counterfeit spiritual conversion, is gained entrance through mystical knowledge or “consciousness raising” manipulated by certain drugs, Eastern meditative methods such as visualization or guided imagery, spiritualism, mind control techniques, self-hypnosis, developing psychic abilities and other dangerous avenues. In this experience, the New Age “conversion” becomes a doorway into a sense of non-Biblical oneness” (*monism*) with the universe in which the Biblical God is no longer viewed as the Creator. Instead, the focus switches to looking inward, and to the belief that we are ALL gods, and that *all creation* is god.

Undergirding these experiences and beliefs lies the keystone concept of moral relativity, enhancing a sense of false freedom. However, we discovered its devastating consequences nearly too late.

As we progressed deeper and deeper into this morass, darkness closed over us. Our marriage—that of two proud,

deluded individualists walking the same path—was disintegrating. I was haunted by demonic visitations and oppression. Yet still we struggled, believing there was a strong sense of promise for our lives. Surely, we thought, we were just being tested for some great work in our call to usher in the New Age Movement!

In 1972, we fled California for Oregon and returned to school, following our separate paths of ambition. I finished my degree in psychology, entered graduate school, and applied for law school. Richard was two weeks away from an interview for medical school when it happened.

Groping my way over the years through the psychedelic dream-turned nightmare, I had been praying to Jesus Christ since I had been told by a spiritualist minister that His was the "highest name." Although I didn't really know what that meant, I began to search for Him. Oh yes, at first it was to the false New Age "Ascended Master" version that I prayed, but I also kept praying for the "highest good"—whatever that might be—and God did eventually honor my search for truth, albeit in a very strange way.

Three months after a devastating miscarriage and cancer operation in 1976, I discovered with horror that the cancer had returned and was spreading virulently. Now thirty-five years old, I woke up to the fact that I was childless in a cold and disintegrating marriage, collapsing from fruitless, driving ambition, demon-ridden, and lost. And now the heart of my remaining femininity was about to be gutted.

I knew it was all over for me... *except for a sense of promise... But what could it be?* I had tried everything I knew to try—studied the psychotherapies, immersed myself in spiritual methodologies, explored the fallen gardens of my soul, launched into the psychedelic seas of "higher consciousness," and survived the pounding of their waves. I had sought the heights, and plumbed the depths. And now I was sinking beyond recall, devoured by an all-encroaching blackness.

*All of the promises of freedom had proven empty. And yet, miraculously, somehow a sense of promise remained, a tiny glimmer of light in the blackest darkness.*

### WORDS OF LIFE

Days before my hysterectomy, when all was blackest, I visited a friend, a Christian minister whom we had met in school. He passed on a little booklet from a recent visit by a healing mission and sent me into the chapel to read it alone. The story of a man who had been miraculously healed of terminal cancer on his deathbed by Jesus Christ seized my attention.

And as I read that little booklet in the radiance of the quiet chapel's stained glass windows, I encountered the words that changed my life forever—and the very Word of life Himself:

**It is a simple matter for Christ to put His hand on the chaos that is cancer, and bring order.**

In that moment, Heaven opened, and a shining river of life poured through me, as clean and pure and holy as the Word Himself, Jesus Christ, who now revealed Himself to me. Caught up in this glory, I knew without doubt that I was not only healed, but *safe*. He spoke words of life into my spirit: "*You are going to have a baby. Drop out of school, and start going to this church.*"

No, I never said the sinner's prayer—because I had never heard of it—and I certainly didn't know the Four Spiritual Laws. But I did know one thing: This was my Savior, and I threw myself upon Him. Repentance and the certainty of salvation followed in the days ahead, as the Lord opened my eyes to the true Gospel and began stripping away the hideous fabric of delusion and occult corruption and bondage that was certainly partly responsible for my cancer. And as I renounced my old pagan lifestyle, with all of its sin, rebellion, blindness, and corruption, I began to walk in His glorious light—and *true* freedom. (To His praise, I am still healed today.)

I went home, dropped out of graduate school, and began to study the Bible.

A second biopsy soon confirmed the healing, and the hysterectomy was canceled. My doctor, a believer, had, in fact, been praying for me. With a history of past miscarriages and fifteen childless years behind me, I didn't really believe it would last when I became pregnant. But a year later, in 1977, Eric was

born. And God set about making the two ex-pagans and the blessed new child into a family.

### THE GLITTERING WEB

Richard's turn came quickly.

Thoroughly pagan, wholeheartedly embracing New Age beliefs and practices, and totally ignorant of true Christianity, he didn't begin to understand what had happened to me, except that it was lifechanging.

Unknown to me, shortly before my healing, he had decided to abandon medical school to help me, for he had realized that he really did love me and I wouldn't make it without his help. We dropped out of school together, and he took up carpentry.

Soon after my healing, he was home alone one afternoon reading a little tract from the church's tract rack. None of it made sense except one sentence: "*Satan tries to isolate a person to destroy him.*"

*Satan!* he thought with surprise. The sophisticated mystic who knew only the stereotypes about Christianity, he'd laughed at the devil's caricatures and believed all the epithets. Then he hesitated, doubtful. The idea of being in isolation because of deceit was compelling, and he always had felt cut off himself.

*What if there was such a being?* Not the caricature of popular myth, but a real spiritual being of immense evil in the heavens. A dark lord disguised as light, with great power—and spirits for servants—spinning a web of delusion and darkness over humanity. An icy chill crept up his spine.

As he considered the possibility, a vision began forming before him. The room changed, the walls and ceiling shimmered with gaudy images, bright lights, and glitter. It reminded him of the old fun houses he used to visit as a child—bright and false, full of mirrors flashing back distorted images of himself.

**~ All that glitters is not gold ~**

The words slowly grew in his consciousness until it finally dawned on him—*they were talking about deception!*

Suddenly he understood what the sense of rottenness was that he had been feeling all of his life. All of his attempts to get free had been nothing but bright distractions covering up the real condition of his life—bondage to sin. *Sin—the other word he had always laughed at besides Satan.*

As the vision progressed, he saw himself as in a deep dungeon, so thoroughly enslaved by sin that he knew he could never escape by his own efforts, which, after all these years, had failed so miserably anyway. Like the images on the fun house wall, he saw that all of his occult practices and beliefs were only *glittering deceptions in a web of delusion.*

It all became clear: *A Savior*, he thought. *I need a Savior ... Jesus saves ...* That old phrase, so often joked about, rose before his mind's eye. He now knew what it meant—he needed Jesus Christ to save him. *So that's what Christianity was all about! Christ had died on the cross to bear his sins and give him a new life!* Right then and there, he renounced all of the glittering web of occultism and asked Jesus Christ to save him.

And He did.

As we accepted Christ's new life together, we were slowly but inexorably lifted out of the terrible darkness and into His glorious light. Our marriage was transformed, we were given a wonderful child, and the truth, purpose, freedom, and joy we had been seeking for so many futile years was poured out upon us.

Awed by this miracle of grace and new life, Richard, the once-atheist turned pagan New Ager, went on to earn a Master's Degree in Church History and to become a Bible scholar and teacher.

But all of this didn't just happen out of thin air. People had been praying for us. My mother, for one. And the man who walked the Haight-Ashbury District in the sixties? Nearly 25 years later, we met him; today we are good friends. And now we all pray together for the lost.

Thank God for praying Christians.

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