



THE DEADHEAD AND THE QUEST FOR GOD: The Zen Garcia Story

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KUNG FU

BY day, Zen Garcia was a slave to Corporate America. During any given work week, you might find him out and about in the Atlanta area, installing faxes and telexes and computer patch panels, telecommunication systems and such for his father. But then, come night, he was let loose upon the lamplit streets, visiting dojos—kickin’ ass.

It wasn’t always like that though. In the beginning, he kept mostly to his own neighborhood, training with the pads at a studio in Jonesboro. He’d kick those for a spell, making sure to work his way towards the bags. The only problem, Zen explained, is that pads and bags don’t fight back, and where is the fun in that?

“I was involved in martial arts from the time I was around 15 or 16 years old,” he said. “I had done it previously when I was younger but not in a serious

nature.” But then like many from his generation, Zen’s devotion to the arts would be radically retrofitted into an alternate way of thinking, transcendental even, after his eventual encounter with Bruce Lee.

Zen Garcia was born on August 19, 1970, three years before Lee’s death in 1973. It is unlikely that the young aspiring martial artist retained any memories of the Kung Fu champion at that time of his passing. Zen’s posthumous meeting would not arrive for the whereabouts of another decade and some change when he picked up a copy of Lee’s book, *‘Tao of Jeet Kune Do’* and devoured every page, studying it as a spiritual manual.

“It was written over a period of six months when he was laid up with a broken back and couldn’t move,” Zen said. “The title comes from the name, and it means the way of the wandering fist. He incorporated his knowledge, even though he was classically trained as a kung fu stylist—Wing Chun is the name of the kung fu that he was involved

in—and he basically incorporated every style as he began learning and relating to all these different techniques.”

“They say that the individual who can utilize all the different techniques to take a person out of their comfort zone and to utilize a style of fighting that they are not used to can render them useless with regard to their expertise. That would be the best approach, even in the strategy of war.”

Just ask Sun Tzu.

“Karate is an extended reach type of martial art where you’re using punches and kicks to also incorporate things like Muay Thai, which are your knees and your elbows, for in-close fighting, and using your shins to take out people’s legs. Back then, the strategy of tackling people’s legs was something that not a lot of martial arts did. And it’s wonderful because for a lot of people that’s their foundation. If you can take out their legs, then they can’t get close to you. They can’t attack you. Especially if they’re used to using their hands.”

Zen incorporated Jiu-Jitsu into his nightly palette of offense and defenses, paying careful attention to Gracie Jiu-Jitsu in the years before the UFC came about. “And I had read previously about how their father and even their grandfather openly challenged fighters from anywhere in the world—to test their styles. At the time, there were big competitions between Japan and Brazil, Judo stylists coming to challenge the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu family. And now we know that the Gracie brothers and their family, because of their ground fighting technique, are world-famous and that Royce Gracie became the first champion of the Ultimate Fighting Championships.”

“The first two I believe he won, and back then you had to fight multiple people leading to what would be the finals, and then you would have to continue to fight and win and that’s something that is unheard of now. People fight just one bout at a time, but back then you had to endure and fight all these people to get to the finals and then ultimately win, and it was a \$50,000 prize at that time.”

“It’s not about trying to hurt people, you know. It was about self-defense, and also testing your skill against others, which is why you see two guys and two women come into the Octagon, and they fight each other, and they’re basically trying to harm each other, yet after three rounds or five rounds they hug and respect and honor each other.

Especially if it was a good fight. To most people that seems to not make any kind of sense. It’s certainly not that way with every fighter either, because there is *ego* and a lot of hype now incorporated into building up a fight. But for the most part, the people that are involved in the sport itself—they honor each other in that manner. And so, it is a beautiful thing to see.”

Throughout the course of his training, Zen began to incorporate every style that he was capable of discovering into his nightly regimen, the basis of which included visits to varying dojos and the schools they incorporated.

“I no longer trained with the bags or pads or anything like that because those things can’t hit back. I wanted to spend all my time fighting and testing myself against individuals and people that were well respected in the martial arts community.”

It helped that employment under his father introduced him to every neighborhood of the greater Atlanta area. “Wherever I would get off work I knew of all these different schools, and so, I would just go to the closest one, as long as I knew they were fighting that night. That was my training.”

Even the dojos reputed for their prized fighters could not keep Zen away. In turn, the best which Atlanta had to offer would come to learn his name. At the Battle of Atlanta, a massively popular martial arts karate competition, Zen even began to rank among them, winning second place on more than one occasion.

And he may have even risen to the top, Zen reminisced over the phone, as though pondering the possibilities. Had it not been for *the injury*.

PARADISE

HE was a martial artist and a poet, and then finally one day in the spring of 1992 it occurred to twenty-one and twenty-two-year-old Zen Garcia that he was trapped behind four walls too many, and the view through his window was lacking something terrible. After abandoning church as a teenager, he had tried his hand at atheism with little success, but desert portraits as well as the wooded areas, babbling brooks and mountainous landscapes amounted to something which he felt he could commit to.

“Most people’s lives keep them separated from what is the great mystery of creation and God,” Zen said, “and that deeper more profound understanding. And so, inherently I wanted to break my routine and to get away from the whole corporate 9 to 5, and the whole thing of being in a building.” Contrarily, “That whole sense of being tied to the creation and a part of a community that really respected the native peoples, and that were interested in seeking experiences that were different from the normal routine that everybody grows up and desires in regard to materialism and the whole thing about the American dream that they sell us. You know, you get a job, you make a lot of money, attract the right spouse, have kids, cats, dogs, a two-car garage, house with a green lawn, picket fence, all that. I decided I was going to challenge myself to live and to trust ‘*spirit*.’”

Zen Garcia quit his job and ditched his normal routine, even if it led to the nightly dojo, and took his kung fu philosophy and training to a whole new level by selling everything. His journey west would connect him with shamanism, by which he sought experiences of the divine in a manner that could not be explained in the pages of a book. He discovered sweat lodges, drum circles, and something called a vision quest. In little time he fell in with the hippies, still running on fumes from The Sixties, before finally finding his niche with The Grateful Dead, but I’m getting ahead of the story already.

As proof of his ambition, he published his very first book, a collection of poetry called, ‘*Look Somewhere Different*.’ And that’s exactly what Zen was going to do.

Look.

Somewhere.

Different.

In Atlanta he sported a Jeep Wrangler, and what perfect way to pull up to a dojo? But he knew the lifestyle he sought after required an alternative—preferably a van.

He found one such contender, dropped in a new engine and transmission and then hit the open road with what money remained, dedicated to that fork in

the road when the opportunity presented itself. Left or right? His spirit would guide him.

“*Wait*, what kind of van was it?” I asked.

“It was a...” Zen stopped to ponder that fact. “80—*no*, I forget the year.” He thought harder. “No wait...” He paused again. “It was an 88 Ford Windstar Van. Actually...” Clearly, the specifics of his van bothered him. “I think it was called an Aerostar Van before the Windstar.” But getting back to the entire point of his story, being, “I had money coming in, five hundred dollars a month, enough to support my travels for two or three years, that I could get to wherever I needed to go.”

Two years, what could go wrong?

The schedule before him wasn’t set or established. “I didn’t even know where I was going to be the next day or where I was going to wake up. It was exciting and new, appealing in a manner that you can’t really explain to people that haven’t done something like that.”

Where he was going nobody knew—not even himself. But one thing seemed certain, his destination was one in which he could be alone with his thoughts, a gentleman poet in nature scribbling words of insight and introspection into his notebook. In reality, he was discovering his voice through an audience of one. He was learning to shape his words for a host of potential listeners, all of which was construed by his personal experiences, though the true *gnosis* was still to come.

“I knew there was something unique about the way I decided to interact with the creation, and also inherently searching for a direct experience of the divine in a manner that most people never even consider.”

“And besides,” he added, “I always had martial arts to fall back on.” And a job. As well as the college curriculum which he was intent on evading.

Within months, the man from Atlanta learned to become a master of snowboarding.



MOOSE TRACKS

FROM Atlanta, he drove west with his father to New Mexico so as to spend time with his grandmother before her inevitable passing. After the funeral, Zen continued on alone, west to San Diego, making sure to take that righthand turn on PCH the moment he caught sight of the grand ocean. From there, he followed its lane lines all the way north to Washington.

In Seattle, he cozied up next to a girlfriend. But then within weeks he was back on the road again, this time in an easterly direction. From Mount Idaho he drove across Montana and cut south for West Yellowstone, where he situated himself for a couple of weeks in a youth hostel, getting a lay of the land, writing poetry. But it was Jackson Hole, just below the Tetons, that nibbled at the appetites of his heart.

“If you’re not familiar with Jackson Hole, the Tetons are said to be the newest mountains in the world. They’re wind raw. I mean, they come 14,000 feet off the valley floor, and go straight up into the air. It’s the most incredible place that I’ve seen and experienced in the United States of America. It’s a

place where there are more animals than there are people. There’s only 5000 people that live there during most of the year. And it reminds me of Africa because there are literally tribes of various wildlife, and huge herds of deer and mule deer and elk and bison and coyotes and pumas. It’s just incredible. And the animals rule there. The people are very few and far in-between. And they’re only limited to one small place, whereas you have the Teton Mountains right there, and that is back-to-back with Yellowstone right above it. And so, you have a huge swath of area which is completely unpopulated. The animals have full roam and full reign. And because it’s on the edge of civilization, there isn’t another town until you get to West Yellowstone.”

The wolves had only recently been reintroduced from Canada when Zen arrived in the wild country. Another animal he’d never seen in person was the bald eagle. “I saw a family of eight of them sitting in one tree.”

Case in point, Zen was driving carefree through the Tetons, as was his usual custom, when the brake lights barked in front of him, and everything came to an obstinate standstill. “People were getting out of their vehicles,” he said. So naturally,

ANGELS WEAR TIE-DYE

he ventured forward toward the front of the line with the rest of them, hoping to see what the commotion was about. “There was a moose lying out in the road, blocking off both lanes of traffic. He was just chilling, and people were out taking pictures of him.” Zen beamed with delight from his end of the line. “Those animals are so huge. He was blocking both sides of the road.”

That right there was Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Civilization on the edge of wilderness, precisely how Zen liked it. America had much to offer, but when he happened upon the Tetons, Zen had finally found the slice of paradise he was looking for. And so, he decided to plant his wheels right there alongside the edge of the road, despite the threat of an imposing thermometer drop in the winter.

“I ended up getting a job as a lifter at the Jackson Hole Ski Resort. And that’s when I learned to snowboard. That was the most beautiful place, and the most incredible experiences that I ever had.” It would be a destination he’d hoped to return to every winter moving forward.

Among his lasting impressions were the massive influx of elk just to the north of Jackson Hole, come snowfall. “During the winter, there’s a huge population of elk that come down to the refuge, and they’re fed by the community there, and so they remain in town for the entire winter, and there are literally 15,000 elk in this one preserve. Even in this community of Elk there’s a circle of their elders that sit in the middle of the refuge, and these are the oldest and the wisest and the most beautiful elks, they have the largest racks, and they are also the protectors of the colony there, and you can see with the way that they interact, when they’re running they fight amongst each other to establish dominance, but just a way that the animals outnumber the people and have no fear and Jackson Hole being a town on the edge of the wilderness, there’s sixty miles north nothing but the Grand Tetons and above it Yellowstone, and so there’s no people between those two huge national parks and what is a refuge for all these animals.”

On a side note, Zen had apparently convinced his Seattle girlfriend that she needed to see this winter wonderland for herself, as she soon arrived to join him on the slopes. Zen simpered at the recollection, adding: “We had an incredible winter there.”

EVENTUALLY, as the snow began to thaw in Jackson Hole, Zen turned his attention to other horizons. He had already adopted Native American traditions as well as shamanism, “because I felt like the people were really spiritual people, and they still held onto a way of life, and through teachings which were outside of the realm of the corporate 9-to-5 and all of that. They did dances and pow-wows and sweat lodges, which was a really key tool for me. Vision quest, drumming, those kinds of things are tools which they traditionally use to put someone into a mindset where you are in a space where you are communing with what I felt was the godhead. And I felt I did not know the Son. I only knew the Father.”

The blending of the two—his ongoing exploration of America’s natural furnishings, whenever the temperate spring or autumn weather enticed him, matched with his pursuit of indigenous spirituality, quickly found application, and practicality, while following the Grateful Dead.

The Dead made their debut at Ken Kesey’s acid tests in the 1960’s. By 1967, they emerged as leaders of the Haight-Ashbury music scene right alongside Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. The Deadhead phenomenon was first commented upon by *Village Voice* music critic Robert Christgau while at a Felt Forum show in 1971, noting “how many regulars seemed to be in attendance, and how, from the way they compared notes, they’d obviously made a determined effort to see as many shows as possible.” Bob Weir later told David Letterman in 1984 that the term Deadhead came about because speed heads, acid heads, and grass heads were already taken. If *Dead* fans found appeal in repeated concert attendance, it is likely first and foremost due to the method in which the band structured their nightly concerts with multiple sets and repeated song selection changes, sometimes starting out acoustic for the first half before plugging it in and amping it up for the second. By the 1980’s their two-set shows often included a prolonged drum solo by Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann, followed by an extended improvisational “space” jam played by the rest of the band.

Perhaps more than anything, Dead shows manifested the very sort of non-organized

religious experience which thousands of middle-class teenagers had thronged towards, but which was typically frozen momentarily in time and among immovable, even unprecedented concerts like Woodstock or places like the Haight. Among the tents and teepees and flowery vans of migratory Dead camps, young minds could experience places of consciousness among colorful tapestries of psychedelia and the passing of joints, tapping into spiritual wells long thought lost in the Manifest Destiny blitz of their American forefathers.

“It makes me feel larger than life,” a young woman told Brian O’Donnell for his 1991 documentary, *Deadheads*, while seated on the ground, speaking carefree as the breeze; “like something incomparable to anything I am able to find anywhere else.”

Jerry Garcia’s biographer, Blair Jackson, wrote that the shows *were* the sacrament, “rich and full of blissful, transcendent musical moments that moved the body and enriched the soul.” Bass guitarist and *Dead* founder Philip Lesh commented, “The unique organicity of our music reflects the fact that each of us consciously personalized his playing to fit with what others were playing and to fit with who each man was as an individual, allowing us to meld our consciousness together in the unity of a group mind.” And drummer Mickey Hart is documented as having said: “The Grateful Dead weren’t in the music business; they were in the transportation business.” Joseph Campbell, author of ‘The Hero with a Thousand Faces’, once proclaimed Deadheads as “the world’s newest tribe.”

Zen’s own beginnings with the Dead dated back to his high school days. Their introduction would come through Jeff Jones, a teenage friend, whom everyone including Zen called Sunhawk. Sunhawk eventually ended up attending school near Little Five Points, “which is a very intriguing cultural area here in Atlanta, where all the alternative lifestyle people come together and congregate. There’s a wide variety of different ethnic foods. There’s a lot of new age shops. And even though he lived there in that area, I would travel down to hang with him.”

The two eventually decided to lift the Dead experience from the usual vinyl records and cassette tapes playing through their headsets and *live* the tours, but not just the shows in their area. They wanted to become deadheads. “Usually, they

would do two through three shows at a time in different cities and then have a couple of days in between for people to travel to get to those other areas, and then they would do in the spring or in the summer or in the fall, a list of 18 dates spread across the United States, though they did do tours outside of the country.”

As early as the 1970’s, second generation Deadheads, who are *also* said to have been turned on to the music through their elder brother’s friends, had begun selling everything from tie-dye t-shirts, posters, veggie burritos, Mardi Gras beads, homemade bracelets and earth-inspired jewelry, bumper stickers, hot dogs, grilled cheese sandwiches, pizza, and chili nachos, in order to sustain the lifestyle. Zen recalls being able to scrape together a decent living selling imported beer. All he needed was a cooler and ice and the imports would sell at two or three times his initial investment.

“There was a flood of money coming into the scene in every city. It was easy for people to make enough money to then provide for their needs, and to pay for their tickets to go in and experience a show, and then live that sort of festive lifestyle. All I had to do was get to a show and we could make money; enough money to survive to get to the next show, and also to get into the show and have a really good time—to be part of this whole misfit group. Certainly, a lot of drugs were sold on the circuits as well, and of course that was dangerous for a lot of people, but for a lot of deadheads, they were wise in business, which seems contrary to the whole mode of being a hippie. There were opportunities because when you go to the different concerts and venues, you have a huge population of individuals who come there that simply want to party and have a good time and go to the show and experience what it’s like to be with this eclectic motley crew.”

“The community who followed the shows and that made up the scene, it was like a carnival, a festive attitude and experience which a lot of people enjoyed. And so, it became like a traveling circus. Even the renaissance festival was an extension of the deadhead community. And a lot of people found in doing these shows and this kind of lifestyle, that they were able to *live it*, and they were able to have a way of being that was contrary to the norms of what society expected for people, in buying into the whole American Dream.”

“They were also very spiritual people, and it was there doing all these Grateful Dead shows that I was introduced to a lot of spiritual techniques, different things, sweat lodges and the Native American tradition was really engrained in that part of the culture. The Deadheads had a great respect for nature and everywhere we went, each person looked out for each other. They were kind to one another. They would share whatever they had, and they were for the most part, very loving. And even the whole thing of random acts of kindness, that was something that came out of the whole Grateful Dead scene. Love one another. And even the songs that the Grateful Dead did, and the vibe that they gave off was similar in that respect. It became not something that you did, or something that you were a part of, but it became a way of being. It became a lifestyle and an attitude, a manner, and a deposition.”

He and his friends always planned to meet in one particular section of the concert. “And that was on the side where Jerry Garcia played, which was on the right side of the stage. That was one of our ways of always hooking up together, no matter which city we were in.” Jerry Garcia was their rendezvous point. “And back then I was doing drugs, smoking marijuana. And so that’s where we would gather for smoke sessions with other Deadheads. And we would always communally put into a pile, everyone contributed, and then we’d smoke out there during the entire show.”

But then New York City Zen did not care to attend. If Jerry Garcia and co. were determined to brave Manhattan, then he’d happily flank his friends at their next meet-up. “I never wanted to go there—all the people and the noise and the traffic.” He even let his friends in on it. They’d have to find their own ride. Unfortunately, the whole lot of them woke up too late, having had far too much fun “working” Philadelphia in the Spectrum. If his friends were to make it to the city, they’d have to find their luck hitchhiking. Zen had a change of heart.

Get in. Let’s go.

Zen, you’re the greatest.

You guys owe me one.

Zen managed to park his van at a fellow Deadhead’s house in New Haven, Connecticut, with just enough time to finish their journey into the city by train. That train, by the way, came free of charge, Zen claims, courtesy of his “well

networked” Connecticut friend. Deadheads have *many* connections, it seems.

After the show, “we always do what we call *ground spore*.”

“What is *ground spore*?” I wanted to know.

“It’s basically where we would run around after the show when the lights came on, and you could find stuff that people had dropped. A lot of people were drunk or stoned out of their minds. So, there was a lot of stuff that was dropped after the shows. We’d scatter out and scope the whole stadium.” That night Zen found a tie-dye sweatshirt and a wallet that had \$60 dollars in it. “And I found a bag of schwag—marijuana and a bunch of lighters.” Zen took his friends into the parking lot and used the cash he’d found in the wallet to pay the guy who’d gotten him inside.

There was plenty left over for pizza and beer.

“The last train ran at one AM in the morning, and so we knew we had to make it back for the last train.” As Zen happened upon Grand Central Station, he saw a guy dressed in tie-dye, sitting on the ground, leaning against the wall. Tie-Dye looked sad. “He almost had his head in his hands, and he was having a hard time. You could obviously tell.”

Zen roamed over towards Tie-Dye. “Hey brother, is everything *okay*?”

Everything was *not* okay.

Tie-Dye sighed.

Nah, man, I lost my wallet in the Grateful Dead show. I’m stuck, man.

“*Dude*, I found a wallet in the *Grateful Dead* show.”

Sure enough, the driver’s license matched his mug. He got back all his credit cards, Zen kind of shrugged over the phone. “And because I didn’t have to use my ticket for the train, because of my connection, I gave him that ticket so that he could get back home.” Then again, there was the matter of the money they’d spent. As compensation, Zen offered him the bag of schwag.

Tie-dye was stoked.

DEADHEAD

IT could have been any city in America—east coast or west coast. Pick your venue at random. It may as well have been New York. Zen Garcia was dancing crazy on the right side of the stage with his friends, completely *in tune* with the music, when he looked up and saw that Jerry Garcia was staring right back at him. Eyes locked, *neither* ‘Garcia’ missed a beat. “And I knew that we’d made contact in that moment.” For that moment—that brief albeit abiding moment, “I shared a tension with him.”

SCHWAG

ZEN said, “The experience that I had at that time, they led me to understand spirituality in a way that wasn’t just *book knowledge*. It wasn’t just something that somebody talked about in a pulpit. I really had divine experiences in doing what I did in the time that I did that—especially my part in vision questing and sweat lodges and all that. That grounded me spiritually.” After breaking away from the church and turning to atheism, the North American horizon “brought me out of that, and I realized there truly is a Creator, and there’s a purpose for all things to be as they are. Inherently, all of us are here to research and discover that. And so, it really led my pursuit of wanting to know, and wanting to have direct experience of something greater. These experiences led me to the person I’ve become.”

In a way, ‘Tie-dye and the Case of the Missing Schwag’ astonishingly exemplifies Zen Garcia’s worldview, not only the *here* and the *now*, but the yesterdays before our *present being*. “I knew in that moment when I met him that this was some sort of crazy angelic encounter, and that God was watching to see if I would do the right thing. And I did so. And I gave him all his stuff back. Things like that would happen to me when I did these sort of shows—supernatural things—just really weird, strange things. It’s always something that worked out for our benefit.”

“My initial life really helped me to have a strong dependence and relationship with the Father, with the Great Spirit—the Father of Creation. It was after that that God led me to the Son.” Yahusha

HaMashiach. Though most simply know him as Jesus Christ.

Whatever one might conclude of the Deadhead experience, or the otherworldly shamanism which seems to accompany it, so too does Zen recognize the flip of the spiritual coin. “I also feel like, for a lot of people that aren’t spiritually connected to anything, that have turned their backs to Christianity, to organized religion, to everything, and a lot of people are gravitating towards that lie that the aliens created us.” *There* is Zen’s tug of war; the magnetization towards a fixed, centralized northern pole on the plane or the vast wandering towards a southern pole which charms but ultimately confounds everything within our spiritual map. “There is disinformation that a lot of the Native peoples are involved with. There are spirits that are demonic, in that Satan purposely created a lot of religions and tied them together with drug use in order to lead people astray, in order to lead them into the use of drugs as dependence in their spirituality. In that way, these sorts of things can be terrible for you.”

“Of course, I don’t use or do drugs now. But I think that, for certain people, they can be a tool that helps break them out of their shell—out of their mold.”

“The initial experience can drive someone to feel something greater. I think the Native peoples, traditionally, that their use of drugs, peyote, even marijuana for the Rastafarian, that those sorts of things were used to commune with the Father initially. Tools like that can be used to initially break people out of the mold of their tradition.” *Consider the Sixties*. “For the people that went through the whole hippie thing, a lot of those people who used drugs for the first time, they had spiritual experiences which later helped their spirituality, their belief in something greater than themselves.”

Then again, “I think that you have to outgrow and learn to have that sort of connection without dependence on drugs because I think drugs are bad for your health and bad for your wellbeing, in that they can only be used as a tool by some people.”

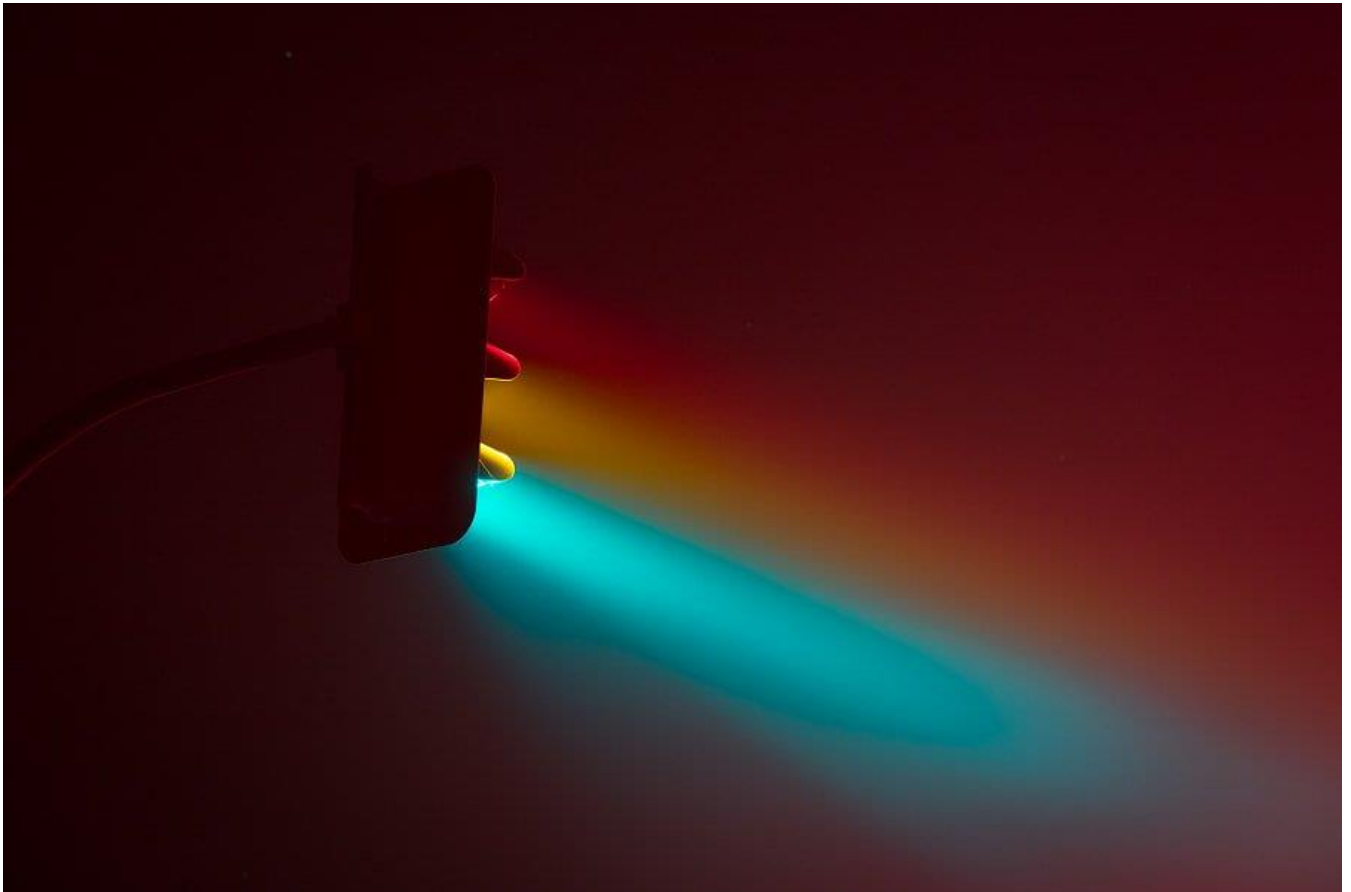
Thinking back on his travels with the Dead, “I’m very grateful for what I came out of, and am able now to have discernment, and a lot of people that ask me; if they’re caught up in depression; if they’re abusing marijuana every day; I tell them: ‘Really, you have to outgrow that. You have to learn to leave that behind. You can’t be dependent on

something that is destroying you.’ I learned those things early in life. At some point everyone had to grow up and move on and have relationships with the Godhead and leave all things that destroy you; things that poison you; things that affect you in detrimental manner, if you use them over time.”

“And so, I’ve been able to relate to people that are involved in New Age mysticism even now, and to help them to understand that there is a Savior Messiah, and why it is that we need to be redeemed through Christ, and that He paid the promise to rectify the Father, and how those two stories come together. And now I’m able to teach the whole thing about the ancient aliens—how it’s all a lie. And I understand more than most people because I studied the Sumerian teachings, I’ve read all of

their mythology. I know how the deception ties into the truth, which is the prophetic Word.”

In regard to how one ultimately views drug experimentation, even when strictly employed as a tool for the unraveling of heaven’s Mysteries, for Zen Garcia, there are very few revelations, if any, which manages to change *everything*. No, there is only a series of revelations and the gradual journey for the dedicated pilgrim, struggling to maneuver through and even understand his predicaments with the cyclical passing of the seasons. The journey itself is what is to be taken into consideration. In other words, there is only his life *then* and his life *now*. Measurements may be taken by the depths of knowledge acquired between.



THE FINAL TRIP

YOU wouldn’t forget a date like that one. September 24, 1994. When asked, Zen can still close his eyes and recall the imposing date of his metamorphosis as though it were recorded onto the track of the latest Dead album. Within hours, the Dead were mustering their ranks for a single

one-night show at the Berkeley Community Theatre, just outside of San Francisco, and Zen stood by the edge of the road, hoping to catch a ride, thumb raised.

A VW Van rumbled to a stop. Inside, somebody named Gypsy and his girlfriend Carrie were headed to the *same* show. What were the odds?

He climbed in.

The brakes went out on a winding pass. Gypsy and the hitchhiking deadhead dropped off a cliff, plummeting 65-feet down. Zen Garcia snapped his neck on impact.

FORCED MEDITATION

“WHY didn’t I grab the wheel of the van and just immediately crash it into the side of the mountain to keep us from accelerating?” Zen said, blending three decades of hindsight with his memory.

The van was too old, the journey too treacherous and far. Why did I even climb into it to begin with?

“I should have known better. But you don’t think of that at that time. The brakes went out and we quickly started to gain speed. So much so that by the time we got to the first bend, we were unable to hold that turn, and went sideways off of the cliff.”

The journey from the roadside to the bottom of the mountain felt like a forever plummet, with everything moving in slow motion. “And then, all of a sudden, we hit something, and it was a loud crash, and from what we were told we hit a tree about 65-feet down. I remember when we first impacted, and hit the side of the mountain, that my neck snapped backwards, and then trying to get up, my body wasn’t responding to me in the way that it should have been, and so, I knew something was wrong.”

Zen lost consciousness.

When he came to, he was lying in a bed in the Redwood Medical Hospital in Garberville with a collapsed lung, and several weeks of his life had passed. Also, he was paralyzed.

“That was certainly devastating, having gone from being trained as a martial artist, and I could move in ways and stretch in ways that most people couldn’t. I could do a split three ways. American splits in both directions and then Chinese split where I could lay down on my stomach and go to sleep if I wanted to with my leg split wide. I had over five years developed the capacity studying even there at the school where I took Tai Chi and yoga, that was part of our curriculum before we went to massage classes. We learned things like deep tissue and polarity and shiatsu and things of that nature. It was a terrible time because my lungs

had collapsed. My body, I was unable to eat. I was on a feeding tube.”

Initially, his hospital caretakers chose to wait while his body deteriorated, preferring him conscious and awake before the feeding tubes entered in. But that was a nightmare experience too, because “you wake up to your new reality and they’re forcefully shoving this huge tube down your throat telling you, ‘Swallow! Swallow! Swallow! Swallow!’ and you’re just like, you just want to grab somebody and start punching them, because it’s painful. They’re hitting the back of your throat, and they’re scraping down your esophagus, and then you’re already in all this pain from the accident and they’re just, kind of callous the way that things are done, but they do it to save your life.”

“I was on a ventilator. I didn’t have any voice. I couldn’t make any sounds but clicking with my tongue. I couldn’t speak. I couldn’t eat. Everything was sensory overload; sound, light, everything. Your senses are reeling in a way that you’re sensitive to everything you never thought you would be sensitive to. And even when people touched my hands at that time which, I don’t have complete sensation in my arms or in my hands, but it felt like sandpaper, and I did not like it. And they would try to rub your hands with the washcloth to desensitize them, and it was as though they were scratching me with sandpaper, and then the whole thing of temperature, not being able to moderate, going from one extreme to the other, going from cold to hot and just misery. The only thing I wanted to do was pile tons of blankets on top of me, and just cover myself, and withdraw into a hole and not be bothered, and not have to deal with any of it.”

The only reason he’d hitchhiked down from the mountaintop to begin with, aside from the *obvious* Deadhead destination, had to do with his summer attendance at the Heartwood Institute. During his last stint of consciousness, he was adding massage therapy to his ever-growing rotunda of spiritual disciplines. Situated within the heart of Humboldt County, the Heartwood Institute sits to the east “of what is the valley of the Giants, where the Redwoods stand in Northern California,” Zen said. “It was a really incredible place to be, absolutely breathtaking. Seeing those trees that are 4000 years old and massive in size, is a humbling experience. They’re growing up out of the valleys and out of the floors with nothing else around them, because they are the oldest and their root

systems probably go so deep into the ground that they kind of own their area and are dominant.”

Heartwood “was just a bunch of older hippies that had the skill set to open up a school to where they were teaching all these esoteric arts. We ate from the food that was grown there at the school. It was mostly vegan or vegetarian. They did offer eggs and fish, but there were no other meat products. And we used to drink shots of wheatgrass every day. There was a store where you could get, like if you were going to a health food store, you could get things like that. Chips and yogurt drinks and things of that nature. Other than that, it was all organically grown food that was just so different from what you see other people eat.”

But then getting back to the hospital bed in Garberville, just down the road from the hippie Institute. “The focus of my life at that time was involved largely upon movement. Martial arts. I was involved in snowboarding and skateboarding, and I had my mountain bike with me in that van that I lived in, and that was a large part of my life, and then to go from that to absolute stillness, to being a quadriplegic and not being able to move even to get up from a laying position and having to be dependent upon a wheelchair for movement, it’s forced meditation. You are forced to become calm and quiet in a manner that you never ever would have thought or considered as far as a way of being. But that’s what paralysis is. It’s forced meditation.”



PATH OF THE ANCIENTS

THE day of his extraction from Garberville is not a date worthy of his recollection. It is the warm rays of the sun penetrating the giant redwoods around him, and the clean, crisp mountainous air, as he was lifted out to Atlanta that is burned into his lasting memory. But also, the gloom and the

rain of his arrival. Shepherd Center was near to his parents but also in the metropolitan heart of the city, of which the noises and the pollution haunted him. For Zen Garcia, it was his own personal apocalypse.

He had lost so much weight during his six-week stint of being comatose that skin sores became an issue wherever the bones poked through his

skeletal body, though the mental pain was far more unbearable.

“They were putting me into a coma to allow me to heal, but coming out of all that, coming out of that with your senses reeling, and being so utterly broken. I mean, every aspect of yourself, you have to kind of pull together all the pieces of what is yet unbroken to re-create and reestablish yourself. And these were things that are completely challenging for anybody that goes through paralysis and the whole transition, and disability is the most difficult struggle that one could ever imagine. It’s not just a matter of learning to walk again. It’s learning to be in a way where a lot of what was your physical independence is gone forever. And then learning to be dependent upon others to sustain and to support you in what is a new way of being.”

Though his free ranging rights were utterly depleted, even the dietary independence he had relished was vanquished. Initially, Zen attempted to hold onto his vegetarian ways, but a feeding tube and a rotunda of nurses and caregivers proved that to be yet another dead-end. “And even in California back then, this is in 1994, there were not a lot of vegetarian restaurants where you could sustain that sort of lifestyle. But certainly, here in Atlanta at that time, it was unheard of. A lot of things like hummus and tabbouleh and things of that nature, nobody even knew what you were talking about. I was told that I needed to start eating meat again. Because initially they wanted me to drink ten Ensures just to kind of sustain myself, and there was no way.”

His mental and emotional resolve only continued to deteriorate after his release from the Atlanta hospital. He was returned to the home of his parents, from which he had begun his vision quest, but they were older and incapable of caring for him, and Zen knew it. “I saw how difficult it was for them, and I realized how overbearing it would be for them in their age and in their lifestyle, with the jobs and the work that they were doing, to try to take care of me. I didn’t want that for them, and so, I decided that I was going to do everything I could to be independent again.”

Zen ended up at a place called Warm Springs, a rehabilitation facility in the Atlanta area. The center included occupational therapists as well as a study center for those who wished to attain their GED, and in another area, wheelchairs were worked upon. “It was a whole rehabilitation

community where people were learning to deal with and to reestablish themselves in lives where they acquired these disabilities, some with traumatic brain injuries, or strokes and seizures and things of that nature. Or people who got vaccines and then ended up with Guillain-Barré, which is a syndrome that paralyzes you slowly over time.”

His residence was a four-room cottage, “and in three of those rooms, different individuals of high-level paralysis lived there, and there was a nurse in the other room, and for six months we were able to explore life and learning to live and to heal and to regather what is left yet of the unbroken.”

His competitive days in kung-fu and ju-jitsu and the ways of the wandering fist were over. He was down on the mat permanently and taken out of the competition. Likewise, winters in Jackson Hole and the highways of America with Jerry Garcia as his pied piper, were shackled to the memories he retained within the prison of his paralyzed body. He was only 24 years old. But one thing he still was, was a poet, and the poet within him was capable of encompassing all of those experiences and more.

“I had resigned myself, even though everyone goes through a period of darkness, where you’re essentially suicidal and not wanting to live and certainly not in this kind of a manner, but I was already grounded in faith and I was already grounded in knowing that I had a role in a mission that was unlike most people, that I knew God had a purpose for me that I did not fully understand. I knew there was something greater that I needed to accomplish, and so, I resigned to do the best that I could with what was yet left of who I was.”

Paralysis had given Zen ample time to stop chasing after the Mysteries of heaven, seemingly caught up in the invisible wind, and for once in his life, sit down and study. Perhaps it was the carefree hours or a change of perspective, but quite suddenly Zen found himself following the path of the ancients when reading “the Bible in a manner which I had never previously.” It wasn’t until after he began combing its pages through the attuned spiritual lenses of his own American vision quest that he “came out of the New Age. And immediately the Most High was leading me to things that weren’t taught in mainstream churches.”

Things like *Serpent Seed*.

Things like *Pre-existence*.

Things like the *feminine* Holy Spirit and the sons of Anak. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

“The big one for me was Genesis Six. The sons of god mating with the daughters of men, creating a race of giants known as the men of renown. There were giants on the earth before and after the flood.” Zen Garcia eyed that passage, which reads almost like a footnote, with the intensity of an eagle. “I wanted to know more about the context of the chapter.”

Well, one thing led to another, as these things so often do. And then one day he discovered a book called Enoch.

Zen sat in his chair and opened up the book out of mere curiosity. He scoured through its pages until the moment when he was through with his initial read, of which there would be many, and then closed its binding, thinking to himself:

‘Why are people not talking about this?’