



Susan looking out over the Grand Canyon from the southern ridge, Arizona, USA

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By Susan Griffith-Jones, Exclusive

I allow my gaze to return to the top of the ridge and arrive BANG in the present moment, experiencing something before me that is in itself but a mirror of that mystery. I can see across the whole landscape where there's a wide, flat, plateaued, deserted terrain within which an entire root system of canyons is spread inside its belly, huge chunks of land dug out, or split apart between cliffs and hidden networks of gorges and narrow stretches of hair width cracks. My brain is instantly trying to intuit the potential shape of this vast basin, put it into a pocket that it fits into within its established memory bank. But even without getting overtly intellectual, it's primarily having a hard time conceiving that such geometry is even possible; its multi-dimensional, multi-coloured sinuous curves starting and ending in space that cannot be viewed, so that it profoundly hides itself within its own dips and shadows. Even though it encompasses the whole space before my eyes, I feel that I'm actually looking at it inside a museum, as if we're standing at the barrier of a glass case and taking a peak at how the world may have been in its infant state, a geology that existed in the Jurassic Period, a trench at the bottom of the sea, a natural temple shrine of self-arising stupas, not something of our world. Then when the oceans receded, it revealed an artist's palette, a depository of every colour of the physical dimension preserved in stripy layers of rock formations, ready to paint the forests, oceans and land onto the Earth. And down there, deep down there, right at the bottom, the blue winding strip of the Colorado River grinding its way through this vast grand canyon.

One of my first reactions is that I want to be down there, inside the very core of this place and I remember that's what I also experienced last year in China's Jiangjiajie National Park, where it had been nearly impossible to fathom where the bottom of the stacks dotting the

entire valley that had inspired the movie Avatar, were from the ridge. Perhaps there's a very yearning that we humans have when we look into something that is so vast and detailed that it becomes unfathomable to our brain and yet so intriguing that we would be willing to risk life and limb to experience what it must be like to be absolutely within it, inside the heart of it, as if that's where the secrets are kept and that's where we'll really be able to feel and experience it. Nowadays, we need guides and equipment and planned routes and escape paths and timetables and torches and food packs and whatever else to visit such a place. We need to cover the whole space of potential with every possibility, so that what actually happens tends to be the path of least resistance, but at the same time, like this we lose the spontaneity and magic of just not knowing, having to trust every step of the way and the wonder and awe at the marvelous occurrence that actually appears. At the gift shop we roll out one-cent coins into oval souvenir momentos in an old wooden standing machine that you have to wind a metal wheel to get into action and Miryam buys each one of us a feather hair clip. And with a light-hearted and child-like mood, we are now a clan and must wear the feathered sign of the group or bear the consequences.

Christine's boyfriend, Chris lives in the town of Prescott several hours' drive away, back towards Sedona. He is conscientious about our visit and calls us several times during the day, to ask if we prefer this or that to eat and instead of his daily bike ride, today he's vacuumed the house from top to bottom! Sharing the various tasks to make the dinner, we swap stories in the kitchen and on to where we sit at the table outside under a starry night. In the morning, we walk Chris' dogs (and ourselves) in the nearby Prescott Hills around a dam lake on which people are floating away their Sunday morning on canoes, boats and the like. News of a hurricane off the coast of Baya California is going around. We can see clouds forming in the distance

and pray that it'll hold off til night, as this afternoon we're going to attend a sweat lodge at 'The Sanctuary' nearby Sedona where Christine works. Having donned my swimming costume and wrapped a scarf around my waist for modesty, I'm dressed for the occasion, but first have an aura cleansing with what smells like a type of burning white sage in front of the door of the tent-like structure that is the sweat lodge. I then bow 3 times at the doorway, as is customary and enter. Once everyone's in and the doors are closed, it is intensely hot, the temperature being maintained by large stones that have been heated for long hours and sporadic splashes of water onto them that create an even hotter environment. It's one of those occasions when you just don't know if you should stay or leave. Staying is unbearable, leaving is unbearable, a kind of 'bardo' moment of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, when you are literally on 2 sides of the coin at the same time! I opt to stay, which in retrospect I later think was a good move, as those who didn't get through the first round, didn't reappear during the rest of the 3 hours and the first session was the worst (as in hardest) of them. Each session is homage to one of the elements (Air, Fire, Earth and Water) and there are offerings to the different directions, with various rituals and invocations that one of Christine's co-workers is handling.

In the 10 minutes between each part, I go outside and lie on the cold stone, then hose myself down with water, but by the end of it I'm literally knocked into profound silence and do not want to even think about anything, nor move around. I have been truly blasted by the heat. I'm unusually unchatty at the full-on buffet in the dining room afterwards, which is very welcomed, as I sense a foul headache potentially coming on without grounding some of the subtle winds of the body that the heat has made rise to the upper part of mine, with some hot, cooked food in the stomach. At 'The Sanctuary' Christine is the specialist in myofascial tissue massage, a special technique that involves returning

the fascia (surface tissue) to its correct position. During the process of gentle, sustained pressure on these connective tissues, what seems to the participant to be a slight pulling and pushing of them this way and that, certain tensions and emotional traumas are released. Actually, there's much more to it than this, but I only know what I myself experience when Christine does it on me, twice, specially for a pain that's been building up in my lower back for a while now. She says very confidently that she thinks it'll take 3 sessions to cure. We only have time for 2, but afterwards the pain is much reduced and as I set off to do a hike around the Bell Tower and Courthouse rocks on my last full day in Sedona, I realize that this is the first time in ages that it is not even present! Many patients are telling Christine the same thing and re-booking further sessions

with her. She says that it's just something that comes absolutely naturally to her, just a kind of inherent knowing of what needs to be done, for any particular case.

Today, I'm determined to 'feel Sedona', be out there alone and catch the vibe. I've opted for the middle length circuit around these great magnificent beasts of rocks, a hike that should take me 3 hours. But, I'm completely distracted from start to finish, first on a phone call to my sister-in-law, who's in LA and then a missed call and voice-mail from Dr Mani Bhaumik, who I've asked to meet when I go to LA this week. I try to call him back, but am in and out of signal here in the desert.

To be continued...

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Chris, Susan and Miryam at the Prescott Hills, Arizona, USA



Susan at the Grand Canyon, Arizona, USA



Miryam, Susan and Christine wearing the feather hairclips, Grand Canyon, USA