

# Memories of a Mentor

Review of

*The Way of the Dreamcatcher: Spirit Lessons with Robert Lax, Poet, Peacemaker, Sage*

By Steve T. Georgiou

Ottawa: Novalis, 2002

284 pages / \$14.95 paperback

Reviewed by **Paul Spaeth**

There have been few articles written about Robert Lax and only one book (a collection of articles) that was out of print almost as soon as it was published. Steve Georgiou is to be commended most highly for putting together this present book in which we can hear Lax's own words as he speaks on life, the universe and everything – well, just about everything. There have been many interviews made with Lax, but Georgiou has gone a step further in providing us with a very full and connected portrait of the poet as no one has before. And the publisher, Novalis of Canada, is to be commended for the care which they have taken in issuing such a beautifully crafted edition.

Patmos is one of the smallest of Greece's many islands and one of the furthest away from the mainland. It is not green like some of the other islands, but very desert-like. It was there that Steve Georgiou met Robert Lax, not intentionally but more by accident while he was exploring the roots of his own Greek heritage. But in searching for those roots Georgiou came into contact with a person that became for him a spiritual guide. He says in the introduction to his book, "The spiritual transformation process seemed to indicate that serious aspirants needed to learn first-hand from enlightened wisdom teachers, spiritual guides, *Dreamcatchers*, who through their virtuous presence and example, would help their disciples to discover unique paths of freedom" (45). Lax became such a dreamcatcher for Georgiou and helped him along "the way," not through entrance into an institutionalized religious order, or by means of a rigorous set of contemplative practices, but rather through regular contact with a man whose personal charisma did not lend itself readily to those settings.

Later in the book Georgiou notes that there was a device hanging from Lax's ceiling, called in Native American tradition a dreamcatcher, a filter to ward off bad dreams and retain, or catch, good ones. This can certainly be used as a central metaphor for the life of Lax, a person who sought out and retained what he found helpful from various religious traditions; that is, those elements which he felt directed him to God. Lax was brought up a Jew, and in relation to his turn to Christianity he would say that he never ceased being a Jew. His desire was to accept Christ as the Messiah saying that he "simply wanted to participate with Him as peacemaker" (58).

At one point Georgiou asks Lax if he ever felt like the desert father St. Anthony of Egypt (90). This is an appropriate question since in a number of ways Lax was like St. Anthony. Not that Lax

was on a par with that great saint of the early church, but it is interesting to note a few parallels. Both men gradually retreated from the world until they found a place of solitude, desert solitude. But neither man shied away from the company of others even when they found that place. And finally, both gathered to themselves “disciples”; that is, people who sought to learn from the example of a life lived rather than adherence to a set of rules. In Lax’s case sometimes these disciples wrote letters (or later on emails), but many made a pilgrimage to Patmos. Steve Georgiou, as is the case with many others, found in Lax an individual who was intuitively (as opposed to institutionally) spiritual. Georgiou has spent his adult life studying and teaching about various religious paths and was able to recognize in Lax a soul who had attained a level of peace and a state of grace that seemed desirable and good.

After a prologue where Georgiou talks about their first meeting, the book is taken up with conversations between the two that are sometimes intensive and deep, and at other times light and joking. This reflects perfectly what it was like to know Lax. The impression is one of listening to the conversation of two friends, rather than reading a formal treatise. In an epilogue Georgiou recounts their last meeting, the end as the beginning happening on Patmos. The conversations are broken into four sections entitled “Origins,” “Craft,” “Art,” “Spirit,” each with a short introduction. The “Origins” section deals mainly with biographical questions, “Craft” with writing, “Art” with Lax’s visual style and involvement with graphic artists, and “Spirit” with religious matters. But the whole indeed deals with religious matters and spirituality; it is the centerpiece of all conversations, and rightly so. Lax’s whole life had been spent in putting himself in the place where grace, the grace of God, could flow to him. That grace was then imparted to others through his writing and through personal contact. Writing was not just a craft to be exercised and developed, but a religious vocation to be shared. So Georgiou’s sub-title of “spirit lessons” is exactly right in relation to Robert Lax.

There are also numerous photographs grouped together in four sections. These are almost all taken on Patmos except for a portrait made by Lax’s longtime Greek friend Moschos Lagouvardos and a photograph of the author trying to spend a meditative moment by Lax’s grave on a hilltop in the cemetery across from St. Bonaventure University (a moment turned somewhat comical when a groundskeeper kept circling with his lawnmower).

In the archives of St. Bonaventure University there is a box of letters from Steve Georgiou to Robert Lax. In sorting through the large amount of correspondence that came to Lax these letters have always been easy to pick out because they were full of bright and colorful drawings and lots of joking and general craziness. Georgiou and Lax were friends, but Lax was also a mentor for Georgiou. This book is a way of sharing that friendship with the world and to promulgate at least some of the spiritual insights of this holy poet of Patmos.