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## Hands of Alchemy

by Judith Campanaro

In the late 1970s, Jerry Wennstrom, a prominent artist on the verge of fame and fortune in New York City, destroyed his large body of artwork, gave away all of his possessions, and began a life of unconditional trust, allowing the universe to provide all that was needed. The next 15 years were spent in a journey of transformation.

In his book, *The Inspired Heart*, Wennstrom tells the empowering story of his journey and exploration into the source of his creativity. Wennstrom says he had questioned the limits of his creative life as a studio painter. He felt the studio was like a template for finding the inspired moment but intuitively knew there was more. He explains that the process of destroying his work felt like the death of everything that most represented him. Jerry said he had to fully inhabit the emptiness of the experience and as he did so, the matter of his work changed form and became the full sense of being. Jerry learned that often we think we have to save ourselves from emptiness, but it is in the experience of loss that you find your renewal.

In a recent interview, Jerry said that perhaps the most important elements of his journey are grace, trust, surrender and courage.

**Judith: The ability to trust the mystery that surrounds us is an amazing gift. Do you think this is a gift that everyone can realize?**

Jerry: Yes I do. Personal access to the mystery is the birthright of anyone willing to trust and remain open to life's full adventure. However, many of us are too busy focusing on other things. The first step to accessing the mystery is valuing it enough to begin to develop a dialogue.

You know the biblical statement, "Ask and you shall receive?" Well how many of us are asking, and more importantly, listening? Most of us are too busy playing God by constantly hustling our material reality to bother. We don't make very good gods however. Most of us, generally, get what we want in the end. Yet when we look back later in life, we feel unfulfilled, without a deeper sense of purpose, wondering what it has all been about.

To try and salvage some scrap of meaning in the fear-based creation we may

have settled into, we then seek justification through our children, hoping they will live our un-lived life and

fearing that possibility at the same time.

This legacy gets passed along for generations if someone doesn't courageously step forward and break the pattern.

**Judith: What has your journey taught you about peace of mind?**

Jerry: Peace of mind comes to us as a gift of grace when we have done our best to do all that we can do, and discover that our efforts have their limitations. At this juncture we must surrender into the unknowing we are inevitably faced with. It is a complete surrender to the metaphorical death experience, which brings about peace of mind and comes to us as an element of grace. The Christian concept of "eternal life" embodies this principal. One must experience the defeat of one's will and effort to receive this grace.

**Judith: How important is the search for self-development?**

Jerry: What lies behind the search for self-development is the quest for God and perhaps the fear of death. Either way, the initial impulse keeps us moving forward even with an occasional step back. It is important for us, especially as we grow older, not to lose sight of the possibility of receiving the final gift of our self-development.

What we once called enlightenment was reserved for the mystics. Now, however, it is a requirement of our time and more available than ever before. I would even go so far as to say that we must each take full responsibility for our enlightenment at this time because there is no escaping the power of its current demand on us. It is a collective requirement!

If there is anything that is going to save us and save all that we love about our world, it will be our surrender at this very special place in the cycle where we are collectively experiencing a larger, metaphoric death.

**Judith: Your story teaches that there is opportunity in losing everything; that when you let go you lose the fear of emptiness. How do you let it happen? How does one learn to surrender?**

Jerry: It happens for most of us kicking and screaming all the way! The universe is in perfect order and we all create the conditions that will teach us the things we need to learn. Most of us do not pursue the kind of deeper understanding that helps us see the value of letting go, and we may even come to see it as a defeat and something to be resisted (and it is a defeat of the ego.) As a result, many of us unconsciously create the conditions where our lives come undone and are forced to let go.

This undoing comes when everything that we strategically and intelligently mapped-out as our identity becomes too small a container to hold the larger creation coming through. For many of us, this can be a place of enormous suffering if we cannot let go and surrender to the power of this creation. Deep listening and a courageous, appropriate response to the moment's calling can eliminate self-created, useless suffering for anyone.

Walking Through is eight feet high and about 18 inches wide and deep. The entire piece is set into an antique casket cart, which at one time folded open and was used to display occupied caskets at funerals. Below the Casket cart are two red feet made from old wooden shoetrees. The round brass switch just above the coffin cart activates the feet so they go through a walking motion. The large, dark elongated box in the center of the piece is an old violin case called a "coffin case." Various parts of the piece are interactive, including the abalone mouth with a copper tongue.

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