

## *Preface*

For as long as I can remember I have searched for and read books just like this one. They were the straws I grasped to keep from drowning, the “voices” that prayed with me in the night, soothed my fears, and made all the difference in the world. Books like this were my manna in a time when there were fewer distractions in our culture; television, the Internet, cell phones, and iPods had not yet come along to divert one from the serious business of individual survival. Had that not been the case, I—who was shy and introverted and utterly lost as a child—would surely have foundered on the shoals of so much collective time-consuming culture. As it was, I searched for, or was given, or “lucked into” *always* just the right book—the one whose story told of possibilities I could not have imagined, of loneliness conquered and the happiness I might one day feel. As I grew older, the authors of my survival became my family of choice. My tribe. My delight. My uncommon wealth.

I have always been a writer, yet before I could tell my own story, I first had to live my life. Not until my Gordian knots had all come unloosed and I was finally whole and healthy in mind, body, and soul would I be qualified to write what was my lifelong burning desire—one of those “just right” books that used to regularly save my life. The book is in your hands today because synchronicity influenced destiny to set my story telling in motion. As part of her research into the nature of wisdom, a friend pressed a set of “life review” questions into my hands—“The Harvesting Wisdom Interview”—and asked me to respond to them; her only instruction was, “Take as long as you like and go as deep as you can.” I knew soon enough that I was writing an intimate discourse on self-discovery, a re-creation of an inner journey whose full meaning and substance would be revealed to me when I had finished my work. And so it was that in exchange for my considerable time and effort, I now enjoy a rare and valuable gift: my life—fully deciphered, whole, and comprehensible in all of its layers. Probing my past, plumbing my depths, I

set about reliving the peaks and valleys of my story from seventeen different starting points and discovered that it was not just my story but *your* story, too. By diving as deep as I could go into the heart of my own particular darkness, I found again and again the essential meaning and purpose of every life. We are unique, so our stories will always be different on the transparent surface of life, yet the deeper I probed—beyond the “particular” to the level of soul—the more I was certain we are all one at our core.

I was stunned to find so much rich and complex material stored up in my psyche waiting to be expressed, but then I am surprised every day by what happens in the process of self-discovering awareness. It is thrilling to feel one’s consciousness enliven and expand—one “sees” and understands and feels ancient, burdensome things falling away, leaving one lighter than air. I have never felt so free. With my friend’s permission, the questions are included in the book as an appendix. They are not as simple as they seem; it will take you longer to answer them than you thought, but I assure you the results of your efforts will quietly change you inside and out. “Take as long as you like and go as deep as you can,” and I can promise you this: the day will come when you know yourself more completely than you ever thought possible, and on that day you will hold your soul—like a precious jewel—in the palm of your hand.