

Jack Williamson  
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Topic: When My Life Got Better or Travel

## **Exploring Caves: travels from the shy side of an extrovert**

*Not all those who wander are lost.* J.R.R. Tolkein

I am an extrovert with a shy side. Out in open spaces, I am clearly gregarious but when I wander into my personal caves I am shy—like the human soul. One of my heroes, Parker Palmer—a Quaker, philosopher and activist—talks about the soul being shy. Like many animals in the wild, when their environments are noisy or threatening, they rarely come out in the open. When circumstances remain quiet and safe the animals grow brave enough to be seen.

I have explored several dark and restrictive caves throughout the world. I have also traveled open spaces, skied down Austrian mountains, swum in powerful oceans and picturesque lakes, seen masterpieces of art in spectacular museums and best of all, flown to countries where I have lived and absorbed cultures different from my familiar homeland.

My fear-laden personal caves, trigger visits to inner dark spaces. Recesses of my shadow sides—like haunting spaces with echos of fear of failure, fraud and shame. Only after tunnelling through my strata of familial and cultural expectations, self-compassion and healthy self-love begin to emerge. Dr. James Hollis, the renowned Jungian therapist, suggests some pursuits that ring true for me; ...to seize permission to be all you really are and to energize and inspire yourself to create a life of personal authority, integrity, and fulfillment.

In recent weeks, the world has been transfixed viewing images of the treacherous confines of a flooded Thai cave, where 12 boys and their soccer coach were trapped deep within the cave's labyrinth. The care and concern for the team's wellbeing spanned nations and time zones, as did the heart-throbbing rescue, with over half the expert diving team coming from across the world. Those boys and coach along with their rescuers exhibited amazing courage throughout their life-threatening ordeal.

Only in recent years have I begun to find the courage to face my inner caves—shadow sides of my typically bright, public personality persona.

At times I can still feel an encompassing dread while trying to find an exit from the frightful dark. At what feels like the brink of deep loss, mysterious synapses link to my inner explorer's compass pointing the way to my true north, permitting light-beams to break through, inviting life-rescuing insights.

Similar to the young Thai soccer players, with the help of caring friends and unseen angels, I am tethered and escorted back into the welcoming sunshine of familiar open spaces and places where goals of personal authority, integrity and fulfillment reside. In the meantime, my shy soul resists coming out into the open space with others and yes, even at times to myself.

I'm still a work in progress.

Yes, occasionally I wander into caves. But I am not lost.