

look more cheerful and happy thanks to our talks, the peace they found here and the concerns they were able to share. All I do is facilitate that. It makes me very happy.”

One day later we meet again, this time at the Parador café. As he drinks his café con leche, Da Paz talks about the differences between the hikers. “Most are old,” he says. “They’re retired and come to catch their breath and think about all that’s happened in their lives up to now. They are often restless because they don’t know what life has in store for them and how they should fill in the blanks.”

What advice does he give the visitors? “I always say: ‘Open an inn,’” Da Paz laughs. “But what I really mean by that is, *Don’t stop working, keep thinking. Don’t just take a trip but link that trip with something. Write a beautiful book about it, write a walking guide.*” Massive numbers of people have followed that advice, he says, chuckling. He has been sent scores of books and countless blogs.

“The pilgrims are mirrors for us just as we are for them,” Da Paz says. “This means we learn something every day about life and about ourselves.” He gives an example: “If you’ve decided for yourself that money should no longer play a key role in your life, it doesn’t mean your money worries are over. We live here on gifts and donations but sometimes we need money and I get annoyed that the money’s not there. The difference now is that I’m much more relaxed about it than I used to be. Now it’s a question of stopping the things we want to do but can’t for now and calmly waiting until the means are there. That continues to be my lesson in this lifetime.”

Evening falls on Santiago. The towers of the cathedral appear suspended in a mix of fog and floodlights as we cross the square. One last question arises as we walk, a question all pilgrims ask themselves during their journey: What does it all mean? Under his cap, Da Paz remains silent for a moment. Somewhat apologetically, he says, “I don’t know. Nobody knows.”

But then he adds, “Don’t take too much weight along on your journey.”

Satisfied, we silently walk on.

MAX CHRISTERN, editor of the Dutch edition of *Ode*, walked the pilgrimage route to Santiago in 2003.



PERSONAL GROWTH

Gay Luce

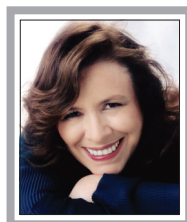
Founder, Nine Gates Mystery School

Corte Madera, California

WHEN GAY LUCE WAS A TEENAGER, SHE SOMETIMES WORRIED SHE was crazy. Living in an agnostic family, she would occasionally experience the inexplicable presence of light and love. As a young adult, working as a researcher and science writer, she struggled with doubts. Still, she felt certain of the existence of “a divine force” with a knowledge that came from “the hidden recesses of myself.”

In 1985, she created a training program that provided keys so others could access a personal, experience-based knowledge of the spiritual. Originally she offered her Nine Gates Mystery School—held during two nine-day workshops a year—to adults only. But three years ago she began offering it to youth, because she saw that contemporary media-fed society, with its emphasis on outward success, is especially hard on teenagers. “Our society says, ‘You may not express your sadness, your worries—you can’t have any emotion except cheer,’” says Luce. “I realized the youth needed a place where they could feel accepted and loved unconditionally.”

Kids in the program learn to connect to their emotions and their spirits through a series of exercises and rituals drawn from the world’s spiritual traditions. In a loving communal atmosphere, they learn skills like meditation, creating sacred space, self-hypnosis, emotional release and non-violent communication. Parents say their children come back transformed from moody teenagers into self-aware, loving young people. The school’s effect on students is mysterious even to Luce. “The students have these explosions of confidence. It’s like magic to me.”—CARMEL WROTH



“Gay Luce is a true Bodhisattva if ever there was one. She brings a depth, clarity and understanding to the human condition that has opened new ways of being for many, and she has brought another order of possibility and consciousness to our time.”

—JEAN HOUSTON, scholar, philosopher and researcher into human capacities