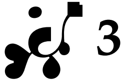 3

At "Toothbrush Tree"

I didn't record how the decision was made, but before Marjorie and Mel left it was clear that I would not have to relocate my own camp as far away as Ghanzi, some 300 kilometers by road from Dobe. We learned there was a sizeable group of Ju/'hoan people living outside the town of Tsau, which was on the main road only 125 km away, about halfway between Dobe and Maun. These Ju/'hoansi sometimes did work for Tswana people, caring for their cattle, cutting thatching grass, and pounding *mabele* (grain sorghum) for their staple porridge, an alternative to mealie (corn) meal. But they also had their own camp on a smaller road that led from Tsau straight back to /Kae/kae, south of Dobe. Both the main road and this smaller road, simply tracks in the sand, were "cutlines" in a grid made by diamond prospectors who were sampling the whole huge western Ngamiland District.

The Ju/'hoan camp, known as Kauri, was sited at the edge of a rich hunting and gathering area almost uninhabited by people. Small herds of Cape buffalo and wildebeest migrated through there, moving to and from the Okavango Swamps. The Kauri people hunted, foraged, and worked for agriculturalists by turns. Those who had jobs with Tswana farmers (or with Herero pastoralists a bit to the south) shared milk and agricultural produce with those who regularly hunted and gathered westward from Kauri.

I also learned that, though many Bushmen in Ghanzi understood Ju/'hoansi, the main San language there was Naro. So setting up my camp near Ghanzi would have meant starting over on a new language after quite a few months of familiarization with Ju/'hoansi. Kauri was also a better choice than Ghanzi because it was closer to Dobe, making our visits back there easier. The Kauri people had close ties with the /Kae/kae people, who in turn had close ties with Dobe. I was glad to be traveling with the people, !Xuma, =Oma !Oma, his wife, Di//xao, and their young child, whom I had brought with me from Dobe. I saw at once that they would make connections wherever we went in the whole Ju/'hoan area, due to their extended families and also their fictive kinship ties.

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These Dobe people who came with me, and were always with me in the dangerous passage between the Dobe area and Nokaneng, and elsewhere, also saved my life on more than one occasion. They provided foraged food and located water when we broke down on the road and ran out of supplies, tracked me when I got lost, warned me about snakes they saw on trails much sooner than I saw them, and became in effect my trusty traveling household. Though none of them spoke English, I relied a great deal upon them for emotional support, as well. Once Mel and Marjorie departed, I had no English speakers to talk to about the conundrums and demands of fieldwork. So I saw the new life I envisioned living at Kauri as freer for me in some ways but also much more strenuous psychologically. I was relieved that when I was meeting new people and setting up a whole new camp, I would at least have a few of my Dobe friends with me.

Before settling at Kauri, however, I had to spend a full month in Maun waiting for the Land Rover to be fixed. During this frustrating time I camped at Ngamiland Youth Training Centre across the Thamalakane River from Riley's Hotel in the town, along with !Xuma, =Oma !Oma, Di//xao, and their little girl. The Land Rover needed extensive repairs for which new parts had to be ordered and installed, unfortunately by a notably flaky and recalcitrant mechanic. It was an older, fairly primitive vehicle, for which parts were hard to find. Unlike the fine modern Land Rovers of today, it lacked air conditioning and had a number of features that, surprisingly, had to be operated by hand. These included the four-wheel-drive gearlocks (you had to stop the vehicle, get out, and unlock the gears manually on each wheel before going into heavier ratios); the windshield wipers (the operation of which could ruin your wrists in a rainstorm); and the crank starter (a long, heavy, metal iron that had to be inserted into the engine from the front and cranked with a huge amount of shoulder power any time the engine would not start on its own, which was often). Waiting for the correct parts to arrive, we were on the riverbank long enough for me to contract my first case of malaria. But eventually on April 14, 1971, we were on our way.

At Toteng we drank *mabele* porridge and sour milk [tangy buttermilk, or curds and whey left after butter had been churned], fixed another flat, and pushed on. Trip to Tsau long, hot, and marred by our falling sideways into huge rut while !Xuma was practice driving [the Land Rover]. We nearly turned over. But I managed to drive it out easily with 4-wheel drive. Got to Tsau and started looking around for a camping spot in all this baking heat. Little success. Finally camped in a grove of thorn trees. In the night heard voices of Bushmen going by in the road, and !Xuma and I went out to in-

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vestigate. It was a party of guys on donkeyback from Kauri, heading home. Kaqece was there, the young man who works at NTC [Ngamiland Trading Company] and has helped me before. We had a long talk in the moonlight about distances + people + donkeys + horses + water + fresh meat + chickens' eggs, all elements in my decision of where to make my camp. It was agreed that Kaqece should stay overnight with us, then show us the way to Kauri in the morning: !Xuma and I had failed earlier to find it.

So the very next day came the introduction to the people with whom I would be spending the next fifteen months. This time, there were no old hands like Mel and Marj to smooth the way: even !Xuma and =Oma were newcomers to Kauri. But the Ju/'hoan name relationship came to the rescue and soon overcame the little bit of awkwardness everyone felt. !Xuma introduced me with my Ju/'hoan name, Baq'u, and people fell to explaining, with enthusiasm, what that meant in terms of people at Kauri with whom I would automatically have fictive relationships. !Xuma and =Oma outlined at length their own (actual as well as fictive) kin relationships to people the Kauri people knew at /Kae/kae. Observing this simple symbolic convention of the name relationships quickly made it possible to set forth in social comfort with guides from Kauri to search for a suitable place to make our camp.

April 15, 1971

We sat on the ground in the shade and talked about the possibilities of my living nearby, and about why I was there. Kaqece and =Oma N!a'an took us to the waterhole, about a mile from the village. There is water there in a long shallow pan at this time of year—muddy but delicious. Other times of year the people draw water from a [bitter] well nearer the village—we went there next. Then we started looking for a campsite in earnest. It was hot, tiring work, driving around thru the bush in the blazing heat of day and getting out to investigate clump after clump of disappointing trees. One bunch would throw too thin a shade, another had marks of standing water around the tree roots, another looked fine until we discovered a big mamba up in the principal tree. About noon, discouraged, we sat down and shared a paw-paw and the Bushmen ate some more *perishi* [mealie porridge]. Our next try was immediately successful. We found a beautiful spot on a rise overlooking a dry pan full of tall grass, with many big trees casting a broad shade, lovely white-feathered grass, an anthill for an oven, and a great view in all directions. I am a little afraid of snakes here though, but that is the only trouble with the place. It is about sixteen kilometers east to Tsau, about five kilometers west to Kauri. We will haul water in two drums from Tsau's good well, and if we get hard up we'll go to Kauri's [bitter] wa-

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terhole. We can get beef (I'm not sure how often) from Kauri, and eggs, and bushfoods; maybe milk too. There are cooperative people there who will build our rondavels [thatched houses]. "My" Bushmen will be close enough to visit . . . and they already know many of these people. I'm a little worried about what DeVore will say when he comes out and finds me so isolated in the bush, but I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

In the early PM drove to Tsau to get the rest of our equipment stashed at BTA [Botswana Trading Association store], pay bill there and give Modisa a bottle of brandy, draw water + mail a letter, see about borrowing some water drums. Very tired when we got back but everyone started pitching in with great vigor to put the camp to rights before a rain should hit us, and we got a fantastic amount accomplished before sunset. Everything perishable got stowed under canvas, much grass and bush was cleared so we could watch out for snakes, and I made some preliminary decisions about the layout of the rondavels. (I think it's going to be a lovely, quiet camp and a long string of good days.) We were done before sunset and I took a much-needed bath + washed my hair [using about a third of a bucket of our precious water].

Then we drove to Kauri to arrange for eight people—four men, four women—to come in the morning to talk houses. We'll settle the balance of the price tomorrow morning. I'm debating whether to pay them some of the money in tobacco to establish a precedent that people who work for me get tobacco, but nobody else does. I refuse to have a general *shoro* [tobacco] distribution if I can get away without it. At Kauri we sat around in the dusk chatting. I told people I had a certain amount of medicine and would help them as much as I could, but that I would not help Tswana or Herero because they have enough money to go to the doctor when he comes to Tsau. Kauri is a beautiful village at night—I could see five little fires burning in front of rondavels, and away under some trees the children started a dance circle as we talked. . . . !Xuma had been given a huge bag of *n/ang* [raisin berries], the best I've ever tasted. As sweet as [real] raisins. Tomorrow I plan to get the housebuilders started, mark out a road to my camp from the Kauri road, make signs so my friends can find me, get the rest of the weeds and bushes cleared out (much as I hate to), get a flat fixed, drive to Tsau for drums of water and big supplies like mealie meal + sugar, set up a shrine to literacy so I can start getting some of my mail answered, do medicine, and maybe have a language lesson with !Xuma from the Tswana-English Dictionary. I also have to figure out salaries.

On April 16, our first whole day in the new camp, we hashed out, down to the penny, the details of a business relationship to get the camp houses built. I thought it would be one way to build the Kauri people's

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trust of me by demonstrating that I would work with them in a businesslike manner and always keep my word.

I agreed to feed the workers for a week with mealie and told them that when the houses were done I would kill a goat and we'd all have meat. I also set up a drawbridge desk under a tree, walked over the area where the side road will eventually [be made], and thought some more about the layout of the houses. I drove to Tsau and got drums and water, mealie meal, meat, etc. !Xuma and I fed everyone when we got back, then people drifted away and I drifted to my desk and that was when I started to worry about this whole enterprise. . . .

In spite of a busy and successful day . . . I feel tonight what the responsibility of a whole camp is going to mean to a person alone. The main problem is my not being enough of a public presence, I feel, to keep the spirit of a working camp steady. With me it flares and then banks down again when I am being quiet unto myself and withdraw from the people who are working for me. I feel that the whole enterprise becomes absurd to them when I am out of contact with them—think that they must wonder what I'm thinking, what I'm doing here if all I want to do is be alone. But I don't really know what they think. The enthusiasm around here waxes and wanes so fitfully that it is hard to say what the prevailing temper is. The main point is that I feel very strongly that most field-workers have more social vigor than I do. I enjoy so much just futzing around and arranging things quietly, and need a lot of time to myself just to keep my head on straight. But I feel so strongly that in this context my behavior is puzzlingly antisocial. I am also still unsure of the authoritarian role—most of the time my [employees] do what I ask them to, but occasionally they seem not to hear at all and I wonder if I have become a mouthing fool to them. I also wonder about the sharing: I think they think me pretty fair, even very generous, often, but then sometimes they don't share with me and I am a little hurt and wonder why. Mostly they do share with me and things are fine among us all. I guess a major worry of mine is that they will be bored. But then when there is a lot to do I worry that they are overworked!

I feel closest to =Oma. I often get tongue-tied when talking to Di//xao, and !Xuma is puzzling, hot and cold by turns in his attitude to me. I think it's amazing, though, that I could live so close to three people for six weeks or so already and be no closer to them than I am. Language is still a barrier—we can't yet really discuss important or subtle things. But the economic relationship, I feel, clinches the standoff. I feel apologetic and self-justified towards them by turns, as I imagine them impatient and grateful by turns. There is certainly a constant tension involved in having employees, and time is robbed of some of its savor. It is especially bad in

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the bush because the employees never go home to their own lives at 5 p.m. They are here around the clock. It was such a relief being away from them for a few days at Moremi [game park, on a trip with anthropologist Jiro Tanaka]. I could forget to wonder about their state of mind. . . . The camp is beautiful, though, and calm and quiet. It will be a good place to transcribe tapes with !Xuma when and if I get any. I am so impatient for my speech to be good enough and for my [repaired] tape recorder to come so I can really begin!

I had been told that at Dobe I would have the use of a professional Tandberg reel-to-reel tape recorder. Unfortunately, before Mel and Marj left, the Tandberg malfunctioned and Mel was unable to fix it. I was also unable to arrange for it to be repaired anywhere near Tsau or Maun. I sent it off to the capital, Gaborone, to be fixed, but it never came back. So eventually I borrowed a second-rate, much smaller reel-to-reel from the nuns at the Sehitwa medical mission between Tsau and Maun, and most of my material for the rest of that first field trip had to be gathered on that. I began to record a few stories at Kauri, knowing these were captured, self-contained texts that could be transcribed and translated later as my language facility improved. I learned that the camp had pretty quickly acquired a second local name, G//aoandohm, "Spirit Voice," the term the Kauri people applied to my tape recorder.

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On the evening of April 18, my three campmates were visiting at Kauri and I was alone in my camp for the first time. After the busy, friendly, social time of the first few days at the camp, I was delighted to have some time by myself to take stock of my surroundings. My hut was not yet built and I was sleeping outdoors, and the equipment and supplies were mostly still in boxes piled under canvas. But I had a definite sense of being in the right place, my own place, the place that would be my home for the next fifteen months. I opened a canvas folding chair next to my desk. I had been warned, back in Cambridge, that chair and table legs tended to plunge themselves deeply and inconveniently into Kalahari sand. Accordingly, the folding chair I brought had rounded tubing instead of straight legs, and I had made my "drawbridge" desk from a wooden door slung by long hemp ropes from a big tree. I found my journal and a pen. I watched the sun go down. I felt the wind die down.

As it grew dark, I set up a candle on the desk inside a hurricane lamp glass. I remembered I had a little gin left from Maun, too little to share. I decided to drink it by myself in celebration of my lovely little

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chosen hill of sand, and of obstacles overcome in getting to this point. I opened a tin of "koejawel halwes in dik stroop" (guava halves in thick syrup) and added the syrup to the gin along with a Schweppes Bitter Lemon. After my strenuous day doing camp chores in the sun, I became rapidly intoxicated by this concoction. Thrilled beyond measure to be in my own camp at last, I felt my adult life was well and truly beginning. By candlelight, I wrote in my journal: "I was thinking the other day of [this] strange interface where hunting-gathering elegantly meets academia, and wondering if the connection is a decadent one. To me it's poignant, rich, meaningful, both in terms of my own physical life and in intellectual interest." Then I shifted to my event calendar and wrote: "I must be growing up—I'm drinking by myself, the first time I ever remember."

Yet the next day I didn't feel so much like an adult, nor did I feel so happy to be where I was.

People started arriving before I was even out of bed, which started things off badly. Having at least fifteen minutes of privacy first thing in the morning seems imperative. Got two flats fixed, thanks to =Oma, and off to Tsau for petrol, etc., after a hassle about who was to go along. Things went well in Tsau for a while—saw the new chief and got official permission to live here, got some letters mailed, did shopping. Trouble began when I was invited to drink beer at a couple of places. Things suddenly got too much for me and people were bugging me about too many things, so I started to cry. =Oma very solicitous, suggested I send him to Tsau for the errands next time with a piece of paper, and I think I will. Got back to [camp] and fed everyone lunch—!Xuma hxaro'ed (gave) me a whole little goat and cooked it. And then I started to feel bad again. =Oma came to me and was trying to be helpful and said maybe I should go home and that N!aici N!a'an (Irven DeVore) should send Marjorie back instead. "Marjorie is more like a Ju/'hoan woman than you are," he said. "If people ask her for too many things she fights back like a fierce little dog—she doesn't put her tail between her legs," which of course made me cry again and I said "Yow!" and went stomping off into the bush. I sat on the ground for a while and was glad to see =Oma and !Xuma eventually coming after me. That !Xuma's first word to me was my own name, in English, was miraculous. It had an electrifying effect on me, like magic sympathy *à travers les âges*. For the space of that one word there was no language barrier between us. We talked a long time about why I was unhappy, and I think resolved some things.

After that it became a little easier to say no. I began to feel alright about structuring my days so I had a little time to myself. I was still a

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little guarded but started to relax socially and even to have fun. Visiting back and forth with the Kauri people in my first weeks after that, I learned that they had quickly begun to refer to my new camp as "the Toothbrush Tree Place." Our little clump of trees and vegetation contained bushes with astringent twigs that were excellent for cleaning one's teeth and freshening one's mouth after a meal. Larger local branches furnished the raw materials for my kitchen hut. This "stick kitchen" at the top of the sandy rise we had chosen for our site was a delight to me, and it made me feel both centered amid the camp and its visitors and somewhat private when I cared to be. Our cooking fire was outside the kitchen and a little ways away. I built lashed shelving inside the kitchen for my tinned goods and the hoard of ancient spices and baking ingredients I had inherited from the Harvard camp. Often, inside the kitchen, I would chop onions and put together the ingredients for a communal meal, then carry them to a big pot on the fire around which =Oma !Oma, Di//xao, !Xuma, and whatever visitors we had were sitting and talking. If something needed to be stirred and we didn't have a spoon that was long enough, someone would stand up, cut a suitable branch from a nearby tree, and whittle one.

I noticed that from the inside of my stick kitchen I could see very well what was going on in the bright sun outside, but that from outside one couldn't see the inside of the kitchen, as it was so much darker there. I thought I would see if taking photos secretly from inside would eliminate people's self-consciousness. For a few days I took candid photos secretly from inside the kitchen without people noticing. But soon I felt embarrassed about that, and I have ended up never using any of those pictures.

In retrospect, I realized I had little need to worry about the Kauri people's reactions to a camera. Few of them had ever seen a photograph in those days, and fewer still had seen their own reflections in a mirror. I was the one who was visually self-conscious, not they. Living closely with Ju/'hoansi, I began to be aware that my own life, in comparison to theirs, was riddled with various forms of painful and disabling self-consciousness. I knew I had been somewhat shy at home in my own culture and had always been trying to get beyond that constraint. But I had never thought possible the dimensions of personal confidence and freedom that the Ju/'hoansi seemed to enjoy. I realized I wanted to learn as much as I possibly could about how they brought up their children to be such well-adjusted, socially competent human beings. Instead of self-consciousness, I saw in them its opposite—an admirable self-containedness, a trust in their own abilities and expressions. I found myself entranced by the confidence of individuals I was

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coming to know. I think it had everything to do with their zest for life—which at times included enthusiastic zest for invective against people who thwarted them! I was learning so much, not just about them, but *for my own life* by living at Kauri!

A little ways beyond my stick kitchen, the employees had a supply tent for staples like mealie meal, tinned beans, sugar, and tea, so they could put together a meal for themselves whenever they wanted. I made a decision to have enough staples on hand at all times so that whoever was visiting at the fire could also be fed anytime a meal was made or tea was brewed. Often the employees would be given wild meat or gathered foods by the Kauri people, and these went into the communal meals as a matter of course. I marveled at the easy sharing made possible by the observation of well-understood social rules and gradually incorporated its benefits into my *modus operandi*.

From the front door of the kitchen I could see down the little hill to a large anthill (actually, a termite mound). I had read that early travelers and outdoorsmen in Africa sometimes made ovens inside of such anthills to bake their bread. With great difficulty, given the cement-hard dirt of my anthill, I hollowed out a cavity big enough for two loaves in bread pans to sit on a metal grate above a bed of coals. I closed the door of the oven with a cookie sheet against which I leaned a heavy stick of firewood (everywhere was sand: there were no stones anywhere nearby). The oven baked passably well, but the bread always retained a slight methane odor, no doubt from the generations of termites that had lived in the mound and deep below it in the ground.

We washed our dishes, mostly of enameled metal, in metal basins, and propped them up to dry on a *g!ahgui*, a rack of lashed sticks five feet or so off the ground. Anything we needed to keep away from animals, ground pests, and damp was also suspended on the *g!ahgui*. I gave up quickly on the faltering Dobe gas fridge and opted instead for drying and for timely use of fresh things as my preservation solutions. A nearby tree had its sturdy lower branches cut short, and from them hung string bags of potatoes, onions, and oranges after our rare trips to Maun—at least until we ate them and the tree cupboard was again bare. Once we had a huge smoked ham hanging there that had been given to me by Dr. Hans-Joachim Heinz, an entomologist and anthropologist. And several times we had big burlap bags of dried fish from Lake Ngami, a lake usually empty but full enough this year of good rains to support the one-man fish-drying operation of another friend, Zoot September, from Cape Town. (I was disappointed to learn, however, that perhaps due to their being foreign to their area, few Ju/'hoansi would eat either pork or fish, despite pervasive hunger. I had to eat most of the

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dried ham and fish myself, and they were pretty unappealing by the time I managed to finish them.)

All in all, I found figuring out our camp setup terrific fun. The cooking arrangements helped me feel I was creating a domestic reality I could live with over the three or four months at a time between supply trips to Maun. These arrangements were a good combination of the communal and the semiprivate, and they worked well both for my shyness and for my wish to live socially as much as I was able. At Dobe, I had felt the kitchen belonged to Marjorie and I was but an interloper. Both Marjorie and I, being in the field and away from the huge feminist ferment going on in the world at that time, were late in taking advantage of the new spirit of cooperation that, with women's liberation, suddenly became possible among American women in those years. On return we both found it miraculously easier than it had been to not be rivalrous with other women. A revolution had truly occurred between 1968 and 1972! By the time Marjorie and I again overlapped in the field, in 1975, sharing cooking and much else was far easier for us, thanks to our American sisters—and women around the world—who had been creating this revolution while we were gone.

At the time I had also felt the Dobe kitchen had an air of excluding the Ju/'hoansi. I certainly didn't fault Mel and Marj or their predecessors for needing a private space for their meals. But as a lone outsider, I needed to share more meals and have more companionship with my campmates and the nearby village. I felt lucky that Kauri had a much smaller community of Ju/'hoansi than did Dobe and its surroundings. Even if the entire community had come to dinner (which they never did, due partly to their distance from our camp), we could have fed them all with relative ease. As it was, our new setup provided perfect hospitality circumstances for the storytelling sessions that soon began at "Toothbrush Tree/Spirit Voice" and continued there for more than a year.

My camp was about three miles from Kauri, which also had an alternate name linking it to the landscape. People told me its "respect name" was Zaog!u, "Grass-Water," a reference to a marshy place surrounded by hollow-stemmed grass that grew abundantly there. The grass stems could be used by foot travelers to suck clean, cold water from the boles of certain known big trees. I learned later that *zao* covered two related species of grass, *Tristachya longispiculata* and *T. superba*.

I debated how best to set up the storytelling sessions. If Toothbrush Tree had been closer to Kauri, I could have easily spent evenings hearing stories told in the "ordinary circumstances" of village life. But we had looked, and for various reasons (mostly absence of shade and pres-

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ence of snakes), we had seen no appropriate nearer site. I reflected that a lot of time each day would be consumed by the storytellers walking three miles each way to my camp or by my packing up recording gear and going to Kauri and back every day. I also knew that, unless food was provided, some large proportion of the Kauri adults would have to be out in the bush for hours each day hunting, gathering, cutting firewood, and carrying water. I wanted a big enough group to provide the audience needed for vibrant storytelling. I resolved to experiment with solutions to this problem. My first experimental solution was to set up a retreat-like atmosphere, a kind of vacation for storytellers. I was lucky: this worked so well I never had to look for an alternative.

I invited the old people at Kauri, ranging in number from four to eight depending on their visiting relatives who came from as far away as /Kae/kae or even the Dobe area, to stay with me at my camp for a week at a time. They brought their own sleeping skins and blankets and slept around our communal cooking and talking fire. I had a few extra tents where they could sleep in case of rain. I would have enough staples and tinned foods stockpiled to feed them for the week, and we all cooked and ate together. Often the younger people brought fresh wild meat (like kudu, wildebeest, or buffalo) or slingshot guinea fowls I could pay or trade for. These extras, along with gathered foods I could get from people according to the season, would go into a three-legged pot with onions, rice, tinned vegetables, beans—whatever was on hand—for an ever-changing stew. The gathered foods ranged from succulent wild salad greens and giant mushrooms to spiny cucumbers, potato-like roots, several kinds of Grewia raisin berries, and sour plums. Sometimes we had delicious sour milk (actually curds and whey cultured in big, dried gourds after the churned butter was removed) from nearby Herero villages and cattle posts. The old people were delighted not to have to search for food during the weeks they were with me, and, as I had hoped, they relaxed into our retreat-like atmosphere of full-time storytelling. The fact that this kind of hospitality exchange was comfortable for both me and the Ju/'hoansi made the storytelling arrangement delightful and productive. I got up each morning wondering what unexpected bounty—in terms of both unpredictable wild food we could share and of further sharing of stories—the day might bring.

Any day's discoveries, whether in the bush or in our camp, could illuminate the contents of the often mysterious stories I was hearing. I wanted to be able to responsibly propose in my dissertation this challenging idea: that the social usefulness of the expressive forms can be understood by relating a society's metaphors to its technology. For this

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I needed to understand the metaphors embedded not only in the folklore but in the activities and problem-solving of everyday life. So it was my intention to get as broad a collection of Ju/'hoan oral tradition as I could—and to understand its content—during the rest of my time in Botswana.

My mentor Lorna Marshall and her daughter Elizabeth had written down quite a number of Ju/'hoan stories in English during their fieldwork in the 1950s, with the help of interpreters. I wanted to follow up on their lead by providing both recordings in Ju/'hoansi and a sense of the tradition as a whole. I felt I needed those things to begin to answer the academic questions with which I had arrived. These questions included, What do folklore stories do for a recently hunting and gathering (or foraging) people like the Ju/'hoansi, whose society was (at that time) regarded as a contemporary exemplar of the most ancient and long-lived form of human organization? And does narrative have specific enabling functions for society? I also felt I must situate the Ju/'hoan storytelling traditions as fully as possible within the physical conditions of their lives at the time. So I saw my role as a dual one, including not only recording and documentation of verbal materials but also ethnographic and environmental contextualization.

As we got started with daily taping sessions, not knowing the scope of the repertoire, I didn't try to put any order into which stories were chosen. I decided to let the cast of individual storytellers, their enthusiasms, and their whims dictate what was next to be recorded. At Dobe I had seen that old people told the stories they knew with appetite and delight. My job, I felt, was to keep tape and batteries in the recorder, and to be ready to let 'er rip whenever the storytelling impulse struck.

I first heard a suite of elaborate and bawdy stories about tricks played by women upon men, alternating with retaliation by men on the women. The storytelling grew more and more hilarious with each episode. /Xoan N!a'an, one of the older women, explained to me that "the man began all the trouble." So for a while I thought that Kaoxa (one of the many names of a male trickster back in the times "when the animals were still people") was always the initiator of the tricks. He was—when the storytellers were women. But one day I heard the story from an old man. "/Xoan N!a'an's been telling you all wrong," he said jocularly. "She hasn't told you it was the *women* who began it, in the beginning." He then proceeded to tell the story himself, starting out, "The women lived and thought, 'What shall we do to this man?'"

In general, the husbands were tricked into eating their wives' sexual parts or falling into a pit of sexual secretions or excrement. The husbands in turn tricked the women into biting into the testicles or anus

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of the husbands or made love to them in the guise of dead meat. Mel Konner had told me he collected a version of this story in which the husband is reconstituted, after one such episode, from his own penis, which the wives have discarded thinking it only the penis of an aardvark. In some versions both Kaoxa and his wives get into each other's stomachs by pretending to be plant food, then laugh or giggle there, making life unbearable. One storyteller explicitly said that Kaoxa wanted to make love to the women so he tricked his way inside them by turning into ripe *kito'an*, which looks like a red cucumber. When the wives are eaten in turn, they sometimes pop right out through Kaoxa's stomach wall and he has to be sewn up again by obliging flies. "This is the same thing you did to us!" the wives crow.

We had a great deal of fun laughing at these stories as they were elaborated day after day. Part of the fun was the worth given to each person's renditions of the various stories: you never knew what the next storyteller would want to incorporate or emphasize in a given story on any given day. People insisted fiercely on each person's right to tell the story in his or her own way. I saw in action here an example of the fact that oral traditions in most cultures vary greatly around a core set of themes, stories, and beliefs. It was clear that this variability added to the richness of the experience—for everyone—of telling and hearing stories. It also increased the speed of my language learning: as I listened, soon familiar with the basic plots, I was still scrambling to keep up with the vocabulary I was learning from the different versions. Each day I would consult !Xuma with my list of new vocabulary. He answered my questions in Ju/'hoansi, and that was how I learned.

One night while several older couples were staying at my camp and sharing stories such as these, we experienced a termite swarm. The old people sprang to their feet as one and called out for me to bring a lantern. Having no idea why, I went into the kitchen and found one with a working mantle, lit it, and brought it back outside. The old people and my campmates had rapidly dug a circular trench about a foot deep with a mound of sand left in the middle. On this mound, they indicated, I was to put the lantern. As soon as I did, the huge, fat termites began literally throwing themselves at the light, getting scorched, and falling into the trench. The people hurried to smother them with sand. Soon there were layers and layers of termites and sand in the trench. Within a few minutes the trench was full and, with the lantern removed, one could barely see where this mass slaughter had taken place. In the morning the suffocated termites were dug out, and the sand was knocked off them. Then they were heated in our three-legged pot. When heated, they generated their own oil. They were naturally

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a bit crunchy, due to their twig-like mandibles and legs as well as to the grains of sand that still clung to them. Tasting to a Texan a bit like cracklins, they were obviously considered a great delicacy.

When my mud house was finished and thatched, I had a raised wooden bedframe (a *g!ahm*) built and mudded into the floor. I put my folding mattress on the frame and slept there in a sleeping bag. The dried mud walls, leavened with cow dung for strength, were dark brown. I built short bookshelves around the walls at eye height and mudded them in, as well. I bought bottles of white shoe polish in the sparsely provisioned trading store at Tsau, and I invited the Kauri children to paint white animals on the brown walls. The effect was like being inside a rock art cave. I had a door made of lashed sticks fitted to the hut's one opening.

Through the gaps between the sticks I could see the sun go down and, much later, the moon go down. As I wrote in my journal, "The stars bright, all the way to the horizon, fool you time and again out of the corners of your eyes, thinking stars are animals staring at you through the trees. And tonight, the yellow crescent moon, cut into two enraged cat's eyes by the single-pole lathing of my door."

At the dark of the moon I could step outside and the fabulous *whoosh!* of the Magellanic Cloud stars streaming down toward the Southern Cross would simply hit me in the face: I was as far from light pollution as a person could likely be in this world.

Nights at that house seemed endless, starkly beautiful, and perfect for solitary journal writing. Nevertheless, I found I kept waking in the mornings with a feeling of desolation and loneliness. Within a few weeks I had moved my mattress and sleeping bag to the fire, to be close to the people there when I awoke. About nine months of the year were bone dry, and it was easy to sleep outdoors. Sleeping outdoors by the fire made me much happier. I used my thatched house mostly for storage. I also changed clothes in it and bathed privately behind it using a bucket on a stand and a bar of soap. The hungry Kauri dogs ate my soap so often that I had to hang a bar of soap on a rope high in the air from the thatch on the roof. "Up off the ground or face the consequences!" became another of my mottoes.

The storytelling and the nights sleeping around the fire and, soon, dancing with the Kauri people began to bring me closer to them. After experiencing the healing dances at Dobe and Mahopa, I felt fairly confident that these would also be regular occurrences among the Ju/'hoansi at Kauri, and I was not disappointed. In retrospect, it was the dances that provided the most immediate way for me to feel comfortable with the Kauri people. No language was required, and there was something

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Figure 3.1. Megan's house at Kauri. © Megan Biesele.

extremely powerful about dancing repeatedly with the same people. I came to know how each man and woman danced and to anticipate their styles and gestures. I learned who the strongest healers were, and I saw the others make gestures of loving appreciation to them, throwing pinches of fragrant *sa* into the air in their direction as they danced slowly around the circle. I saw both young and old men and women flirting with each other in the dance, and I began to be able to decode how safe or how daring, depending on kinship rules, was each instance I saw. Timid about participating at first, I was warmly encouraged by both men and women to start learning the clapped cadences and beautiful polyphonic singing that made night after night electric and enabled the healing. Dances happened about once a week and were the perfect introduction for me to this group of people I was coming to know in other ways at the same time. Concerned about "doing it right" and respecting their dance, I asked an older woman, !Unn/obe, how I could learn to dance just like they did. She replied, "You just do what you feel like doing." I realized this dance was a radically capacious

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form: though some people excelled in it as dancers, there was no such thing as a mistake, even for an outsider.

One key element that seemed to hold dances together was the ubiquitous, fragrant *sa*. The women were enveloped in the earthy, musky perfume of *sa* powder they pounded from the hard little ball-shaped roots of certain water-pan plants. Seeing how the people loved this magical powder, and loving its varied scents myself, I asked some women friends to take me to the dry water pans where it could be dug, and to make me some. I traded oranges and sometimes little containers of cooking oil for *sa* and for *sa*-scented ochre. The Ju/'hoan women were sometimes able to obtain this ochre from Herero women, whose men had horses to take them to the far-off places where ochre was to be found. Ju/'hoan women and Herero women alike loved to dry and pound orange peels to add a citrusy aroma to their *sa*. And every Kalahari dweller I ever met coveted any sort of oil or creme to spread on their perpetually dry skins. Dressing up specially for a dance meant women's faces were shining with creme or oil, or were dramatically scarlet or yellowed with ochred oil, or that the scent of newly pounded sa enveloped them—or all three, whenever possible. When you saw a woman thus adorned striding purposefully toward a dance, often with layers of beadwork around her neck and freshly cleaned and softened skin blankets on her body, you knew she meant to enjoy that dance to its fullest.

I loved the evenings when we knew there was going to be a dance and we would traipse down the sandy track to Kauri village. By day I was beginning to feel a simple familiarity with Kauri, with its handful of thatched huts with their doorways facing this way and that, standing at roughly the edges of a cleared sandy space, with one more elaborate mud and thatch house at a distance. The more substantial house was that of a man who had a regular job with Tswana pastoralists near Tsau and had been able to start his own small herd of *mafisa* cattle, earned by working each season for a number of years for payment in calves. He was still part of the Ju/'hoan village but clearly upwardly mobile in a way that set him beyond the means of other Ju/'hoansi. I thought his constant slight look of social anxiety must have to do with his economic status. The contrast between the hunter-gatherers and the pastoralists, such as the Tswana and Herero, could not have been more stark. Though in that area practically everybody spoke all three of the languages and there were a number of intermarriages, the pastoralists were seen as the haves, the Ju/'hoansi the have-nots, with each side of the divide cordially and systematically trying to exploit the other.

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Kauri at night was another thing entirely. It had a fantastical look to me, like a place at the edge of the earth, a place in a dream. Walking there, we turned off the sand track at a barely visible break in the tall grasses. I used a flashlight when I had live batteries to put in it and shone it on the narrow trail in careful watch for snakes. I was never alone on such trails but always following !Xuma, or =Oma !Oma, or some other Ju/'hoan person, knowing from experience how easy it was to get lost, especially at night. As the trail brought us to the clearing, we could see the dance fire with a little watching fire beside it. Often people continued to sit at their own small cooking fires and watch or listen from there, before joining in the dance when they were ready.

The dances usually began about sunset with the enthusiastic and playful singing and clapping of little girls, who would gradually be joined by boys and older men and women as the night grew darker. Entries to the dance were completely casual and lacking in time pressure. Women, often with babies on their backs, would simply appear when they were ready, and the ones already seated would make room for them in the tight circle where they sat with legs overlapping. When they sang and clapped, women often turned their heads toward other women at their sides, the better to hear each other and to improvise beautifully within the singing. Babies and young children nestled close to their mothers' bodies, often sleeping for many hours or whole nights within the circle of firelight and music. Boys and men would wind dance rattles around their ankles and up their calves and begin to dance in a line that made a circle around the backs of the seated women. Sometimes, at what signal or whim I knew not, the line of stamping, rattling dancers would reverse itself and travel slowly in the other direction.

At first, both at Dobe and here, I brought my own sense of time tension into the dance. When a dance started I was worried that I would miss something or not be there for the whole of it, and that I would therefore be an interruption for others. When I finally understood fully how reliable the sense of flow was for everyone, myself included, in these dances, it was an immense relief to me. It was a form with the power to dissolve many obstacles, including the pervasive sense of outsiderhood I carried with me always in Africa. The goal I had arrived with was to understand their culture "from within," but some powerful diffidence or shyness had tended to hold me back from real participation. However, the dance's sensory elements—cold grey sand under my bare feet, the unearthly beauty of musical counterpoints in singing and percussion, the popping and smoke of pungent fires, and the cacophony of excited talk and laughter that erupted each time there

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Figure 3.2. Dance at Kauri. © Megan Biesele.

was a pause in the singing—combined to rouse in me a fierce desire to take part and to learn all I could about what was going on. Late in the night, and often just at dawn, there would be a climax of dancing, singing, and palpable healing that involved every single person present, including myself.

The morning after each dance, I tried to talk to !Xuma or others of the healers, and to the women who had been singing the night before. I asked them questions about what I had seen and experienced. I also asked those who went into trances whether they had traveled to the "village of the spirits," and if so, what they had seen there. Each person's description of these experiences was idiosyncratic to himself or herself, and yet all were accepted as part of the multifaceted truth of the world beyond—the world knowable only through altered states of consciousness. In this way I slowly built my understanding of the panoply of ideas and beliefs that supported this astounding community performance—one that the people, appetitive and joyful, undertook over and over again. I also realized that in the folktales I was recording, and just beginning to be able to understand, there were many intriguing references to the dance and to healing. I decided to let these references lead me where they would, and I gradually understood them to be not only mutually reinforcing but absolutely basic to the structure of belief that kept community members here in tune with each other.

The central theme of all of this was mutual tolerance and the paramount importance of social relationships. This theme was prominent in

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the folklore, and it played out among a cast of characters who gradually came alive for me through different versions of their adventures. Back at Dobe, Mel had told me that a large number of the folktales he had heard were focused on an enigmatic heroine. Variously seen as a beautiful antbear (aardvark) maiden, an elephant, a python, an eland, and in several other forms at the same time as she was seen as a woman, this heroine had a striking series of adventures. Mel and I had wondered whether they might constitute some sort of epic cycle. Mel told me he had never heard the episodes strung together or told sequentially, but I was still, at that time, convinced there must be some "authentic" or original way the whole story had been told at some time in the past. I was determined to find some expert storyteller who might know how the heroine's episodes fit together in a sort of ur-story. Beyond that, I was asking, might there also be a similar series of young men's adventures in Ju/'hoan folklore?

With these themes in mind, I began looking for experts. It turned out that both storytellers and listeners often mentioned, without prompting, the names of the people from whom they had learned specific stories or ritual information. People seemed quick to acknowledge good storytellers, dancers, musicians, and others they regarded as repositories of information. Common refrains were "She (or he) *really* knows" or "He (or she) is a *tci-!'han-kxao* (an owner of knowing things)." Often these knowledgeable people were located elsewhere than at Kauri. Some were a few miles away at cattle posts to the south like Xaxa, !On!a'an, and Muhoahoi, but many were among the Kauri people's relatives more than 120 kilometers away, back near the border at /Kae/kae, Dobe, and even as far north as Tsodilo Hills. I realized I had underestimated the distances most Ju/'hoansi probably cover during their yearly rounds of extended-family visits. They seemed to think nothing of traveling many kilometers on foot to bring new babies for family to see, to exchange gifts with their relatives, and to take advantage of seasonal food and water sources. These people were walking—or when they could, riding donkeys—a lot! Though I obtained many of the stories I wanted right there at Kauri, I was given enough clues to the existence of distant storytellers, healers, and musicians to know that I would be doing quite a bit of traveling. I began to see the references to these artists as beckoning points of light along my evolving route on a constantly unfurling map of western Ngamiland.

I was learning that Ju/'hoan expressive life was not only direct and scatological at times but could also be characterized as highly oblique, indirect, and allusive. One of the many pleasant surprises I received was learning to what extent metaphorical play is part of everyday conversa-

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tion among the Ju/'hoansi. For example, a number of "respect words" are used in dangerous circumstances such as those involving lions or rain. I expected to learn a few of these, but it turned out that there are hundreds of such respect words to be used when circumstances dictate. They can enhance the politeness, prudence, or delicacy of any utterance. Ordinary implements, parts of the face and body, items of clothing, huts, encampments, areas of land—all have respect words associated with them. These form what is almost a second language for the Ju/'hoansi.

Working on these words one day with the Dobe people when I was visiting there from Kauri, I asked for the respect terms for various animals. We began with carnivores. The terms for these were given as I asked for them. When we got to the great meat animals like the antelopes and buffalo, however, I no longer needed to ask. The respect words for these were reeled off in rapid succession, in a kind of litany form I had heard used previously for these meat animals' regular names.

Sometimes the respect words had significances that utterly escaped me. Some of them were unfamiliar words altogether, which could not be literally translated. But many of the words were readily translatable and their metaphorical significance apparent. For instance, one of the respect words for python is *g!u-tzun-g/a'a*, "water-nose-eye." Feet are called "sand-pressers," faces "what's-up-front," breasts "chest-meat." A pestle and mortar are called "speech" because of the sound they make when food is being pounded. A territory is not only called "tree-water," as I've mentioned before, but "sand-surface," and a pot is called "fire-medicine." Water is "soft-throat." Lion is "night," "moonless-night," "night-medicine," "cries-in-the-night," "calf-muscles," "calf-muscles-of-nightfall," and "jealousy." The delicious swarming termites are called *kxani*, which I translate in this context as "good luck."

One of the most interesting spontaneous metaphoric interchanges involving respect words took place over a teapot boiling on my fire. I had just shared a pot of tea with a group of old women. Now the tea was all gone, so we were boiling the leaves a second time. A man approached the fire and sat down. Politely not looking at the pot but staring off into space, he asked the women, "Are the *com* (buzzings, a respect word for bees) being chopped out of the trees?" By speaking obliquely of bees, he meant honey, a word that is also used to refer to cane sugar, which in turn metaphorically implies tea with sugar. "The light-colored honey up at the front of the hive has been chopped out already," answered one of the women. "Now the dark honey at the back is all that is left." The man's polite question was about whether there

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was still any freshly brewed, sweetened tea in the pot left for him. The woman's answer implied that, no, the tea leaves were all that was left in the pot and would have to be brewed a second time. Their metaphors, used in a simple social situation, operated not at one remove but at four.

When stories were being told, it seemed to me that the most attention was given to storytellers who excelled in using respect words and complex metaphors. At first I was looking not only for "the best" storytellers but for urtexts that I thought would be somehow more authoritative than others. I had not yet understood that the real excitement lay in the widespread contemporary knowledge within the entire society of the tales and items of belief. That it lay in the endless creative variants and different performances, all treated as valid—but still discussed with critical acuity!—which made their tradition the property of all. This understanding gradually developed, eventually becoming the real intellectual adventure of my fieldwork. But for the time being I was following every lead toward finding "experts." Some I had already met or learned about from colleagues, including the elderly grandmother //Xukxa N!a'an, the first storyteller I worked with at Dobe; Jimmy /Ai!ae, a thumb-piano composer at /Kae/kae; and Kxao =Oah, a healer at !Aoan. Names like these became intriguing points of light on the map I wanted to visit and revisit. They were part of the zigzag trail I followed to learn about cosmological ideas and figures in folklore, and eventually, as I will explain in chapter 8, about their relationships to ritual contexts I focused on in my thesis—sickness, initiation, hunting, childbirth, weather control, and danger from carnivores.

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Though I quickly began to record stories, I had resolved not to make recordings of interviews until I felt I could both put questions well and understand a reasonable number of the responses. Through my conversations with fellow students back at Harvard, I had developed a commitment to open-ended, creative interviewing, and I knew I had to be fairly conversant in the language before I could follow an answer well enough to ask an appropriate next question. Little did I know that my very first, and one of my all-time best, interviews would be recorded—at the command of the would-be interviewee—well before I was ready to ask any questions at all.

In preparation at Harvard beforehand, I had told Richard Lee and Irven DeVore that my plan was to collect Ju/'hoan folklore and other narratives and try to understand their function in Ju/'hoan social life. Lee had also introduced me to the Brandeis psychological anthropolo-

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gist Richard Katz, with whom he had in recent years carried out joint fieldwork on Ju/'hoan psychic healing at Dobe and /Kae/kae. The US National Institutes of Mental Health, our grant sponsor, asked me to provide data on women healers to complement what Katz provided on Ju/'hoan men healers.

My plan, then, as I saw it on leaving for Africa, was to concentrate on folklore and other verbal art collection. To do this right, I felt, I had to learn the language well, learn as much as I could about the environment, and make all sorts of ethnographic observations. I also wanted to study the beliefs and practices of altered-state healing, especially with women healers. In other words, I was contemplating eighteen months of total immersion in the cultural activities and expressions of people who hunted and gathered at least part-time in a desert, a privilege rarely available to anthropological field-workers today.

A few months after I established the camp at Kauri, I had occasion to make a trip west to the village of !Aoan, not far from Dobe. There I was offered the use of a small thatched mud house perched on the side of a dune of heavy grey sand. I arrived late one night, greeted some people I knew, and was introduced to others. Then I unrolled my sleeping bag on the sand floor of the hut, and climbed in. At dawn the next morning, when I was still in the sleeping bag, I heard someone speaking to me from outside the hut's door. When I opened it, two men stood there, the younger leading the older, a blind man, using a walking stick carried between them. Through his translator the blind man said, "Turn on your machine—I have something to say!" The blind man was the healer I had once seen healing a child there at !Aoan, when I was still with Marjorie and Mel. Dick Katz had also told me about this man, Kxao =Oah (Giraffe), named for the spirit animal that had led him to become a healer.

I scrambled to turn on my tape recorder, and for the next few hours an extraordinary narrative of one man's acquisition of healing power in his youth, and his use of the power in midlife and into old age, spooled onto the brown cellophane tape. There was no chance or need to ask questions, had I even been able to. I knew I was not catching everything that was being said, but it was clear to me that this was an important firsthand account of religious healing. For the time being, it seemed vital not to interrupt this sustained burst of enthusiasm. Fortunately, the borrowed tape recorder had not yet been made useless by the omnipresent blowing sand, and it faithfully recorded the whole of this freely offered (or should I say imperiously demanded?) communication.

Humorous and intense by turns, Kxao Giraffe described his voyage into the abysmal waters of an underworld, his ascent to God's camp

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on "sky threads," and his own initiation into the powerful mysteries of the healing dance. He wove together his otherworld journeys, his trance journeys as a curer into the bodies of sick people, and his own first experience of an altered state into a single unified narrative. It was his own story, different from those of other healers, yet accepted by them as a facet of the "truth" of what was beyond ordinary human consciousness. Translating it later, I also understood that Kxao saw all of his own journeys as one, despite what we who haven't been on such journeys would understand as chronological time gaps. They all took place in what was truly another—dare I say timeless?—world. I later included a translation of this narrative in my thesis, saying, "In a sense, all three of these themes—the curing journey into the body, the journey to the sky, and the reception of power (*n/om*) for the first time—are one in that they are all initiations, leaps of faith requiring that one dare the loss of soul." This was my first inkling of the great courage required for this kind of healing.

I saw that what Lorna Marshall translated as "half-death" (Marshall 1999: 88–90) was a willingly undertaken near-death experience, one that took immense daring, immense willingness to offer oneself. I mused on the close verbal relationship between the word for the healing trance—*!aia*—and the word for death itself—*!ai*—and awaited a time when I could adequately ask questions about this relationship, hoping for ultimate answers.

To trance is to *!aia*. *!Aia* is a verb that is cognate to *!ai*, to die. A healer has to "die" to this world temporarily to access the beyond-normal powers of another world, in order to use them for healing. Once a healer has "died," he or she can travel on the vast web of threads in the sky said to then become visible and beckoning. Kxao =Oah grasped these threads with his fingers or inserted them under his toenails and ascended on them to the place of God to plead for the life of the sick child—and the many other people he healed through the years. Other healers told me they took the threads in their hands and climbed them, sometimes carrying younger, novice healers on their backs to, literally, "show them the ropes."

Many anthropology students are by now familiar with Ju/'hoan healing power from Richard Lee's article "The sociology of !Kung Bushman trance performances" and from Richard Katz's classic book, *Boiling Energy*. Katz and Lee did their work with healers in the sixties, a few years before I joined the HKRG. When I later read the drafts for Katz's *Boiling Energy*, published in 1976, I realized the extent to which my two predecessors had also worked with Kxao. It seemed their work may have readied Kxao to offer me his account promptly on my arrival. Because

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I was understanding and responding as much as I could in his own language, however, and was recording it all, I may have gotten a much fuller account of his experiences than had my colleagues. I could tell right away this interview, when carefully translated, would add new and valuable material to the record.

For those who may not know about the phenomenology of Ju/'hoan healing, I should emphasize that Ju/'hoansi describe the healing *n/om* as power or energy, a kind of supernatural potency whose activation paves the way for curing. Associated with it are special powers shared with many other shamanic traditions of the world, like clairvoyance, out-of-body travel, x-ray vision, and prophecy. *N/om*, residing in the belly, is activated through strenuous trance dancing, beautiful polyphonic singing, and the heat of the fire. It is said to ascend or "boil up" the spinal column and into the head, at which time it can be used to pull out any sickness or unrest afflicting the people in the group. Arriving at this state where healing becomes possible also involves an experience in the chest and midriff called *//xabe* (being set free, being untied). Over half the men in Ju/'hoan society at that time had experience as healers, as well as a large number of women. Kxao's account was one of many I ended up recording over the years.

That morning Kxao said:

Just yesterday, friend, the giraffe came and took me again. Kaoxa [the trickster god] came and took me and said, "Why is it that people are singing, yet you're not dancing?" When he spoke, he took me with him and we left this place. We traveled until we came to a wide body of water. It was a river. He took me to the river. The two halves of the river lay to either side of us, one to the left and one to the right.

Kaoxa made the waters climb, and I lay my body in the direction they were flowing. . . . My feet were behind, and my head was in front. That's how I lay. Then I entered the stream and began to move forward. I entered it and my body began to do like this [Kxao waved his hands dreamily to show how his body traveled forward, undulating in the water.] I traveled like this. My sides were pressed by pieces of metal. Metal things fastened my sides. And in this way I traveled forward, my friend. That's how I was stretched out in the water. And the spirits were singing.

The spirits were having a dance. I began to dance it, too, hopping around like this. I joined the dance and danced with them, but Kaoxa said to me, "Don't come here and start to dance like that: now you just lie down and watch. This is how you should dance," he said, as he showed me how to dance. So the two of us danced that way. We danced and danced. We went to my protector and Kaoxa said to him, "Here is your son." To me he said:

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"This man will carry you and put *n/om* into you." The man took hold of my feet. He made me sit up straight. But I was under water! I was gasping for breath! I called out, "Don't kill me! Why are you killing me?" My protector answered. "If you cry out like that, I'm going to make you drink. Today I'm certainly going to make you drink water. . . ." The two of us struggled until we were tired. We danced and argued and I fought the water for a long, long time. We did it until the cocks began to crow. [Kxao softly sang a medicine song.]

That's how my protector sang. He told me that was how I should sing. So, my friend, I sang that song and sang it and sang until I had sung in the daybreak. Then, my friend, my protector spoke to me, saying that I would be able to cure. He said that I would stand up and trance. He told me that I would trance. And the trancing he was talking about, my friend—I was already doing it. Then he said he would give me something to drink. My friend, my little drink was about this size. . . . He made me drink it and said that I would dance the dance I had learned. And so, my friend, I have just stuck with that dance and grown up with it.

Then my protector told me that I would enter the earth. That I would travel far through the earth and then emerge at another place. When we emerged, we began to climb the thread—it was the thread of the sky! Yes, my friend. Now, up there in the sky, the people up there, the spirits, the dead people up there, they sing for me so I can dance.

When people [just] feel bad, my friend, I don't dance. But if a person dies . . . I carry him on my back and lay him down. I lay him out so that we are lying together. He lies with his feet this way. And his head lies across my shoulders. I lay him across my body and carry him on my back. I carry him and then lay him down again. . . . That's what I do, my friend. I dance him, dance him, dance him, dance him so that G//aoan (the great god) will give his spirit to me. Then I return from G//aoan and put his spirit back into his body. My friend, I put it back, put it back, put it back, put it back, put it back and that's how he comes out alive. Sometimes I cure a person, and he dies, and G//aoan says, "This person is going to die today. I will take him and go away with him!" . . . He won't return . . . ! Not when he speaks like that. Now we who have been with this sick person, staying with him, when G//aoan tries to leave with him, we are stingy with him. We do not want to let him go.

For I am a big dancer. Yes, I am a big dancer. I teach other people to dance. When people sing, I go into a trance. I trance and put *n/om* into people, and I carry on my back those who want to learn *n/om*. Then I go! I go right up and give them to G//aoan!

My friend, when you go to visit G//aoan, you sit this way [in an attitude of respect, with arms folded across the knees.] People sit this way when

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they go to G//aoan, the great, great god, the master. . . . When you arrive at G//aoan's place, you make yourself small. You have become small. You come in small to G//aoan's place. You do what you have to do there. Then you return to where everyone is, and you hide your face. You hide your face so you won't see anything. You come and come and come and finally you enter your body again. All the people, the Ju/'hoansi who have stayed behind waiting for you—they fear and respect you. Friend, they are in awe of you. You enter, enter, enter the earth, and then you return to enter the skin of your body. . . . And you say, "He-e-e-e!" [Kxao makes the trembling sound of those who have "died" in trance and returned.] That is the sound of your return to your body. Then you begin to sing. . . .

My friend, that's the way of this *n/om*. When people sing, I dance. I enter the earth. I go in at a place like a place where people drink water. I travel in a long way, very far. When I emerge, I am already climbing. I'm climbing threads, the threads that lie over there in the south. . . . I take them and climb them. I climb one and leave it, then I go climb another one. I come to another one and leave it, then I go climb another one. I come to another one and climb, then I come to another one. Then I leave it and climb on another. Then I follow the thread of the wells, the one I am going to go enter! The thread of the wells of metal. When you get to the wells, you duck beneath the pieces of metal. [Kxao weaves his fingers together and puts them over the back of his head.] And you pass beneath them. . . . It hurts. When you lift up a little, the metal pieces grab your neck. You lie down so that they don't grab you. When it grabs you, you have entered the well. Friend, when you've entered the well, you just return. And then you come out. That's what this *n/om* does. . . .

Friend, that's how it is with this *n/om* that I do! Its possessions! They're many! Gemsboks, leopards, lions, things like that. When people sing, his possessions come, the great, great god's possessions! Friend, just as you have come to me here, G//aoan's animals will come to us!

After about six months in Botswana, I was able to go through this entire monologue of Kxao's and, with the help of !Xuma and others, begin to put together a full translation. By then I was also able to request interviews with other people who, I knew, had knowledge of things I wanted to know. I could record the interviews and understand the answers well enough to go forward in a creative, rather than rote, manner. But the nuances and associations behind these narratives have continued to deepen for me in the fifty years since that time, as I have recorded the life stories of other healers and talked to healers and healed alike about their beliefs and experiences. Some of the most profound realizations connected with the words of the healing beliefs

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finally crystallized for me only in July 2018. That happened when I was working word for word through the Botswana material with Fridrick /Ai!ae /Kunta, one of the translators in the Ju/'hoan Transcription Group (JTG) I started in Namibia in 2002. (More on this group will be found in the epilogue to this book.)

I have always valued my early experience of being freely given his story by Kxao, a man who clearly wanted to share it with some wider world. It cemented for me the worth of radical openness—and open-endedness—in doing this sort of fieldwork. After that memorable early morning recording session in 1971, I vowed to be ready at all times for similar opportunities. Part of my success that day, I feel, was that I was perceived by Kxao as a clear channel. I presented myself as the unschooled novice that I was, and he simply poured his knowledge and experience into me. I wasn't even able yet to translate a good proportion of his words.

It may also be true that my natural reticence or shyness worked for me on that occasion. I didn't do any kind of initiation or motivation, or ask leading questions. I was merely a good listener. Kxao seemed to see me as a vessel to carry his knowledge. After hearing his story, I knew a big part of my role in life going forward from that moment would be bearing witness to this long-honed, efficacious, and beautiful healing dance. But I have continued to feel, and to present myself, largely as the novice in their culture I will always be. As a result I have learned something new each day I have since spent with the Ju/'hoansi.

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I have already touched on some of the things I learned in my first few months; many of them could be summed up as social lessons. I learned some of these lessons from the Ju/'hoansi over and over; some of them became incrementally clearer over time. Situations in which I had the opportunity to learn or more deeply learn what I thought of as "the lessons of the Ju/'hoansi" kept recurring throughout my time with them. These came to me, a member of an overpopulated, competitive, highly stratified society, from a group of people who lived most of their lives face-to-face on an equal basis with the same few dozen people. Their very lives depended on managing to get along in harmony with each other over the long term. Most of the lessons focused on the absolute necessity of egalitarian sharing, and on tolerance and respect for each other. Not speaking "for" another but allowing each to have a say, in storytelling, in group decision-making—this was a deeply enshrined value. In their environment of scarce resources, moreover, the Ju/'hoansi

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taught their children the worth of keeping their eyes open for opportunity at all times. They also learned that the most reliable resources of all were their relationships with each other.

Balance in relationships with others was to be kept at all costs. These others included the people who had gone before—the departed kin, seen by the Ju/'hoansi as maintaining lively interest in the well-being of those still on earth. The Ju/'hoansi extended the obvious power of blood kin relationships in several ways. First, they named children for the grandparental generation, thus creating instant shared identities and bonds that lasted people's lifetimes. Second, they employed the simple expedient of identifying selected nonkin as fictive kin with the same roster of names from which their children's names were chosen, making way for even more shared identities and bonding. They taught their children the rules for asking their kin for things—but also, over and over, reinforced the rules for giving to their kin.

A very important lesson the Ju/'hoansi taught me was one that, at twenty-five, I had not yet learned well from my own society. That lesson was the power of indirection in bringing home a lesson, a commentary, or criticism. Ju/'hoan people who excelled at modeling modesty, indirect teaching, and methods of sharing their wisdom without making others feel small became moral leaders. Leadership was constantly pared and re-pared to an efficacious level by the reinforcement of the ideal of equality—and by instant social disapproval of any form of self-aggrandizement.

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