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M A G A Z I N E

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Why I Keep A Dream Journal

Jeannette Lambert



I'm a jazz vocalist and improviser, and recently it occurred to me that much of what I do is very mysterious to other people. So in a quest to explain myself, I started a blog. What follows is a journal entry I wrote in January, with the goal of explaining a vital part of my creative process.

When I tell people I've been doing dreamwork for decades, they sometimes ask why I keep a dream journal. Here's one small story that illustrates what I love about it.

I began keeping a dream journal in the early 1990s when a series of mysterious dreams and events led to me to start gathering evidence for my mystic detective work. At that time, I wasn't entirely sure what to do with the dreams I collected—I just followed the urge to collect them. I've kept dreams scribbled in notebooks, binders, and more recently on my computer.

While tidying my office this past week, I stopped to check if a notebook was blank or full. I flipped it open and discovered it was a travel journal I had kept during a family vacation to Santiago de Cuba. The date was March 11, 2009. My children were young and it was March break, a chance to escape school and the tough Canadian winter. We wanted a beach getaway to a place that would have good music nearby. Our trip to Santiago de Cuba fulfilled those wishes.

Feeling a bit nostalgic now, I randomly reached up for one of the dream journals I'd just placed on a high shelf. I landed on a dream journal entry from February 11, 1996. My husband Michel and I were living in Paris and pondering our future a lot, the possibility of starting a family, those kinds of things. We were poised on the cusp of starting a family together. The journal entry reads "yesterday in my dream I was made to remember the words "chang chang."

Was it exactly that, chang chang? Or was it chan chan? What did I make of those instructions? Did I find it sinister or random, a name or phrase from another language? At that point I hadn't learned how to work with my dreams creatively so it was noted as an instruction and nothing more. Remember this.

And speaking of remembering, with these two journal entries juxtaposed against one another in this current moment, a song popped into my head. I remembered that in March 2009, during our trip to Santiago de Cuba, the soundtrack of our trip, the song we requested the most, was the great Cuban song by Compay de Segundo entitled . . . Chan Chan!

Don't I have video of my children singing along with this song? Ah yes, I found it easily, two happy boys on my parents' laps, singing Chan Chan! triumphantly, fourteen years after I was told to remember the title in a dream. (Video link is <https://youtu.be/OAIRZy3blTo> and Chan Chan starts at 1:31). My younger self, questioning the future in Paris, would have been comforted to know I'd be singing and dancing with our two children soon enough.

And here I am, about eight years after we all sang along with it, finally putting two and two





together. I'm not entirely sure why the puzzle pieces have fallen into place right at this moment. I have a few theories about that now, but they are just thin, delicate gold threads of ideas, like trying to remember a dream that occurred very early in the night.

Perhaps it is because I was thinking of a question my dreaming friend Maureen Boyd Biro asked a group of us earlier in the week. She asked how we feel about those voices that tell us things as we wake, pray or meditate. Are we picking up thoughts around us or are these entities that have attached themselves to us? This synchronicity between journal entries seems to reply: look, it's fine, it was intended to be helpful even if it took a few decades for her to get the message. I can imagine the voice that instructed me in 1996 rolling its eyes and slapping its forehead at my slow awakening. But what a wonderful aha it was the day I put two and two together.

Thinking about those links—Paris, Santiago de Cuba, decades between—I also wonder what kinds of folds of time we are dancing in? What does it say about the limitations of our notions of time? The brushstrokes of connections seem to encompass a wider area than we can even imagine. I discussed this idea once with the great Canadian short story writer Mavis Gallant after we experienced a few strong coincidences together.

She took the napkin in front of her and started folding it up like a fan or an accordion and said: it's as if we sometimes drop from one layer to another.

Such is the magic of dreaming and dream journaling, breathing poetry into our lives every day. To cap it off, another dreaming friend, Barbara Allen, pointed out to me that the song Chan Chan is also from a dream. Wikipedia quotes Compay Segundo as saying "I didn't compose Chan Chan, I dreamt it. I dream of music. I sometimes wake up with a melody in my head, I hear the instruments, all very clear." So the melody was always contained in a dream. All the more reason to take our dreams, full of song and music, story and poetry, and bring them with us into waking life.

Note: See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chan_Chanson for more information about the Chan Chan song

Jeannette Lambert is an internationally acclaimed jazz vocalist and multimedia artist in Montreal, Canada. She has kept a dream journal for several decades and considers active dreamwork a vital part of her creative process. She created one of the first online journals *Diary of a Mystic Detective* in the 1990s. She has taken several of Robert Moss' online dream courses and is currently a member of two inventive dream sharing groups. In 2016 she led a workshop entitled *Singing Your Dreams* at the International Association for the Study of Dreams conference in the Netherlands. A song based on her dream-inspired haiku appears on her husband Michel Lambert's new cd, *Alom Mola*. Dream inspired songs also appear on her own CDs, *Sand Underfoot and Lone Jack Pine*.

