WHY

When Carlo set out on his journey, everything was left to chance. Nothing was planned, and for sure nothing was certain. He was aimless, found life meaningless, his days were joyless, and he had been living without stability for years. Every relationship in his life had broken down at some point, most of them had ended by his own decision. Carlo also lived without friends, perhaps to stay one step ahead of the inevitable separations? His tireless search for answers to the big questions of existence seemed a never ending story.

The only soul who accompanied him faithfully and without complaint or grumbling on all his missteps during his years of wandering was Tasko, Carlo's loyal Labrador mix.

Tasko was used to quite a lot already, but this journey would push even him to the limits of his friendship with his much adored and beloved human. More than once, they found themselves in situations that strained every fiber of their nerves to breaking point. And ultimately, not every crisis could be resolved with words, gestures, a glass of beer, or a handful of dog treats.

Perhaps you, too, are searching for answers. Asking yourself the big questions about where, when and why. You can sure find purpose and meaning in your existence even

though you probably won't find a comprehensive solution within these pages. But perhaps by reading this book you will come somewhat closer to understanding your inner self.

And maybe one day you'll simply pick up your walking stick and hat, strap on your old backpack, put on your walking boots and just set off.

Just as people from all cultures and every continent have done for centuries in trying to find what only they themselves can discover, something no one else can point out to them.

A sense of unity with who they truly are.

So come along. Let yourself be carried away on a strenuous hike where no fiction of murder or betrayal need take place. Accompany Carlo and Tasko on an adventure where hardly any blood is shed and the world doesn't need to be saved by a supernatural hero.

Follow the two simple minded fellows on their road through doubt, dust and devotion.

THE PAPERBACK

It started like any other Monday morning, but today everything was about to change. Carlo, who had slept poorly on the guest sofa after a night of political discussions and pub talk, slowly woke up, and cursed.

Tasko, the good-natured Labrador on the other hand, rolled over on his artificial sheep fur, grunting briefly, when suddenly the living room door swung open.

“Oh man, good morning Boomer, hi Nadja.” Carlo scratched his throbbing head.

Boomer jumped upon Tasko, and the two greeted one another enthusiastically, licking each others faces friendly and frantically. The carpet slipped, and the morning romp immediately picked up speed, which only elicited annoyed scolding from their two humans.

“Hey, get out of there, you clumsy oafs, wait until you can run outside.” Nadja turned to Carlo’s Labrador and stroked his head briefly, then rather firmly but still gently. “Hello, Tasko.”

Boomer, now standing next to Carlo on the sofa, wagged his tail and waited for the same attention which he immediately received from his best buddies human.

It wasn’t the first time his hangover had left Carlo with a splitting headache, and his friend’s morning comment, with whom he was

staying at the shelter due to his months of homelessness, didn't sound particularly friendly.

Nadja turned to Carlo and snapped at him harshly.

"You call that a good morning? Great. I'll tell you what. I can't take it anymore, I'm constantly worried whether you're still alive, and when I come in here in the morning, the whole apartment stinks of smoke and booze. Are you trying to get yourself killed?"

"I wanted to…" he began meekly, but he didn't get far as she just waved him off.

"You're welcome to get yourself killed, but without me and especially not in my apartment, where you don't pay a single penny in rent anyway."

"A cent," he said. "You mean…"

"Oh, shut up, for Christ's sake! I'm sick of it. I'm so damn tired of your damn arrogance and booze nights out."

These were strong words from an otherwise friendly, loving person, he thought to himself as he laboriously, almost clumsily, began to gather up his few clothes scattered around the room. As he stepped into his jeans, slipped on his shirt, and pulled on the gray mottled Canadian style plaid shirt, she turned around without further ado, grabbed Boomer by the collar, and left the room with her also pitch black Labrador.

Nadja. Barely five foot tall, no longer wore her usual radiant, warm smile today. Her face, tanned by small wrinkles from earlier and far worse times, yet still pretty and always looking so innocent, always radiated a true zest for life. But today, for the first time, he really got to know her other side. She really was angry at him.

She was forty one, had gone through a difficult twenty years of childless marriage, which she had ended two years ago with a painful but long overdue decision. Nadja had stormed out of her in laws' house on the spot and had not returned ever since.

Her desire to do good for people and animals gave her the courage to separate from her man and family and thus also to change personally. From then on, she set out on the path to self realization and the discovery of her "true self," as she always called it.

At first came a burnout cure prescribed by her doctor which followed participation in various seminars and training courses on esoterics, metamorphosis and reflexology. A kind of semi independence while she still continued to work for another year at the company she hated as much as the entire environment of her former family, to which she now no longer belonged.

After being laid off due to staff cuts, she realized her old dream of having her own practice in her small apartment, where she earned her living by giving seminars and

personal spiritual sessions. Nadja soon got along well. She enjoyed helping people and was successful at it. Then as much as now.

She also helped Carlo, whom she met by chance while walking alongside a hidden forest lake. Are there coincidences?

Carlo scratched his aching head while he was just gathering a few items from the bathroom now, reflecting on the encounter at the lake where their dogs, Tasko and Boomer, had met for the first time, just like their humans had in the very same moment.

It seemed like a decade ago, but it had actually happened only a year back at that small lake in the old forest close to his home town. Since then the two animals had been almost inseparable. Unlike Carlo and Nadja, however, because Carlo, who was always dissatisfied with himself and his life situation, simply could not and would not understand her view of this supposedly ideal and loving world. Like the dogs, they were both somehow heart and soul, even to this day, but falling in love with Nadja and building a real relationship with her had become almost impossible for Carlo.

Now Nadja was standing in the hallway, lighting a tea light. Carlo knew that with his innate negative attitude toward himself and the guilty environment in which he eked out his meaningless and unfulfilled existence, he would never find common ground with Nadja. She, on the other hand, had believed in him firmly until now, but what now? What was this?

He looked at her and swallowed. “In your view of the world, I still carry too many problems around with me, right?”

“That’s right. And it’s entirely up to you to finally change that,” she said as she came out of the kitchen and handed him a coffee. “Drink this,” she said. “Carlo, you can find your path. You can do it, just as I did it, after all.”

That morning there was no lovingly brewed herbal tea from the clay teapot to prepare him for the day, as she usually served him. And the usual morning hug at the start of the day’s work, with best wishes for bright sunshine, even if the weather predicted hours of gloom, was also silent.

Instead, she handed him a small paperback.

“You want to find yourself, decide who you really are, know where the journey should take you? Here you might find where your life will lead you. Just read the book, but get out of my life, out of my apartment. Get out of my heart. And preferably right now.”

“Thank you, I…”

“Oh, never mind.” She wiped a tear from her cheek with the sleeve of her plain white, hand knitted wool sweater. “You know I love you. But your self pity and this endless whining about all the guilt in the world… Ah, just get going, I can’t stand it any longer.”

She blew her nose loudly into one of her silk handkerchiefs. She had always detested disposable items and single use utensils such as paper tissues and similar aids that lined the pockets of the magnates of the modern money hungry industry.

“Your whining about your misery, which you pretend that only the others keep getting you into, is simply unbearable. Go and find your own way and, above all, your own worth!”

And as she spoke, abruptly turning her back on Carlo, she disappeared out the apartment door, taking Boomer with her. The door slammed loudly against the wooden door frame.

A cold wind swept through the seven hundred square foot attic apartment, and the small tea light lost its flame in the draft. With the resounding bang, not only had the door slammed shut on Carlo, but his casual hanging out in the always warm pad of yet another chosen victim had also come to an abrupt end. The draft left behind a trace of her subtle perfume.

Silence.

“Man, Tasko, now what?” Carlo’s Labrador looked a little surprised, but he understood Nadja’s displeasure. He lay down, Boomer, alas, now gone, back on his fur, where he once again rolled quietly from left to right, grunting merrily. He then pulled up his left lip as he often did, and grunted again. Stretching

his limbs into the air, he licked his mouth thoughtfully and closed his faithful eyes.

"If we are to leave, you'll also be losing your twin brother now, buddy. And yes, you're right, it doesn't matter to you. But to me, she's such a kindhearted person, she really loves me, while I'm just the poor ass who can't get anything right. Once again that is..."

Self pity came through as he just sat there and cried the tears of the always misunderstood poor soul, who really wanted nothing more than to be able to love and give himself. He looked around. This home was a pure oasis of relaxation, but it had remained a mystery to him for a long time, ever since he had first come here. The warmth that the small apartment seemed to radiate from within was almost indescribable, tangibly present, but it always seemed kind of strange to him because he was not a warmhearted person. Not anymore.

This woman, who had been through so much and carried such deep and sincere love in her heart, devoted her life to people and to what she called pure love among them.

Carlo could not understand why she gave herself away so selflessly to heal and enchant others. He tried to grasp it, but her brief answers gave him no clarity at all. He was an unbelieving barfly, hating himself and her words often reached him in cryptic fragments he could not decipher. She offered him no explanations for the world she seemed to live in.

He had never accepted conformity to the preset system, and her kindness and purity of soul gave him no real insight into who she truly was. Nadja simply remained a mystery to him.

And yet, through her words, her actions, and her gentle nature, Carlo had known for years that existence held more than he dared admit. Somewhere "up there," in the tales of spiritual universe, the legends of stone circles, soul magicians, life companions, and those who saw only the good in everything, something real was waiting to be found.

After all, he himself had experienced the mystery of energetic connections more than once.

During his time with Nadja, he had gotten to meet, and in some cases still had to get to know about, quite a few of these stone circle legends, herb burners, and jute sack carriers, as well as other shamanistic inspired esoteric believers. For many of these strangely minded people explained to him bluntly and without concern that he was far from ready to connect with their high levels of spirituality.

"Or, well, it might also be the other way around, if I'm honest, Tasko?" He straightened up. "Get up buddy, its about time to move on."

Again, there was no response from the black furred dog. Tasko was a calm fellow with a very friendly nature.

Universal energies, as Nadja described the communication of the spiritual beings were

based on something he had long known about but had not yet been able to grasp. He could not understand these energies, even though he had been searching for solutions for so many years. And so Carlo firmly believed that he had long since lost every spark of love and humanity within him. But why then had he met this woman? Nadja had entered his world so determinedly and confidently, with the firm intention of changing this life, and thus him, the rough and ready Carlo, to turn bis realm into the better once and for all. But for what?

She was a formerly subjugated person, pressed into all kinds of doctrines and basic structures of the Catholic Church but had freed herself from the stringent rules of religious belief. Still though, she found herself deeply rooted in the strict upbringing of her devout parents. Her unbreakable faith in the ever present archangels Michael and Gabriel guided her, while she also believed in the messages of a randomly drawn card from a colorful Native American animal card set. She followed the wisdom of her old friend Josephine, a self proclaimed shaman, too.

Josephine was Nadja's first and for quite a few years most influential teacher in her esoteric and spiritual world. The two women had only met six years ago during just another esoteric seminar they both attended. Nadja believed in true love, her love for Carlo, which she confessed to him just a few days after they first had met. The wild Carlo, however, couldn't relate to this confession.

Reminiscing was his favorite hobby, and as he now packed his bags, his tearful thoughts drifted back to one of his walks along the lake in the woods, where he liked to run with Tasko. He loved the tranquility of the pond deep in the forest because it was secluded, quiet, idyllic, and mostly free of people.

Remembering, he saw the vehicle approaching, from which a woman emerged and asked, somewhat uncertain, whether his dog was sociable with others. Carlo, whose Tasko had never been involved in a fight, replied with a friendly good day and yes, but nevertheless kept his black Labrador on a short leash. The woman, now assured, opened the trunk of her small car and out jumped a large black dog that looked strikingly similar to Tasko. And to no surprise, the fellow immediately rushed towards Carlo and Tasko, completely ignoring the cries of its now again frightened owner.

“He won’t hurt you,” she called.

“Really? We shall soon see,” said Carlo and clipped Tasko’s leash off. “Better they meet in the open woods and settle what needs to be settled.”

Carlo knew from painful experience and an expensive vet bill that in situations like this, when one dog is free and the other is on a leash, an inevitable fight usually ensues. People simply didn’t learn anything and didn’t get any smarter, but that sure wasn’t Carlo’s problem.

Contrary to all expectations, however, the two black furry noses, both male dogs, lunged at each other, not even greeting one another with a sniff or a snap, but turning away from their humans in a fluid sideways movement and running side by side into the nearby meadow. On their way they romped, frolicked, and played extensively with each other, behaving entirely as equals. The two humans, who had not known each other before, watched the dogs' lively activity in sheer disbelief.

Pointing at the trail of the two fellows who had now disappeared in the thick woods, Carlo asked, "do they know each other?"

"I wouldn't know where from. Hello, I'm Nadja, that there dog in the woods is Boomer. Hope he comes back..."

"Hello Nadja, Carlo, nice to meet you. Tasko sure will be back soon, and so will your Boomer be. You'd think Tasko and Boomer were siblings, the way they behave towards each other, don't you agree?"

"It seems they get along well, but I don't think they would be related to one another."

The short conversation led to walking together with the dogs through the pine forest and alongside some freshly mowed paddocks. When Nadja and Carlo grew a little closer, they later discovered from the dogs' animal passports that their two four legged friends could indeed be siblings. When they called the breeder a few weeks later, he not only

confirmed their brotherhood, but also that the two were actually twin brothers.

"They hatched from the same egg, so to speak," the farmer joked.

A few weeks later they had arranged to meet once again at the very fish pond for another walk. The dogs were playing freely when Nadja suddenly confessed her love to Carlo, completely surprising and baffling him. She believed in a special kind of love, she said as they walked among the fir and pine trees by that now well known fish pond.

Could such a special love that arose out of nowhere really exist, Carlo wondered. Love at first sight? He couldn't explain such thing and he didn't even want to. The love Carlo knew consisted of pure desire. To experience love as giving and devoting, to sacrifice oneself for someone else, had become entirely foreign to him. But Nadja also believed in the power of randomly picked stones, thoughts and wishes. She said that she could see the aura of a fellow human being and at least this was how she felt since they had met, she had reassured him, back then at the edge of their forest lake.

In a peaceful moment, she all of a sudden stopped her walk and said, "Carlo, you have a beautiful aura, but one that currently is very wounded. We may try to heal it, if you wish?"

Once again, he didn't understand what she meant, dismissed it as charlatanism with a shake of his head, and resisted this insight,

which he had actually recognized for a long time but didn't want to admit to be real.

But she relied on the power and goodness of the energies of the universe and the statements of the chakras and the energy centers in a persons mind, soul and body. Her whole person testified to these powers, to the omnipotence of her angels. Nadja lived solely for this kind of holistic love in nature, while he, on the other hand, lived in drunkenness, and the rough biker scene. Carlo existed merely in learned structures of submission from all his failed relationships and, last but not least, from the odd job he took on every now and then.

So here he stood now, collecting his stuff from the shelve and wardrobe in the hallway of the cozy apartment. His head throbbing, he wasn't trusting his eyes and ears. He was feeling worse than ever before and close to tears. The previous evening had been a maneuver to avoid her, he thought.

"Well, that worked," he grumbled morosely, immediately ashamed once again of his often macho attitude, which he had carried within him for years and could not really shake off. But he didn't really want to get rid of his attitude either, because it offered him protective mechanisms against further disappointments that might be thrown at him.

Nevertheless, he was contemplating now and said to himself, "I would have loved to spent more time with Nadja, just to enjoy the

endless and thoroughly intelligent conversations with her."

Conversations that opened up interesting and often new horizons for him and answered at least some of his questions, giving him a starting point for explaining his expanding horizons.

But he couldn't love her. At least not in the way she wanted him to, because the fear of losing her again was omnipresent and one of the reasons why he was no longer willing to enter into any long-term relationship. That sounded paradoxical, but it corresponded exactly to the basic features of his self-isolation. He was not yet aware of his own deeply rooted depression, which formed the rough background for his often arrogant and selfish, and often nonsensical behavior. Until then, he had lost all the people he was close to, whom he loved, whom he tried to give to. And so he defied every new relationship, resisted any closeness, and fled to bars, fleeing to avoid his own feelings as well as those of others. He sure didn't want to hurt Nadja, always trying to give both of them the necessary distance to not collide. His goal was to be friends, to be close to one another without going into emotional contact.