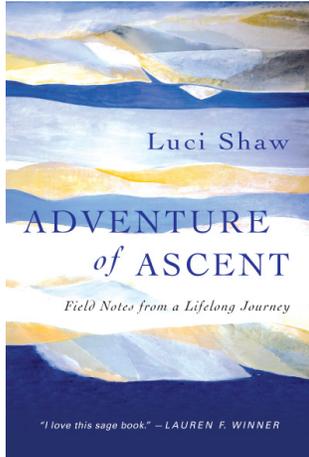




BOOK EXCERPT



*Adventure of Ascent: Field Notes
from a Lifelong Journey*

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"I love this sage book."

— Lauren Winner,
author of *Still*

Meditations on Inevitability

So much for the body, the temporary house in which we exist. But what about the thrust of spirit for survival and individuation that seems to dwell in all forms of life? In the human being it's honed to a fine point by consciousness and self-consciousness.

I'd have hoped that by now in my life some questions would have been resolved. I think with amazement of the distance I have traveled from my very conservative early indoctrination in Christian theology and practice. I still hold the name Christian, but what meaning does that designation carry anymore? It's a label that has become generic, too broad in its application to do much but distinguish its adherents from those with a Jewish or Islamic or other religious heritage. To say I'm a follower of Christ gets at the heart of it, but what a failing follower I am! It is pure grace that I feel assured and reassured of my place in Christ's body.

What is grace? What is inevitability? Where have all my searchings led me, even with the occasional epiphany (though I might have anticipated that epiphanies would be a thing of the past)? George MacDonald, in *The Wise Woman*, suggested that with age the evidences and illuminations from beyond us will become less frequent, less clear. That the unknowns would gather like rain clouds.

I'm pondering the ultimate despair of mortality. (And the word *pondering* implies weight; this is a heavy theme.) If one is being, like me, carried on a slow train toward death, a nonbeing of bodily life and perhaps of the essential soul — what is the point of all the accumulation of human existence? All the achievement of ecstatic moments, the repeated fulfillment of desires and needs? The occasional relief of release after tension and anxiety? Of satisfaction after hunger? Of pleasure? Of all the beauty and creative work of artists of all time? Of the skills developed — writing, gardening, knitting, typing, photography?

Of what value is the growth of a body of wisdom that life and learning have achieved in us? All the fertile pockets of experience translated into words and images and letters and messages, each longing for some kind of permanence — the preservation of emotion and illumination in a discrete expression that holds it up to view in its own clear cell of a written form?

I keep a reflective journal. I write poems and essays that attempt to capture and hold on to insight and experience. I take photographs to keep memories alive and to refine and express my sense of beauty and design. Everyone now has a point-and-shoot camera or a smartphone that can snap and save an image. Now there are so many trillions of such images that when we're gone, who'll care?

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Luci Shaw is a poet, essayist, lecturer and writer-in-residence at Regent College, Vancouver. Widely anthologized, her writing has appeared in numerous literary and religious journals. She coauthored three books with Madeleine L'Engle. In 2013 she received the Denise Levertov Award for Creative Writing from Seattle Pacific University and *Image*, and is a founding member of the Chrysostom Society of Christian Writers. In addition to *Adventure of Ascent*, her recent publications include *Breath for the Bones: Art, Imagination & Spirit*, *Harvesting Fog*, and a collection of her poems, *Scape*. Her papers are preserved in the Luci Shaw Collection at Wheaton College's Buswell Library. She lives in Bellingham, Washington.

I'll be beyond caring! In my attic hundreds of carousels of slides have lain waiting to be viewed, images of our entire family growth over sixty years. My family says they'd love to see them on the screen, but who has a projector anymore? My brother is endeavoring to transfer them all onto CDs for us. But is anyone really interested in looking at them? It will be ancient history and obsolete technology, likely to be relegated to the trash heap, the burn pile of trivialities.

What about all the challenges I've taken up and succeeded at? The risks I've taken? The failures I've learned from? Is that set down in that record book in heaven for safekeeping? Have I accomplished anything of lasting worth? Even more intimately delicate is the question, does it really matter what anybody thinks about me or my work?

What is the meaning and value of an insight gained, of a perception captured, along with perhaps some grains of wisdom? Even if it has been shared with kindred spirits, might it not evaporate in a swirl of someone else's forgetfulness and the swift passage of time?

What lasts, even for a lifetime? Is anything permanent? Books and magazines are being digitized, but with the rapid progress of technology much will become obsolete with time. Memory can become a prism through which to view the colorful events and accumulations of a long life. But what if the prism is shattered? What if the light is snuffed out like a candle flame? Is anything left but a dead wick?

— Taken from chapter four, "Fit for the Climb?"

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