



ALTERED STACY

No hairy breasts, but a mean craving for burgers

By Stacy Davies

When you grow up with a big New Age-freak father (disguised as a Republican) who makes you watch Shirley MacLaine's TV movie *Out on a Limb*, encourages you to read books about Atlantis/the Bermuda Triangle, thinks Stephen King's *The Stand* is actually going to happen, and can stare at the sky and make clouds disappear (did they *really*—or was it just windy that day?), later in life, you tend to steer far, far away from the paranormal, the spiritual, and any unidentified flying hoo-has.

So when Eric Peterson from Xicoco (Shuh-co-co) Shamanic Arts of Riverside called and offered me a free "float" in their Samadhi tank, all I could think of was how excited my kooky, still New-Agey/(now "Independent") Armageddon-obsessed father would be, and how I'd never, *ever* tell him that I was going to do it.

Before I shaved my legs (which, by the way, is *not* a good idea before you float in a tank of saline solution), I decided to watch the 1980 film *Altered States*, in which William Hurt, with the help of a floatation tank and some Native American psychedelic mushroom juice, regresses his molecular structure first to prehistoric beginnings, and then to a *primordial* shrieking glob. Kinda creepy, kinda stupid.

Eric assured me, however, that I would not emerge from the tank with hairy breasts (or something like that), and that what floating really did was remove external stimulation—thus allowing the brain to enter into the alpha (or "relaxation") state, which frequently leads to the theta, or "dreaming" state. Now, I can dream at night in my own bed—usually—but this particular type of dreamy relaxation is supposed to aid in pain relief, emotional distress, detoxification and self-programming. You can also—as William Hurt did, I suppose—explore alternate states of protoplasmic monkey-ness.

As a workaholic who does *not* want to self-program to quit smoking (hey Mikey, I like it!), who no longer drinks enough booze to actually *need* detoxification, who isn't in any real pain or emotional distress (unless I stumble across my kids watching a rerun of *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*), and who will ruminate on just about *anything*—including such random ponderances as how, exactly, Medieval women handled their menstrual cycles—instead of actually letting myself chill out, I figured I'd be an interesting test subject, if only to see if I could truly relax without a Vicodin.

Being obsessed with germs and cleanliness (though not at the Howard Hughes level—*yet*), I was already *somewhat* relaxed when I saw that the Shamanic shop and its Samadhi tank were squeaky clean, and that the communal water was filtered after every use.

I was also told that most people float in the nude, which is not my most comfortable state in a public place, and that I should shower both before and after the float—first to rid myself of hair and body products, and afterward to shed the *800 pounds* of Epsom salts I was about to lay on/in. Eric also asked me to float on at least three different occasions to get the full effect. After seeing the tank—an 8-by-4-by-4 camper shell-type white box—I wasn't sure I'd even make it through one session, recalling a traumatic camper shell episode several years earlier. No, *really*.

(It was a beautiful weekend at a Malibu beach in a borrowed RV when I decided that night that I could hack sleeping in the toaster-slot-sized space above the cab. Around 3 a.m., I awoke believing I'd been buried alive in a white-trash coffin, and before I started clawing my way through the roof, I opted to quietly slide out of the slot-bed and curl up on the icy camper floor. Not so fun.) But back to the story.

Trying not to focus on what has become known as the Camper Cab Incident, I bobbed

along in my tank and tried to think of nothing at all, which made me do a *heck* of a lot of thinking about what, exactly, "nothing at all" really means. (If I force myself to envision the tranquil, rolling green of Ireland, that's *thinking*, but if I don't, then I just think about floating in a tank, which is not so *relaxing*.) Every slight sound that came from the room outside the tank made my heart skip, though I tried to remind myself that no one was *really* going to come in and expose my nudie soup. It was also pretty humid in that tank, with condensation beadlets forming on my nose and eyes and dripping down my chin—super annoying, really. I managed to stay in the tank for 45 minutes (an hour is usual), and, except for one millisecond, did not dip into an alpha or theta state. This float also took place in the morning *before* work, which, for someone like me, is not at all a good pre-relaxation state of mind to be in.

On the ride home, two thoughts floated into my waterlogged noggin—that the tank thing is probably not my gig, and where the hell can I find a cheeseburger, and pronto?

I decided to return to the tank the next week, however, and was told that if it was too humid that I could leave the door of it ajar with one of my towels. This I did, and with a soft stream of air wafting in, and leaving the day behind me (I took *this* float *after* work), I fell, or perhaps more accurately, *plunged*, into not only alpha, but theta and beyond. I have no recollection of what I thought about, and only a flicker of images that materialized, mostly unshapely things that would not normally make it into my swirly dreams. I went so deep, and apparently needed it so much, that though only a short span of time seemed to pass, when I awoke—thinking I was nearing the hour—I had actually been in the tank for that hour, plus another half. I left the shop like a doe-eyed zombie-deer, so wobbly that I actually had to stop at my mother's house and come to before my long trek home. I also wanted another cheeseburger—or maybe three.

I asked Eric if being famished at the end of a session was normal, and he said he'd never heard of it. Was this my prehistoric beast coming out? Awakened from dormancy in my molecular history, exerting its carnivorous thirst for bloody red meat? Since I was craving McDonald's, I realized that couldn't be the case—they stopped serving meat back in 1983. Still, I found myself to be in a pleasant mood—not my most comfortable state either—and when I encountered things that would normally be irksome, I found they just rolled off my newly-flexible shoulders. I also slept like a redwood log that night—another rarity, since the slightest creak in our hardwood floors usually sits me bolt upright, to my own (and everyone else's) annoyance.

For the final float, I tried to recreate my personally-set guidelines from the previous session, and yet, while I floated for a little over an hour, I was basically counting down the seconds in exasperation—too much to think about, too much to do, and here I was, naked and floating in a goddamned tank of salt! When I left, I felt limp and noodley again, though, which was odd, since I remembered only dreaming for about five seconds the whole time. As I drove home, blasting an old Garbage CD to high heaven, I noted that I did indeed feel pretty damn good, that I was surprisingly unstressed that we had no cover image for the paper the following week, and that my disassociation from intense feelings reminded me of that film we all saw in elementary school once about angel dust, where a druggie girl watches her friend drown and does nothing to save her. I also noted that a Double-Double sounded *really* good. And it was—both of them. **1E**

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Website of the Week



www.idealists.org

Working sucks. We all know it, we all hate it—and people who say they like their job are lying SOBs, in denial—or they're actually hooked into something they're passionate about. The key word here is *passion*.

Not that you have to make love to or at your job to be happy—those trades usually come with a lot of blow and nasty viruses—but who wouldn't want to get paid to do something you like to do? (No, not those *bribery* jobs where you like the *pay* and all the toys you can buy—which you need so that you can forget how much you hate your job.) Often, to do what you love, you have to do it for free, or for almost no pay at all, but a surprising number people do it. The trade off? Worrying about paying the electric bill instead of getting trapped in a cold, corporate asshole job.

But is it possible to make a decent living and retain your character? The people at Idealist.org think so.

On their free site, you can set up an account with defined preferences and receive weekly emails listing jobs that match your criteria—now, how damn easy is that? If you're more of a go-getter, you can search their jobs database on your own, much like you would at Monster.

I decided to give it a spin, looking for a corporate-type job I actually might enjoy, and searched "environmental administrative," and in any state, because I was pretending to be an adventurous 20-something-year-old, like, well, how I was when I was 20-something.

Among other positions, I found: A Fellowship Officer at the nonprofit EarthWatch Institute in Massachusetts for 30-35K plus benefits; must have a willingness to travel 20 percent of the time—including to the annual meeting in Oxford, England. Score, Gen Y-er.

Financial and Admin staff for the Grassroots Campaigns HQ in Boston, where they say, for 24K, you can help take back Congress from the Bush Agenda. You can get *paid* for something like that?

For 50-60K, you can be a project manager at the Blue Ocean Institute of New York, and for 32K, you can be an admin assistant at the Pacific Forest Trust in San Francisco.

Other positions popped up with the Sierra Club Global Warming and Energy Program, the Nature Conservancy, the Working Families Party (who try to elect progressive candidates who'll pass things like the "living wage"), the Yosemite Fund, and an Environmental Specialist for the National Council of Churches—see? Who says Christianity isn't compatible with saving the planet?

Personally, we're going for the Summer Camp Director position in Sausalito for, *hello*, 41K, next summer. While it may not be the type of dough the Republican Elite or Conservative Capitalists can live on—gotta fill up that Hummer—most of us can make it work, especially if it means doing less of the hatin' and more of the lovin.' (Stacy Davies)