

## Clinging to a Clod

BY GEORGE SALIS

AS CARL SAGAN LOOKED AT THE LAST PHOTOGRAPH that Voyager 1 took of Earth, showing the entire planet as a pale blue dot 6 billion kilometers away, he was compelled to contemplate human existence vis-à-vis the cosmos.

He is not alone in that compulsion.

The night sky causes this for most of us who care to look up or for those who have explored the awe-inspiring photographs from the Hubble Space Telescope. When we look at the vastness of the cosmos, we can see a symmetrical splendor governed by an ever-churning set of laws.

It's beautiful, the essence of anything truly spiritual, but it can make us feel small, for as far as we know the universe is indifferent and cold, hostile to human and other animal life, except within the delicate sliver of atmosphere that we inhabit.

But when we realize that we are made of star stuff, that the elements which compose us are from supernovae, a truth surfaces: We are connected, not just to each other through our biology, but to the rest of the universe through our atoms.

What can we make of these facts?

As Sagan put it, "We are the custodians of life's meaning." We are in this together. As living, thinking creatures, it is up to us to create the meaning in our individual lives, for it is not written in stardust, it is not something the wind will whisper in our ears, and the clouds are equally empty.

There is so much to live for that we know is real: family, friends, art, discovery, love, sex, nature, honesty, food, conversation, and perhaps most of all, making the world just a little better than it was the day before.

I find that the answer to everything is either education or love or a combination of the two. Education in its purest sense: teaching people not what to think but how to think, critically. And love in the conventional meaning, but also in the sense of empathy and sympathy: understanding that everyone comes from an immeasurable amount of experiences both cultural and genetic.

Education and love. This simple formula is how we can bear the vastness.

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*"The hard truth seems to be this: We live in a vast and awesome universe in which, daily, suns are made and worlds destroyed, where humanity clings to an obscure clod of rock. We are the custodians of life's meaning. It is up to us."*

*—Carl Sagan,  
Renowned Scientist*

