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By Malidoma Patrice Somé

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Born in West Africa in the early 1950s, Somé was kidnapped at age four by a French Jesuit missionary to be trained as a priest, for the next 15 years enduring the harsh regimen of a seminary where his native language and tribal traditions were systematically suppressed. At age 20 he escaped, but when he returned to his Dugara people in Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) they rejected him as an outsider. To reconnect with his native culture, Somé underwent a month-long initiation into shamanism during which he reports that he journeyed to the underworld, became a bird, then a porcupine, and was buried alive.

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