The Man Who Lit the World

by Liz Gibbons

Nikola Tesla is an individual who has long intrigued me. In Life magazine's special issue in September 1995, Tesla was listed as one of the 100 most influential people in the last 1,000 years. Yet, I doubt that most people know much about him.

He was born in Croatia in 1856 and came to America in 1884. He is best known for the development of the alternating current (AC) motor and the Tesla coil which is used in radio technology and wireless systems. The work of his life was devoted to designing and improving devices for mankind.

Tesla had a photographic memory. He could so accurately visualize and assemble his inventions in his mind that when assembled they did not need any redesign and worked perfectly. He regularly made his ideas available to the general public through articles and lectures. There are over 700 patents registered worldwide in his name, and many more of his inventions were registered in the names of his backers.

In 1888 Tesla presented a paper at the American Institute of Electrical Engineers on alternating current motors. George Westinghouse was so impressed that he developed a partnership with Tesla. This led to the beginning of the nationwide use of electricity in America.

In 1899 Tesla built an experimental station in Colorado Springs where he experimented with various electrical phenomena. While there he made what he considered his most important discovery: terrestrial stationary waves. The earth could be used as a transmitter. In an article in *Century Magazine* in 1900 he wrote that his experiments had "opened up the wonderful prospect of transmitting large amounts of electrical energy for industrial purposes to great distances without wires…its practical consummation would mean that energy would be available for the uses of man at any point of the globe. I can think of no technical advance which would . . . add more to and more economize human energy."

Returning to New York in 1900 he looked for a piece of land on which to build a giant transmitter. Financially backed by J. P. Morgan he began building the Wardenclyffe transmitting tower at Shoreham, Long Island. The tower was 188 feet high topped by a huge copper dome housing within it the magnifying transmitter. It was to be used as a wireless communication system to broadcast news and entertainment, telephone, telegraph, stock tickers, written matter and photographic images to any place on the globe. Tesla felt eventually they would be able to transmit electricity. Because J. P. Morgan realized you could not meter and charge fees for such distribution of electoral power, he withdrew his funds, and the project eventually collapsed.

It is unfortunate that money controls what is accepted or rejected. I envision the day when our economic system is not ruled by money, the day when mankind reaches the mindset that all of earth's resources are the common heritage of all the people. Then all the latest technological marvels can be released to provide for the well-being of all people, and earth's resources will no longer be plundered for profit but wisely used in a conservative manner for the benefit of

all. I believe to some degree this was the vision of Tesla as well as many other inventors.