

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THERE'S A WHOLE IN THE WORLD

It takes tremendous pressure to create a diamond. The catalysts, heat and pressure translate as pain to an organism which craves expansion, growth. The creative moment resists the significance of shrinkage, implosion and loss, yet the refinement and transmutation of material is part of the cycles of growth, progress, evolution and advancement.

The chrysalis state would be a highly disturbing traumatic moment for a caterpillar who wasn't in synch with her nature. She would feel compelled to crawl into a little dark space, stay hidden, alone, without food or company, without the multifarious distractions of daily life, curled up in the dark, transforming, rebirthing. I mean, can you imagine being forced back into the womb and making your way through a physical re-enactment of human evolution - AS AN ADULT? - without your nature, your connection to nature, without unconscious guidance. Can you imagine being torn from the power of civilization, culture and consciousness, separated from your biological experiences, forced to undergo the sea change of gestation and birth, fully conscious, yet bereft, torn from the full consciousness of soul stored in the cells of your body, your cellular consciousness, the surety of form and definition, the slow, the gradual experiments of millennia. As your wings develop and your body changes, you are trapped in this stiff shell, this cocoon that you yourself made. You don't know why this shell, which was originally soft and malleable, adjustable, plenty big enough to contain your little squishy caterpillar body, has now, through the action of the sun and wind, through the exposure of days, hardened. You have transformed. You are bigger. You have wings which want to spread, stretch and fly. You can't get out. This experience lingers on. You have one or two hairs which have yet to grow, the sensors on top of your head aren't long enough yet, or strong enough. You can't escape. You are in process. You are dying to get out of there, out of restriction, out of the cocoon, away from your own stench, your own organic transformation, back into the world, back to relationship, to distractions. Then you give up. You know this is the end. You will be here forever, in the dark. There is a crack, a bit of sunlight, that hurts, and a smell, a flower smell, perhaps the smell of hyacinths makes its way through the crack and the next part takes maybe minutes, maybe hours, but it seems an eternity, as joy seeps in through your senses to permeate your awareness, as freedom takes hold. It is nothing if not painful, it overwhelms you, it demolishes you. "Stop," you scream, "no more change, I can't stand it." But you do, because you must. The light is warm, the air drenches your new body with an ecstasy soft and strong. On the thought, on the whim and the wish, you fly.

What I remember most about the marathon was that it was long. It had to be long, we had to get beyond our assumptions, we had to get beyond the limit of our endurance.

No windows in that basement room. Posters broke the monotony of the walls. My favorite poster was black and white with splashes of bright yellow here and there. A hundred little circles, ultra-simplistic line renditions of emotions, sad, happy, serious, lonely, loving, hating, confused, angry, suspicious, joyful, boisterous, amazed, shocked, bored, indifferent, ashamed, each one pretty accurate for a line drawing. One hundred variations of that famous happy face.

If one of us got stuck for a word we could use the poster. We were always encouraged to use feeling words. We were asked to not worry too much about understanding, thinking, or analyzing. Feelings were their own reward. Feeling them, being acknowledged while feeling them, allowing them validity in and of themselves. By exercising our right to express feelings openly, by increasing our ability to express feelings accurately we were validating ourselves.

When someone was stuck for a feeling word she would peruse the poster.

There was a lot of time that day for feelings, not endomorphic androgynous manic rush around the clock time; the big butt lazy ass queen time, she came, spread herself out, became comfortable with us.

After being in this oppressive airless room for an hour or two, we had been through and discussed everything we had on our minds, after all, this was the usual length of a session and we more or less barreled through it and had a bathroom and soda pop and cookie break but we were still far from lunch, at least that's how it felt at the time. Lunch loomed far ahead with fresh air at the end of the day far beyond the horizon invisible.

We talked and talked. We knew each other well, not a day to day kind of knowing but the deeper knowing of intimates, of darkest nights and lonely campfires, of long bus journeys, making fast friends on a plane ride to the stars.

After snack break time we came reluctantly back to our circle. The psych nurse read us a poem that another young woman, who had been in an earlier group wrote. I thought it was stupid, awkwardly written, a clumsy attempt at best and yet I cried. There were two of me, one crying, moved to tears by my peer's experience of pain and therapy, the other critical, trapped, restless, furious and insulting. I felt myself drift apart, as if I were two huge ice floes or surface plates of the mother herself, frozen blocks or enormous slabs of compressed organic material, moving slowly, steadily apart. The inevitability of my self separation felt more powerful than my will to reverse it. I was losing ground. I might drown in a frozen angry ocean suddenly raging up from the spreading chasm. I might be swallowed by the limpid sucking sea rising, engulfed by a tidal wave after the earthquaking plates had moved too far for endurance. Beyond the status quo, the quorum, the quo vadis, tempis fugit or any other Latin phrase, I felt myself losing control, I wanted out.

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I got very quiet.

I sat very still.

The nurse lit three candles inside the stifling oppression of a room shaped like a box. I had hoped that no one had a queasy stomach, that no one would let loose stinky farts in the unmoving air. Now, candles lit, poem read, "at least we can fart now," I thought the candles would burn away the stench. My critical brain, my angry analytical mind knew that there is no safe time to fart. But part of me was acknowledging that I now had permission to stink up the room. Here in the dark, in the memory of an anonymous female person's pain, my wastes could be disgorged.

I felt myself drifting.

After the poem was read we were asked to be silent for a little while longer. We were still, in the dark. The nurse talked us through a vision of a girl who climbs a mountain. She, the climber, starts up the hill because she thinks it's a nice day for a climb, because she wants to see the view from up there, because she has a friend who did it and said it was great, definitely worthwhile. She sets out prepared for every emergency. She has food, a sleeping bag, fresh water, good shoes, clothes, a tent, matches to light a fire, a battery powered lamp. She sets out alone.

After hiking for a day, she stops for the night in a clearing, because she has heard that clearings are safe. While she sleeps someone comes, or some thing comes to steal her food. She wakes up knowing something's wrong. She looks around to find something missing. She cries in frustration. She can't see how she can continue. After much soul searching she decides to eat what she can find along the way. She hikes higher. She eats berries and flowers. She's hungry and a little lonely going to sleep that night but she's still in good spirits. That night her lamp and her boots are stolen. When she wakes up the next morning, the morning of her third day on the mountain, she's cold and can't find her boots. This time she's angry. She thought maybe someone was following her, trying to fuck her up. She thinks someone has it in for her. She thinks she's being stalked by a malintentioned prankster. She decides to continue even though she has lost so many things. She decides to continue just to spite the asshole who's trying to fuck her up. The psych nurse didn't use words like that, but that was the sense of it as far as I could tell.

The hiker continues her journey. You can tell the way things are going. The poignancy of her journey derives from the juxtaposition of the losses she sustains and her indomitable desire to continue her journey. By the time she reaches the top of the mountain, she's naked and empty handed, but she has lived on the mountain in harmony, she has not only been stolen from, her needs have all been

met; shelter, food water, have all been provided for her. She stands looking from the mountain and from there it is indeed a beautiful world. The mountain opposite holds some appeal for her, but she is mostly fascinated with her own town, where she comes from, the town she lives in, visible at the foot of the mountain she is standing on, in the valley, by the river of sweet water, that's what she is most drawn to, that is her home.

On her way down the mountain she gets lost in a storm and has to leave the path because it's flooded. She makes her way following her senses, her memory and the movements of the sun and moon. Miraculously she recovers all of her gear as she makes her way down. She arrives home as fully equipped as when she left. No one can understand why her clothes don't look dirty, her food is still uneaten, her flashlight batteries haven't run out and her boots hardly look scuffed.

Her father says, "Where have you been, the Ritz Hotel?" Her mother says, "Welcome home dear, I hope you had a nice time."

No one asks her what the view was like, or how was your trip? or anything like that. They eat dinner in the usual way, her father reads the paper, her mother gabs on about who did what when, with whom, and where, and guesses what the likely repercussions might be.

Later that evening, after her parents have gone to sleep, as she sits feeling lonely and maybe a little pissed off with her family's lack of attentiveness and approbation, their lack of fascination with her and her adventures, their lack of appreciation for her victories, as she sits looking at the stars from the soft comfort of her bed, from the window of a sturdy warm house, the same stars she saw naked on the mountain, her brother knocks softly on her bedroom door. This is her elder brother knocking. He has also climbed that mountain. He has, in fact, climbed both the mountains embracing the town. She realizes, when she sees his impish face, that when he had returned from his climbs she had asked him nothing. She had missed him but she only wanted his attention when he returned she wanted to be tickled, taken on rides on the handlebars of his bike. Only much later had it occurred to her to ask him what it had been like up there.

She welcomes her brother in, thinking now she will ask, now they will discuss their trips, she will be able to tell him about what she has learned, he will be a sympathetic listener. But when he comes in, he sits down so seriously, so quietly, so honoring the silence and the darkness of the night, that she says nothing. They sit together, side by side, looking at the stars.

At last he says, "I came in because I thought there was something you ought to know. The same time that you took off up the mountain, your friend, Felicia went up the other mountain, she wanted to surprise you. She didn't want to steal your thunder but she felt that she had to climb a mountain of her own. She was up there for three days when there was an avalanche. All of us who'd been up

there before, we looked for her for days. We gave up. We know she died but we can't find her body. She has become part of the mountain."

I looked down and in my hands was a doll, made out of tissue, tissue rolled and twisted, wet with tears and snot, a tissue paper sculpture of a baby in a womb, or a crib. I saw myself I met myself. *Hi, little girl.* Who was I before I began? I knew. I felt the vulnerability of the child I had been, the tenderness of my sensations, brand new nerve endings responding immediately, chaotically, surrounded by danger and confusion, my organism trying hard to scramble some clarity, some information together, some control over large motor movements, some way to cope, wanting to escape, trapped, trapped in life, trapped in sensation, unable to act on sensate information, a victim of sensation.

The girl child is inappropriately caressed, the boy child has his foreskin torn and taken from him. And then? And then how greet the new world? How embrace life which is a dialogue of sensations, when sensation itself is not only suspect but horrifying?

Embrace the horror. That's what we've done. We have incorporated the horror into our concept of human life. We are terrified of human existence. We perpetuate horror and terror on each successive generation, *for their own good*, for our idea of what their survival will require.

I can't help but wonder if we haven't begun to grow beyond these apprehensions. When I was a turnip I spake as a turnip. But now I am a woman and I don't feel like pretending I'm a turnip anymore, I don't like dressing up as a vegetable, I want to be wholly human and I can't remember why I was a being a turnip in the first place. Was I hiding from woman eating dinosaurs? Was I denying my own dignity?

I am my feelings. I am more than my feelings. I am my thoughts. I am more than my thoughts. I am my body. I am more than my body. I am my awareness. I am more than my awareness. I am this pain. I am more than this pain. I am this intelligence. I am more than this intelligence. I am this anger. I am more than this anger. I am this joy. I am more than this joy. I am this person thinking these thoughts. I am more than this person thinking these thoughts. I am the person having these experiences. And I am more. I contain all of it yet none of it defines me.