



Creative Wordshops

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Writing Newsletter

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re-story, re-create
and re-imagine your
life and work

this letter is in

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(courtesy Dominic Haarhoff)

See the blog for ongoing opportunities and 'what's on'

Dear seeker of words and images

*I saw grief drinking a cup of sorrow and called out, "It tastes sweet, does it not?"
"You've caught me," grief answered, "and you've ruined my business, how can I sell
sorrow when you know it's a blessing?" - Jalaluddin Rumi*

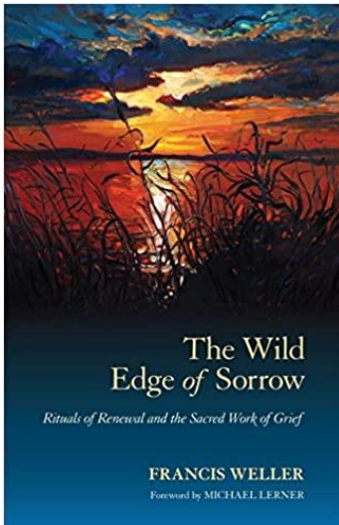
The Cup of Grief

Grief keeps the heart flexible, fluid, and open to others. (Francis Weller)

Peter Fox, my friend, showed me recently. Francis Weller's, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*. (see youtube video Newschool Comonweal Oct 2016) So grief arrives once again on this month's newsletter radar.

To write of grief is to write of love- not only in their spacial co-habitation but also in volume - the galaxies of words that have hosted these two shooting stars ever since the first person scratched the first signs and symbols of sorrow in the sand. This letter is rich in a scattering of quotes that have inspired my spaceship's navigation in such a fathomless cosmos. The *cosmos nescientia* - the cosmos of unknowing. Here be skydragons, hurled rocks racing through space. From an unfolding galaxy of light years of literature, I share a scattering, a handful of grief stars. They remain constant even in the unseen dazzle of the joy of the day.

Weller considers five gates of grief - loss of what we love, loss of what we have discarded as not being worthy of our love, grief for the world, sorrow of what we will never experience and ancestral grief. Each of these revolve through cycles, (sometimes identified as shock, denial, bargaining, anger) looping back, circling in their own time to a kind of acceptance. Then hopefully beyond acceptance to integration and nuancing:



Gudrun Zomerland has written about trauma as “the shaking of a soul.” “The German word for trauma [is] ‘Seelenschütterung.’ The first part, ‘Seele’ means soul. . . . ‘Erschütterung’ is something that shakes us out of the ordinary flow and out of our usual sense of time into an extraordinary state.”

Trauma, then, is a soul-shaking experience that ruptures the continuity of our lives and tosses us into an alternate existence. When this soul shaking occurs frequently and early in life, as a result of prolonged neglect, what was originally an extraordinary state gradually becomes ordinary. It is the world as we know it—unsafe, unreliable, and frightening. This is a profound loss and a lingering sorrow that is difficult to hold.

The failure of the world to offer us comfort in the face of trauma causes us to retreat from the world. We live on our heels, cautiously assessing whether it is safe to step in; we rarely feel it is.

This echoed in the last two verses of Robert Frost's *Reluctance*:



And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,
No longer blown hither and thither;
The last lone aster is gone;
The flowers of the witch hazel wither;
The heart is still aching to seek,
But the feet question 'Whither?'

Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season?

As a testimony to writing as a way to host and incorporate this visitor, these two poems *The Way of Grief* and *Second Skin* offer my experience and response to a story I heard (included in an earlier letter, repeated here):

The Way of Grief

she scribbled bits of Europe
in folio, in the ring-binder
her parents had given her.
daily she wove her spider thread
round pencil sketches
and ticket stubs stamped
with train dates and opera stalls.
she shaped impressions of a gallery,
a climb up a hill to reaches of snow,
market women and temple ruins.
the widow's pension
with an enamel water jug
and a turret above a canal
and her week of waiting
at Carlo's Cafe
filled four pages.
scripting her way south
she recorded a procession
of the Last Supper Christ
through candle streets.
she was hardly home
when out of the African blue

blood cells sang her requiem.
matching dates and places
and pension addresses,
her parents embraced
the journey through the underworld.
they sat in the out-of-season
opera house, rode the metro
to her disembarking
and spoke to the widow
and Carlo of the water-side cafe.
taking her hours as guide
they shod their feet in journal leaves.
and walked the pages of her days.

Second Skin

grief tosses me a hide,
stiff, raw off the animal.
I work its leather-wet death smell
through salts
to tan, soften and shape it.
I wear it supple
on my body.
it moves now, as I move,
breathing with me,
this sunburnt skin,
warming and adorning.

The last word arrives as a surprise, an unexpected gift. This is the nuancing.

As in Kahlil Gibran's - *On Joy and Sorrow*:

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.
Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's
oven? And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was
hollowed with knives?... But I say unto you, they are inseparable.
Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember
that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Or in the oft quoted Mary Oliver lines from *Poppies*:

loss is the great lesson.
But I also say this: that light
is an invitation

to happiness,
and that happiness,
when it's done right,
is a kind of holiness,
palpable and redemptive.

This *Cup of Rice* story I often tell in wordshops. Many people lay down their own stories of loss next to it. And a conversation begins:

A woman's baby dies. She cannot find it in her heart to bury the infant. So she approaches the great healer in the village. He sees her coming and responds, "I know why you have come. Give me the child I will bring her back to life."

The mother is ecstatic. As she hands over the dead baby, he hands her an empty cup. "There is one thing that you must do for me first. Go to any hut in this village and bring me a cup of rice." As she leaves he calls after her, "By the way, the rice must come from a home that has not known grief or suffering."

The woman goes from hut to hut to hut. She returns with the empty cup and says to the healer, "Give me my baby. I will bury her."



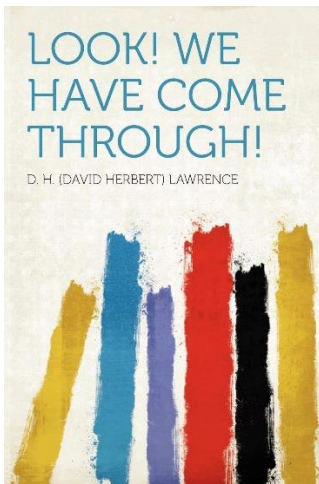
(Sculpture Annemarie Breytenbach)

When we descend down to the bottom of the well of grief we reach communal waters. Flowing from **my** suffering we now belong to **the** suffering. We smile with Rumi who prefaces this letter. And with Shelley - "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

Back to Francis Weller:

Psychotherapist Miriam Greenspan uses the term intervulnerability to describe the need for this mutually held space.... we suffer together, whether consciously or unconsciously. Albert Einstein called the idea of a separate self an "optical delusion of consciousness." Martin Luther King Jr. said that we are all connected in an "inescapable web of mutuality." ... in our intervulnerability is our salvation, because awareness of the mutuality of suffering impels us to search for ways to heal the whole, rather than encase ourselves in a bubble of denial and impossible individualism.

Maybe we need a new coinage- lossjoy. May we belong through our grief to such a community. In jubilation we join D H Lawrence:



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