



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

May 2011

Thoughts On Solitude

In the February 2011 issue of *Raven's Bread*, we reflected on "soul friending." In these reflections, we continue our exploration of *anam cara* within the context of sharing our life stories. To be a person is to have a story to tell. Our unique life stories are fashioned and shaped by who we are and by each experience we have. The challenge is to make use of the gift of our stories because, in them, are the multi-coloured threads for the weaving of our life tapestries. When we do not share our life stories, they are like unopened gifts.

Stories help us remember who we are and who we are becoming; they are a bridge to our culture, our faith, our family, our dreams, and ourselves. Storytelling helps us to remember in a way that promotes healing by naming, owning, blessing our life tapestries. With their telling, we come home to their unfolding gifts and can then move on in new awareness, new growth. Hence, every story needs a storyteller and a listener. Both are necessary but one is not to be confused with the other. The storyteller, the soul sharer must have a listener, one who knows about the Celtic thin space of both sharing and listening, one who knows enough not to interrupt a good story!

Our life stories help restore the original power of language. In their poetry, they unite us to the beauty and grandeur of nature and the cosmos. They are ever old in that they bind us to each other in their similarities, and they are ever new in that they reveal the uniqueness of each of us.

Unfortunately our life stories may seem unimportant to us and we may not even remember them, except for an unconnected thread here or there. When such multicoloured threads are not woven into the mosaic of our lives, we do not come home to their potential richness and beauty. Aspects of our life stories may be painful but as we voice that pain, they have a valuable richness for growth. In his poem, "Story Water", Sufi mystic, Rumi, likens our stories to intermediaries that both hide and show what's hidden. The challenge is to embrace them. A soul friend can help with this journey home.

In sharing out loud our particular life tapestry with a grounded listener, we journey deep within where we touch into the deep mystery of our lives. We gradually learn about gratitude and "enough" in a faith-trusting living of the Now, our precious present. Indeed, for some of us, this is a faith journey, a deepening of our relationship with the mystery/Mystery of who we are. Sharing one's life story, in an atmosphere

of sacred trust and confidentiality, is based on the premise of an adult to adult relationship, where the listener, the accompanier, is trained to reflect back to the storyteller, the themes of her/his life-growth journey. Such a sharing is neither therapy nor counseling, although from a holistic perspective, it may be "therapeutic." At the same time, from such a listening stance, this person senses when we would benefit from the skills of a counselor or therapist (specific cues include a sense that we are "stuck", "depressed", cynical, or overly critical and blaming) and suggests this help when appropriate.

However, the soul friend's role is one of nonjudgmental listening, followed by an intuitive summation of both the words and the spaces between the words, the silences, a reflecting back to the storyteller the possible patterns in her/his unique tapestry in the making.

As the storyteller, learning that the answers are deep within, we see both the story and the listener as intermediaries. It is the challenge for each of us to come home to possible growth areas, the "knots" in the threads of our life mosaics. Hence, an underlying premise in this journeying is that the answers are within the storyteller, just ready for the sharing. What we need is a sacred space in which to share out loud the different threads of the story in order to eventually weave them together into some holistic tapestry, the tapestry of moving on in one's life through a naming, owning, blessing, letting go, giving thanks and moving on process.

Anam cara, the Gaelic phrase for soul friending/mentoring, is a mutually adult relationship in which the soul friend listens to our story but does not take it on, does not take over our lives. S/he cares about us, but does not take care of us, does not "fix" our problems. Rather the soul friend provides that sacred space for us to empower ourselves. Integral to our spiritual journey, the *anam cara's* role is to "heart-listen" and then to invite us to come home to the different nuances in order to own them from our God-centeredness deep within.

Part of our ongoing growth is dealing with the stresses of life. We know about distress but maybe not **eustress**, (from the Greek "eu" meaning good), the good stress that keeps us getting up each morning, daring new things, while living joyfully the mundane. At times, there may be fear and fatigue but these are balanced with a sense of "I feel called to do this" in this Now. A soul friend, with who we can share both the eustress and distress of our life stories, can facilitate

(Continued on page 3)

A Word From Still Wood



In this issue we again explore the value of telling our stories and listening with care to other's stories. We have recently celebrated a major liturgical season in the Christian calendar. In truth, we are still celebrating (for fifty days!) the drama that the Church replays in liturgical form during the Paschal Season. We are asked to listen anew, be an *anam cara*, as Jesus' story is retold – the facts of his final days, what he experienced, why he did or did not do certain things, how he wants us to understand and share his story.

His is one of the Great Stories which have shaped human history and culture. Why has this tale of a young man's unjust trial, sentencing and death so affected people for centuries? What made it different from the stories of the men crucified with him? Initially, his story was simply told from "my lips to your ear", recited by those who were players in the story themselves. Then, it was recounted by those first listeners (Paul of Tarsus, for one) to people further away from the original scene. As with all stories, the tellers dwelt on the details which most affected them. Various versions of the original story were handed down, all of them telling the truth, but no single one able to convey the full richness of what took place. Still, the essential truth of what happened to Jesus of Nazareth and why, was never lost. To this day, the truth is there for all of us to explore and make our own, if we so choose.

Because that "Truth" is so fantastic, such an inexplicable event must be retold over and over, year after year, with many weeks focused on it alone. The story line is quite simple – a man is cruelly put to death because his teaching threatened the powers of his day but he did not stay dead! In many of humanity's Great Stories, the protagonist experiences death but the power of his/her message lives on. Few explicitly claim that the hero returns bodily from death. The death of Jesus of Nazareth is a largely uncontested fact, attested to by many witnesses; his resurrection is the belief of millions. Once the finality of

death is overcome by even one human being, it is no longer the final truth for any of us. We all cherish a secret hope – that for ourselves and those we love, death will not be the end. "Life is changed, not ended!" we chant on Holy Saturday. When our hope is validated, everything else changes. Everything, no matter how senseless it seems, is charged with the possibility of purpose and the absolute certainty that Life will overcome; that Love is stronger than hate, malice, and every cruelty perpetrated in our sorry world.

This fact is so astounding that we can only absorb its import in tiny increments. Hence, we re-visit the story which serves as its repository over and over. For many of us, this has happened all our lives – Easter cycling around just as earth breaks free of winter's apparent death. Can spring be ignored? How, then, can this Story lose its meaning for us?

We need to listen, asking all the questions the story raises in our hearts and minds, and ponder the answers (or lack of them). Rilke counseled a young poet to "be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to *love the questions themselves*.... Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. *And the point is, to live everything*. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, live along some distant day into the answer."

If we find ourselves without questions, we have not really listened to the Story. We are missing our purpose which is "*to live everything!*" Do we begin to grasp why the Church tells us Jesus' story over and over? Not to bore us by re-presenting a familiar tale but begging us to listen. If we listen, we will learn we can live, live eternally. Death is not the last word of our story ... nor anyone else's!

*With grateful love,
Karen & Paul*

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in eremitical life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. This newsletter seeks to affirm and support people living in solitude. Raven's Bread is a collaborative effort and thus depends on the shared reflections, stories, news, notices, letters and information from hermits themselves.

Please send your written contributions, address changes, and subscription donations to: Raven's Bread Ministries, 18065 NC 209 Hwy, Hot Springs, NC 28743 or via Paypal at our website.*

Our phone number is: 828 622 3750, The annual donation is \$10.00 in the USA or \$12.00 US for readers outside the States. Please send payment in US funds (PayPal can convert foreign currency to US dollars.) Any extra donations will be used to subsidize subscriptions for hermits who cannot afford the full cost.

Raven's Bread derives its name from the experience of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17: 1-6. where a raven sent by God nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (The Cutting Place).

***Our website is :[Http://www.ravensbreadministries.com](http://www.ravensbreadministries.com)**

(Continued from page 1)

the changes we need to make in order to be healthier physically, psychologically, spiritually.

Choosing a soul friend requires discretion. Many a soul friend has training as a spiritual accompanier but in the end, we are looking for a person who is mature, compassionate, discreet, and respectful of us and the uniqueness of our life stories. One particular quality that is essential in soul friending is the self-discipline of keeping the focus on the storyteller, not his/her own story. This is the real test of an *anam cara*'s self-knowledge, maturity and self-esteem. Because another's story often resonates with aspects of the listener's own, there is the automatic urge to show the storyteller that I/we understand by sharing our own life story experiences. Most times, this does not have the desired effect of compassion and empathy but rather it can become a "one-up" relating of stories. Anyone who is a soul friend must constantly be on the journey of her/his own coming home to God deep within. "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (Augustine).

Anam cara, that soul friend journeying with another, is a privilege. Certain qualities are requisite to accompany another on her/his lifestory journey. Such skills are only the context for the intuitive text that unfolds as the story is told. The spiritual accompanier's role is listening and reflecting back to the storyteller. From this perspective, soul friending is an intuitive, spiritual, contemplative process. Hence, it is crucial not to get in the way of a good story, the mystery of which is revealed just in the telling. Being a soul friend to another, we are challenged constantly to come home to our own ongoing process of conversion, the ongoing changing of our own heart of stone to a heart of flesh (Eze.36:26). In the end, a good story needs both a storyteller and an *anam cara* listener.

Further Reading

Bausch, William J. *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*. Mystic, CT" Twenty-Third Publications, 1984

Eppley, George *Finding Your Story*, in *Human Development*, Vol 18, No. 3, 1997, 10-13

O'Donohue, John *Anam Cara, A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. NY: Harper-Collins, 1997. O'Laoghaire, Diarmuid. Soul-friendship, in *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990, 30-42.

Sellner, Edward D. Lewis as a Spiritual Mentor, in *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990a. 142-161.

Mentoring: The Ministry of Spiritual Kinship. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1990b

The Essential Rumi, Harper San Francisco, 1995

STORY WATER

A story is like water
That you heat for your bath.
It takes messages between the fire
And your skin. It lets them meet,
And it cleans you!
Very few can sit down
In the middle of the fire itself...
We need intermediaries.
Water, stories, the body,
All the things we do are mediums
that hide and show what's hidden.
Study them,
And enjoy this being washed
With a secret we sometimes know
And sometimes not.

(Rumi, 1995, 141-142)



Janet Malone
Charlottetown, P.E. Canada



BOOK AND WEBSITE REVIEWS



For those searching for spiritual classics and out-of-print books, **RB** reader, Ana Cortinas, recommends contacting Steven A. Vranizan, 2930 Cedar St., Philadelphia, PA 19134 (Tel: 215 423 6508), who, if sent an SASE, will mail out a current listing of available books, describing each book and its condition. She has obtained "*some jewels from him, including Christian Prayer volumes. He is very reliable and will look up particular books or subjects if asked.*" Titles were going for \$8.00 in 2009.

Sarah Seymour-Winfield announces: By the time this newsletter reaches your hermitage, my book, *Images Old and New*, will hopefully be in print and my website, www.imagesoldandnew.com will be in operation. For all those who have placed pre-publication book orders, my deepest thanks.

BOREDOM AND THE RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION, (Studies in Religion and Culture, Charlottesville, VA) by Michael L. Raposa. Raposa's writing is motivated by the observation that in certain instances, boredom matters. Drawing on sources as varied as Aquinas' reflection on spiritual sluggishness (acedia), Dante's "dark wood", and William James's consideration of the "sick soul," he highlights boredom as religiously significant. Pbk. 199pp. University of Virginia Press, 1999. \$18.50.