SHARING FROM THE WELL

On Meditation and Deep Listening
—John Merrill

I started meditating 35 years ago and I noticed over time a change in my relationship with others. It took lots of practice but I noticed I was able to focus my attention completely on the other, able to practice deep listening. I could engage with another without thinking or planning a verbal reply, I just was able to respond in the moment without a planned or rehearsed response, I was able to speak from the heart. This took lots of practice and time but it changed the way I am present with others. I also came to the realization that the ability to be fully present with another also presents an invitation to the spirit or great mystery to enter the relationship.

The Rusty Planer
—Betty Carlson

For decades, the tools that were once treasured
Laid neglected beneath a layer of dust,
Forgotten, and no longer needed.
After my father died, I was designated
To handle his estate, which included
The house where he and his two brothers grew up.
It was located three blocks from my parents home.
As a child, we frequently went over to Grandma's.
Her tiny house was built just before the depression.
The original plan was to build a garage and live there
While they were building their house.
Plans change, and the garage became their home.
Later, the house was jacked up to dig a basement,
Where Grandma stored her canned goods
And Grandpa did his woodworking.

A two-storied shed was also built to provide shelter
For the chickens and the milk cow.
During the depression, my grandma would drive
The Model A Ford into the city to sell her eggs.
The egg money allowed them to pay for the car.
Eventually, my grandparents built a large garage.
Their three sons liked to work on cars,
And decided to dig a pit in its floor. When not in use,
The pit was covered by heavy wooden planks.
After both my grandparents died, my Dad kept
The property so he could continue to work
On his various projects in the garage.
The house remained empty, except for the furniture,
And the memories that echoed within its walls.
As my Dad's health declined, his projects decreased.
Then he gave me an old lawn tractor for our farm.
First time out mowing, the engine blew up.
I called Dad to report the incident to him.
Should I buy a new one, or did he want to repair it?
After his heart by-pass surgery, he had more energy.
He wanted to repair it. He created his work station
On the the heavy wooden planks that covered the pit.
He was in the process of overhauling the engine,
When the planks shifted beneath him.
He fell five feet into the pit that he had dug.
No broken bones. He was just badly bruised.
Ten days later, he died in his sleep.

In the months that followed my dad's death,
My husband and I began the process of emptying
The contents of the house, the shed, and the garage.
Eight decades had passed since my grandparents
Began the process of building their new home.

Eight decades of furniture, dishes, canning jars,
Tires, numerous car parts, motorcycles,
And tools for engines and for woodworking.
My sister and I decided to sell the property,
The home of my dad's family. Without them,

The place felt empty. What remained were
So many memories, and the stuff of their lives.
We brought home what was most precious to us,
And our cousins took some things as well.
We had sales, took the old tires to hazard waste,
And ordered a large dumpster for what remained.
An offer was made on the property.
The closing was set for October 31st,
All Hallow's Eve. After I signed all the papers,
I sat in my car and sobbed. I grieved the death of
My dad and my grandparents. I grieved the house
That was once filled with love and kindness,
That was home to the people I loved.
Now it was an empty shell that no longer
Belonged to our family.
This summer I was going through my husband's tools
In our garage. He died over three years ago.
Among his tools were those that belonged to my dad,
or were rescued from my grandparent's home.
I came across several old wood planers.
None of them appeared to be in good condition.
I took them to a knowledgeable woodworker
Who evaluated each one of them.
Among the three, he chose the rustiest one
As the one that would be worth refurbishing.
He recommended an upcoming workshop.
I took the old planer to class and dismantled it,
Cleaned the rust off it, and sharpened the cutter.

After I put the pieces back together, I planed a board.
Very thin shavings delicately curled up above the cutter,
With each stroke, the wood became smoother.
Somehow in the process of refurbishing one tool,
I have reclaimed not only that old planer,
But a piece of my dad's story.
What was once forgotten and neglected
Has now been remembered and restored.

The Wall
—Doug Brown

Armed with resolve to fully convey my condolence,
I face a wall of prose and poems.

The life of my genuine, authentic, generous, good-natured colleague
will surely be encapsulated somewhere on this wall.

I will, I know I will, purchase the perfect expression of sorrow
to present to the family I've never met.

I begin my search. The ridiculous poems. The platitudes of nothingness.
The cliché shortcuts to happiness and joy. The search goes on.

"May memories of your loved one bring comfort in the days ahead."

"Remembering all the good times" will certainly ease your tears.

"Knowing you will see your loved one again in Heaven" will certainly stop the pain.

How long can a person loiter at this wall before the clerk becomes uneasy?

I look and look and look. I was not intimately close to this friend, so does it really matter what I pretend to say through this surrogate?

Will the family even read it?

My shoulders dropping and my body slumping tells me this is a fool's errand. What's the point? If the words are meaningless to me, they have no chance of meaning anything to anyone else.

Do I really need to fork over good money for some emotional "pat on the back?"

I keep searching. Then, out of the spiritual abyss, I see it! Like a sunrise on a spring morning.

"I'm so sorry for your loss." `[BLANK INSIDE]` An empty canvas inviting me to create.

My words. *My* expression. *My* heart.
Flawed… Perfect.

Before Dawn
—Marv Klassen-Landis

I was born to
a farm with oaken
roots, but greed is
an ax and I was sold
to the highways.

Mama, Papa,
I'm haunted
by never seeing
your hair turn white.

When dark is darker
than light is light,
I curl up under
heavy blankets.
Does a cocooning
caterpillar
seek rest or flight?

I Am From
—John Merrill

I am from the big river, first in shoes and booze and last in the American League

I am from rusty parts and things reused—share croppers, hot summers and orphanages

I am from lightning bugs, trains, and sweaty t-shirts

I am from strong coffee, shaky hands and thick cigarette smoke

I Am From
—Elizabeth Johnson

I am from the Bitterroot, the Rockies, the sharp and wild Cascades
I am from abuse and reparative conversations and pain that bubbles tenaciously throughout my lineage
I am from forgiveness and hugs and 'if you can't say anything nice, don't say it at all'
I am from far away travels and 'don't get hurt!'
I am from love, not wealth
From duty above pleasure
saving before spending
service before self
I am from the heartache of having a child perish
before my ending of life
I am from optimism and fear always holding hands
I am from belief that it will all be ok

I Am From
—Marv Klassen-Landis

I am from a farm beloved by nine generations of Landises,
A farm replaced by an industrial park

I am from carving whistles and digging up Sweet Cecily roots
and grafting apple trees with Grandpa,
fishing and birdwatching with Grandma,
gardening and laughing and crying and flower arranging with Mom,

milking and haying and communing with hawks with Dad,
roaming the fields and meadows and streams with siblings and cousins.

I am from four-part harmony congregational singing, shoe-fly pie,
Pennsylvania Dutch accents and “but what will people think?”

I am from sudden “too-young” deaths: Grandpa—heart attack,
Dad—car accident. And long cancer “too-young” deaths—Mom,
her sister.

I am from hitchhiking and riding freights around the U.S.,
Searching, searching….

I am from marriage, home, children, grandchildren, community

An Excerpt from a Reflection Paper
Patty McDevitt

Yes, I know grief--I am continuing to learn its wisdom--to make peace with it
(this so very intimate part of life), it, grief, just keeps taking pieces of me.

And I am shattered, and I am whole, and I hold both and find my center.

On the Responsibility to Mourn
John Merrill

I think we experience grief and mourn for individual growth and transformation; I also think we have a responsibility to the community to mourn. It sets a tone and example for others and gives support and validation to others.

A Song Recommendation
John Merrill

I recommend a song by a midwestern folk singer, Greg Brown from Iowa. He put music to some poetry by William Blake in 1985. I still listen to "On Another’s Sorrow" at least weekly, for me it really captures the shared nature of grief and suffering. [Album: Songs of Innocence and Experience]

Migration

Marv Klassen-Landis

I walk into the bay up to my chin
and lose myself in windless water
and cloudless sky. I turn, slow as sand
through an hourglass, look back
to the smudged line of beach.

An undulating ribbon appears
to hover just above the water;
I wait and watch a line
of butterflies approach,
then pass, so close that I see
the light glowing through each
orange-and-black wing.

Mist

—Marv Klassen-Landis

you are not sinking
        the mist is rising
allow yourself to float
        love will hold you

Collaborative poem from October webinar:

Grief

Grief echoes in the night
        Night wraps me in love
Grief lingers and grief deepens
Grief is ever near
Grief hovers above me in the sky
        Sky is dark but there are stars
                Stars are hidden tonight
Grief is transforming
        Transforming my life one cell at a time.

Grief is the teacher I never chose
Grief—I'm lost in thoughts and words
Words escape my mind and heart
Heartbroken, I miss your love and presence
Words are lost beneath the tears
Tears flow endlessly
Tears heal my soul
Soulfully I awaken deep parts of the unseen
Unseen I sit on the cushion
Unseen scar of grief
Unseen love awakens gently
Tears are hidden
Hidden, alone
Alone I walk in the evening of life
Alone on the edge of the unending flow of river
Tears arrive from nowhere
Nowhere can I see you....Ah! There you are
Tears open me to the life force of the world
Grief is my companion
Companioning is a journey of being
Being happens in the moment
Moment by moment the journey unfolds
Being is enough, today I need not do
Grief envelops
Enveloped in a feeling of truth, I play
Play without hesitation, dance without restraint