

SISTER WHO'S PERSPECTIVE

Sister Who's Perspective, copyright, Issue 261, March 2021

Overview

Among the few cursory comments I recall about the Romanticist era of painting in Art history, is that dramatic contrast was a primary element, often placing darkness in the foreground and light in the distance. The encouragement was nonetheless—without denial—to look beyond the darkness toward the light. Perhaps this is true now also.

Finding Family in Fallibility

It remains mysteriously significant to me that I was born on the very day that Marilyn Monroe died. I often wonder whether we “passed in the hallway” and exchanged notes about being anomalous persons. A quote attributed to her is that, “I guess I belong to the world, because I’ve never really belonged to anyone or anything else.”

A resulting challenge for at least her and myself, is making such a circumstance into a good thing. It is discouraging that our best efforts often went unrewarded, yet noteworthy that neither of us found within that, adequate reason to stop trying. No matter how often we were unable to overcome the bullies within our lives or the ways that they victimized us, we still subsequently found other places to go and better things to do.

I suppose one could say that Marilyn and I found ways to make our lives larger than any setback we experienced. Will any of that ultimately matter? That answer depends upon all of you and your responses to our creativity.

All that being said, one could also wonder what the rest of her life would have included, had she not—as many believe—been killed to conceal the secrets of public personalities. A great many of humanity’s visionaries, in fact, did not die of old age, but rather persistently invited humanity to grow, until adversaries silenced their voices. Yet in

each instance, were opportunities for specific individuals to act as family for one another—making a greater collective strength a potential dynamic within each and every crisis any individual ever faced.

Sadly, one of Martin Luther King’s many quotes remains true: “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil, is for good to do nothing.” A choice of whether or not to act, often unfolds within a larger constellation of strengths and weaknesses. No one ever lives a full and complete life all alone, but rather exists within a constellation of relationships that ideally can form a symbiotic configuration within which strengths and weaknesses are complimentary.

Narcissism, conversely, is the negation of relationship—which includes symbiosis in all of its possible manifestations. Without plants providing a continuous supply of oxygen, other forms of life could obviously not endure. It is specifically the ability to fail that drives all living things toward symbiosis and interdependence.

Innumerable people I have known, had the power and resources to make a positive difference, but chose to behave in more selfish ways. The result has always been some form or degree of loss, injury, or even death. Their choices to withhold resources and love, were also a perhaps undefined form of mental illness that collectively is truly destroying our world.

In contrast, is the persistent ability to find and create a sense of true family—to infuse demonstrated love that pushes circumstances in constructive directions. Without commitment to each other and believing in the value of the lives of each other and of ourselves, however, better outcomes remain profoundly unlikely. An essential insight then, is that there may be little difference between finding family and creating family—in spite of any weaknesses and not as superficial configurations, but as life-altering dynamics and relational patterns.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Finding Purpose in Perplexity

To first begin to specifically define the perplexity confronting virtually everyone, one must consider the variety of mental and social “games” that innumerable people irresponsibly play—although I am not entirely comfortable with referring to their interactions as “games,” if that means that what they do, doesn’t really matter. Innumerable persons are truly wounded and relationships attacked, as if doing so had no serious consequence, yet they may spend the rest of their lives attempting to recover. Persistent throughout such interactions within those seeking to help, is the realization on some level that their wisdom and understanding are less than the particular challenge requires.

Ideally, this would lead them into learning more—which could provide a sense of purpose, inviting them to become the ones who actually do more. It is not a question of more money, however, but rather of more healing and empowerment; of truly making the world, individually and collectively, better than it has ever been. It is not a situation defined by “us” and “them,” but rather by all finally embracing dynamics of love in ways that no one is excluded.

Until then, innumerable examples spend inordinate amounts of time “playing chess”; competing for power and control rather than love and empowering dynamics of regeneration and growth. I’ve only heard a few described as being “meglomanics,” but I don’t recall anyone ever describing the underlying mental illness that, like every illness, would ultimately destroy everything around it, if it were not somehow stopped. It does seem that there are innumerable forms of the same dynamic which could be treated while they are still small, rather than allowing them to grow to dangerous proportions.

It seems, however, that many are not looking for small challenges; only the big ones get their attention—when associated problems have become far more difficult to oppose, correct, and heal. As an autistic, this seems to me like neurotypicals being unable

to see the details of their surroundings. My perception might, therefore, be helpful to them—but only if they are ready to listen.

My experience within such situations has more often been societal pressure to be similarly blind to what they did not wish to face—but I couldn’t stop seeing whatever it was that I saw. I also couldn’t stop seeing their unwillingness to constructively respond to the particular challenge. In many cases, this might explain why I wound up alone.

A primary challenge within such situations is to resist the temptation to think that because I have not been loved, I must be unlovable; that because I have not been valued, I must not be valuable. The actions of others are not a measurement of me, but of them. My sense of purpose must come from within me and not from within them, because there are too many personal realities they can never know.

Purpose is not assigned; it arises from within one’s self. External function and internal purpose are absolutely not identical and thinking that they are, is a step toward various forms of enslavement. Embracing internal purpose will always move one’s self at least one step closer to true freedom.

Growth and development may be externally nurtured, but they are always an inside job and in their most significant forms they are never easy. Those who wish that all challenges be easy to resolve, sabotage their own potential. Those who utilize their blessings in exclusively self-serving ways, limit their own growth, which, curiously, is always oriented to symbiotic relationship.

For life to be what it is, it is always a complex configuration of giving and receiving that must always remain, interconnected and interdependent. Seeking an alternative configuration would be analogous to any part of the human body attempting to live in isolation. When understanding is missing, the parts of the body are no less dependent upon each other, but are simply waiting for life-affirming love and wisdom to return.

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Finding Caring in Confusion

Part of discerning genuine caring is being able to distinguish between love and duty. A perhaps unanswerable subsequent question is whether in the absence of love, duty can suffice. My personal evaluation is that while love is always substantive, mere duty is forever empty and hollow.

It suggests an absence of love; that others are not doing something because they want to do it, but rather because of some sort of feeling that they are expected or required to do it. This was the pattern of many adults throughout my childhood, who would do only what was required or expected, without ever taking any interest or investing any personal attention into my individual development. It seemed that whether I succeeded or failed, did not matter to anyone—even extending to the fact that my parents never asked to see a single report card beyond my third grade of Roman Catholic elementary school.

In contrast, among the verses displayed upon my walls is one attributed to the outspoken writer, Wendell Barry. The most challenging phrases within it, note that “The mind that is not baffled, is not employed. The impeded stream is the one that sings.” I understood early that even if no one else cared, I needed to do my best in service to all experiences of life that would follow. Also, even at that age, the particular nuns I met within the school presented an understanding of the Divine that was more mystical and less encompassed by human definitions, doctrine, or dogma—and thus more empowering.

*“My life should not
be measured by
how many times
I have been wounded,
but rather by how often
those injuries failed to kill me.”*

— Sister Who

Yet a peculiar quality of growing up within that Roman Catholic religious context, was also an often-challenging view of suffering and poverty that specifically looked for positive effects within such experiences. Nonetheless, while I acknowledge that innumerable good works are created within deplorable and even adversarial contexts, I reject any view that suffering is good or necessary in and of itself.

The fact that one is able to transform bad into good, does nothing to make what is bad, any less so. Yet in the midst of even overwhelming chaos, love and agents of healing are nearly always present—if one is not standing too close to see them. One may even become an agent of healing and goodness, who is able to make a difference.

From a distance, such persons shine like stars against a night sky. Conversely, if one *is* able to find them within chaos, it may be specifically because one is standing so close that one sees nothing else. The story one later tells of the event, may then be quite different from anyone else’s summary.

An important additional point to note, is that caring may be present within confusion specifically because one puts it there. Each one of us may be the reason that good enters into discouraging or even wounding societal events. The query that presents, is what specifically, each of us will contribute.

Finding caring within chaos could then be said to be a matter of finding this dynamic of being a healer within one’s self. If you are present, whatever love or wisdom resides within you is equally present. One can then ask, not as a protest or dismissal but as a true search for truth, “What is my connection with everyone else here, that makes dynamics of love and wisdom both relevant and important?”

All of this minimizes the distinction between finding caring within confusion and creating caring within confusion—just by fully being whoever and whatever one finds one’s self to be. It may even be that the reason one is present, is because one has the ability to contribute love, harmony, and compassion.

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Finding Hope in Haphazardness

On far too many occasions throughout my life, when I have prayed for guidance, the only response I have received is to “trust the unfolding.” The only similar recommendation within more recent years, which I now have framed and hanging on my dining room wall, was spoken by Miss Ferenzi within the movie, “Gryphon.” “What seems disastrous often works out for the best, although it may not be apparent at the time.” Heeding either advice seems to be unavoidably fraught with uncertainty—which I describe as “standing too close to be able to see all that is necessary in order to understand.”

It seems fairly impossible to accurately describe humanity—individually or collectively—without acknowledging all sorts of limitations and vulnerabilities, some of which may be in one way or another overcome while others not. A primary activity of life appears to be the process of determining which is which, within specific yet fluctuating moments and circumstances. I’m reminded of the sequence within the movie, “Star Wars,” when Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Leia Organa, and Chewbacca have escaped from the trash compactor and are trying to return to the Millennium Falcon to order to leave the Death Star, and are chaotically running through one hallway and then another, trying to avoid Imperial troops; the only thing encouraging any success is that they keep going.

At a minimal level, they could give thanks that they are still alive. This is not encouraging, however, unless some higher wisdom knows that their efforts will not be in vain—but they themselves do not; they merely hope. It may be that hope is not possible without humility; without awareness of one’s weaknesses and limitations that one simultaneously recognizes are no guarantee of failure.

At the core of such circumstances, is the reality that oppression, tyranny, and evil are never as omnipotent as they claim to be. Every prediction and speculation can never be more than it is, allowing that the future can always be changed. At the heart of hope, is actively seizing that opportunity to make things better.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

On a Personal Note

This has been a most intense month, as I continue to prepare for video production of Episode 500 of “Sister Who Presents...” on Wednesday, April 7. The script for that event has been in process for months and includes translation into Spanish and German—both of which have largely been accomplished. Set pieces have mostly been constructed, but still need to be painted and finished.

My doctoral dissertation continues to make positive progress, but is also evolving into a larger and unanticipated form. My professors have all been significantly encouraging. The ongoing limitations of my current financial and housing circumstances seem unable to prevent significant positive development, although corresponding emotional struggles happen daily.

The new iMac computer seems to be serving my creative activities with at least 80% efficiency, but I was surprised that through acquiring carpeting for the video production, I met someone who has facilitated shifting my previous computer to a Linux operating system that may ultimately do even better. Only time will tell, but I am choosing not to resist any change that may ultimately prove constructive.

In terms of health issues, a recent report is that circumstances are far worse, but my actual symptoms do not confirm this and there is a possibility that the report is in error. One must also consider what effect attempting to manage so many challenges simultaneously is having.

Yet I persist; what more can I say?

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