

Trauma to Incendence: a Memoir and More

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the bottom.

At the memorial service of a friend the family gave us a small booklet that had some photographs and stories about her life. It was a pleasure to learn more about her as I had known her only in her later years. Remembering this, I decided to write a few stories about my life in New York City, Buenos Aires and now in Cambridge, MA. However, I have recently understood something more compelling that needs to be written. The story I want to tell is about the consequences of the family tragedy that profoundly affected my life. It is also a story of the spiritual awakening that changed me forever but about which I had no understanding. I write to share my exploration of the long-hidden consequences of that tragedy and the search which was provoked by spiritual experience. My story would be incomplete if my largely unconscious suffering, a celebration of our transformed worldview, occasional insights and some events of daily life were not shared. ¹

David's Death...Changed Forever

A tragedy occurred in my family just days after I was born. My four-year-old brother David became ill one frigid day in March after he fell into a ditch while playing with his and my brother, Ken. Initially it was thought he had an earache. While my mother was caring for David, contractions began so she was taken to the hospital where I was born. David became seriously ill and was taken to the same hospital. My mother could not visit him for fear of contagion. David died of spinal meningitis four days after I was born. My family and I were thrown into a very difficult destiny at the time of my birth.

After living four years in Buenos Aires, my husband, Jaime, and I and our two boys, Dan and Chris, had recently returned from Buenos Aires and found an apartment in New York City. One afternoon, when I walked into the bedroom I was thrown to my knees. I then woke up on the floor. I did not consciously decide to kneel. I had not been taught to kneel as a child. Afterwards, I had absolutely no idea what had happened. I was awakened by a dimension of life previously hidden and unknown to me. It was a profound knowing about which I had no understanding, but I could not lay it aside. I wanted it to happen again. I had experienced something of very great power and worth and fundamentally attractive. The experience seemed to come from outside my person, but how had I been brought to my knees if it came only from outside my body? The experience propelled me on a journey. It determined in a significant way the path of my coming years as it demanded a search to know that reality again. I was literally thrown into a compelling but difficult journey

¹ Much of the content of the first ten pages of this essay can be found in more detail in my book *The Depth of our Belonging*. Please excuse the repetitions for someone who has read that book. This essay can be understood as an addendum to that book.

I learned later that my experience could be called a mystical experience. In the Idea of the Holy, Otto Rank, an Austrian psychoanalyst writes of “overpowering might of some kind, the numinosum” The numen refers to an indwelling force or spirit. The numinous has a deeply spiritual or mystical effect.

Beginning a Long Journey: Union Theological School and Fordham University

Not long after being thrown to my knees, I joined a largely black, local Presbyterian church where I was kindly welcomed. I had gone to a college with Presbyterian origins and the church was nearby in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. In a bible study group, I remember an elderly woman being very upset when she dropped her bible on the floor. It was memorable to me that she was so apologetic as clearly the bible was of great importance to her and to be treasured. My pathway is different, but I recognized that we were both engaged in a search of great personal importance.

At that time, I was at Teachers College at Columbia University studying to become a biology teacher. I assumed I would continue down that pathway as I had taught biology in the American Community School in Buenos Aires and had done graduate work in biology. However, I felt drawn to apply to Union Theological Seminary even though I thought it wrong to abandon the promise of a career in biology. Additionally, my science background was not good preparation for theological studies. Nevertheless, I had been deeply internally captured by the promise of the awakening experience. I could not forget or ignore the longing awakened by that experience and subsequent experiential reminders. Union held promise and was a short distance away from where we lived in New York City. Jaime worked in medical research, our family had grown to five, with Sarah’s arrival and I began a new course of study. I enrolled in U.T.S. seeking help in understanding my experience. Certainly, there were other possibilities for help in my search, for example, finding a meditation teacher from an Eastern tradition or embracing the promise of Jungian psychology, but at that time I did not know of the potential value of those pathways.

At Union I was introduced to the world of biblical studies, historical theology, and contemporary religious thought. I valued and enjoyed my time at Union but seeking by means of an academic pathway what one cannot grasp rationally did not further my search. I would learn years later why I was not able to hear fully the value of much that I learned at Union. There were opportunities at Union to ask for help to understand the experience that led me to study there, but I was not able to, for reasons from my infancy and childhood that I will describe. But it is heartening to learn that Pascal wrote “Thou wouldst not seek me if thou had not already found me.” (Jones, p.66) At times we follow our heart not knowing where it is leading.

I have not forgotten a weekend led by Walter Wink, part of a course on the Gospel of Mark, during which we addressed selected passages. At the beginning of the weekend, Walter Wink's wife, an energetics teacher, led us in some movements. Somehow those movements did break through into some internal wounding which brought me to tears. I cried a long time, leaning against a tree. Some others in the class were similarly moved. After the weekend we were offered the opportunity to speak with someone about our experience. Unfortunately, I did not accept, which may have been a mistake although it may have not been the right time for me to experience again the suffering that made me cry. In retrospect, by not asking, I was protecting a facade built to protect myself from addressing the suffering experienced during the tragedy in my infancy. I feared unconsciously that breaking open the inner patterns that had been ruptured by the energetics movements would awaken again the strong hidden suffering.

At Union I was introduced to Jungian psychology which led to working for a valuable period with an analyst. He got me engaged on an important pathway although I did not understand it at the time. It was a very great loss that he died prematurely. Although I tried, I was not able to find another analyst who I thought would be helpful.

Anne Ulanov was my thesis advisor. The topic of my thesis, *The Nature of the Will*, did not directly address my real questions although it was related. Again, although an interesting subject, an academic effort was not a fruitful undertaking. I must have wanted to know if my desire for a recurrence of the mystical experience was available to the will as I understood it in a narrow sense. I did not tell Anne Ulanov what my real questions were and I did not yet know the true issues. My excuse for failing to take advantage of the opportunity to speak more fully with Anne Ulanov is that asking the right questions and finding valuable answers can only happen in its time. Maybe it was a question of courage.

After receiving my Master of Divinity degree at Union Seminary I worked part time for two years as an assistant to Sr Rachel Hosmer. At that time, she oversaw the spiritual direction program at General Theological Seminary, an Episcopal seminary in New York City. She was a sister in the Order of Saint Helena, an Episcopalian women's order. I enjoyed her companionship and the classes and the groups that were part of the program. It was an occasion to read books and essays that spoke about people's spiritual experiences and how a person might be guided in their spiritual search. I did not have a spiritual director at that time although I was working with a Jungian analyst.

James Hollis speaks of the autonomy of spiritual, psychic experience so it cannot be ignored. (online program) In retrospect I now realize I had the good fortune to be able to undertake a new pathway in response to an experience of undeniable importance.

One day, I heard Ewert Cousins, a professor at Fordham, a Jesuit University in the Bronx, speak at a quiet day, a day one chooses to step aside from the demands of daily life for rest and contemplation. Dr. Cousins spoke about Franciscan spirituality. Unexpectedly and suddenly, I was filled with hope and excitement, realizing I might find help from Dr. Cousins and others at Ford-

ham. I applied to the graduate program trusting courses about mysticism and some of the great spiritual figures of the west would help me and I could have conversations in a world where some professors would be sympathetic with my experience, my questions and longings. There I could study what people from the past wrote about mystical experiences and the journey to move toward the realization of its promise.

In my years of study there I found good friends among the students undertaking a journey like mine. I am indebted to Ewert Cousins and his broad knowledge of mysticism and spirituality. He was editorial consultant of the 107 volume *The Classics in Western Spirituality* published by Paulist Press as well as being involved in interreligious dialogue.

At Fordham, I read with care the writings of Teresa of Avila, the 15th century Spanish mystic. I wrote my dissertation about her spiritual journey which she describes using an image of moving within an interior castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal. The castle has seven main rooms within which there is increasing depth of spiritual experience and spiritual life as one moves into the interior rooms and then to the center of the castle. My awakening experience did bring me into the castle so I hoped her teaching would help me enter the interior rooms. I thought that by carefully reading her understanding of what had impeded her from entering the inner rooms, I might understand my situation. Using object relations theory, based on the work of W.R.D. Fairbairn, Melanie Klein and others I sought to understand in psychological terms the reasons she tells her Carmelite sisters why she was unable for many years to enter the interior rooms of the castle. In object relations theory the object is most commonly the mother. Relations with others as an adult are shaped by experiences with the mother or other caregivers during infancy. I certainly must have chosen the topic knowing about the tragedy at the time of my birth. The theory speaks to my personal history and was a wise topic of study, but I really did not connect emotionally with the importance of object relations for me at that time. I have continued to greatly value my study of Teresa of Avila's writing and teachings.

My Journey Continued: Watercolor Painting and Riverside Church

Upon graduation from Fordham, I did not seek to be a professor of religion as I still did not know what I would teach nor where I might teach. I somehow knew I had a home in painting as I was attracted to art through grade school and high school. And I had turned to art when I had to make a presentation in college. I had long loved painting although I had not appreciated its significant importance for me. For me it was a place of calm, enjoyment and challenge. I began painting in New York City, exhibiting at a local gallery in northern Manhattan. I spent many very satisfying years painting, enjoying occasional travel to workshops in Europe and showing my work in many competitions and private shows over the years. I won several awards, and I became a signature member of the Northeast Watercolor Society. I have sold many paintings. My watercolor painting of Edgecombe Ave in New York City is in the permanent collection of the New York Historical Society! And my painting of West 125th Street made from the elevated subway platform was acquired by Columbia University. I hope it will be hung in an appropri-

ate place. The attractive old buildings in the painting were demolished to build modern buildings for Columbia University.

The way I touched modestly into the psychic dimension of art was seeking to capture occasions of beauty I found in Argentina, in New England forests and in my travels. After several years of painting I turned to a different theme, seeking to express the importance of the New Story to me (which I elaborate on in the following section). I used imagery of Celtic origin and other sources that spoke to me of the spiritual significance of the new story. I lived quite contently during the years of watercolor painting, a place where I belonged although I did not fully embrace that for many years. For many years during my studies and while painting I was a member of Riverside Church, attracted initially by the promise of its preaching ministry. My children went to the nursery school there and Jaime sang in a community choir before joining the St Cecilia Chorus. I was baptized and became a member, serving on several committees, finding good friends, and belonging to several groups. Some of us formed a wonderful group called Grips that lasted many years with great discussions and celebrations of holidays in our homes. I was a deacon for a period which meant, among other things, giving a tray with small glasses of grape juice to the first person in a pew who then passed it to the person next to them. This raised many questions for me about what is being said at a communion service. I gradually became reluctant to volunteer and be on committees as again my spiritual search alluded me. However much I valued the time at Riverside, I still longed to enter the promise of that experience in the bedroom.

Finding My Home: A Transformative Worldview from Science and The New Story

In the early 1990s I most fortunately picked up a flyer announcing that a video series *Canticle to the Cosmos* would be shown at a Unitarian Church on Central Park West in Manhattan. I had learned Brian Swimme's name when a friend took me to Thomas Berry's Riverdale Center of Religious Research in northern New York City to hear one of his monthly talks. Thomas Berry, author and cultural historian and Brian Swimme, author and mathematical cosmologist are among the foundational voices awakening us to the new story. When I heard Swimme explain in the video series the discoveries made by physicists early in the 20th century I was shocked, excited, and deeply moved. Based on empirical and mathematical observations a non-visible energy within matter has been identified. This discovery demonstrates, as Brian Swimme explains, that a primordial creative energy permeates us and all the manifest world. Over the millennia of the evolution of the cosmos with the formation of our complex physical world, including human beings, this non-visible energetic dimension of matter is present. I was convinced that it is present within me! It can be identified as spiritual as the word spiritual (*spiritus*) refers to its energetic nature. Our belonging within the earth story means belonging within the sacred. Brian Swimme suggests the name All-Nourishing Abyss for this dimension of our being and all the natural world. Rufus Jones, Quaker author, activist, and professor, writes of the spiritual core within the universe itself. (p. 62) The words "Ground of Being" from Paul Tillich are valuable. Teilhard de

Chardin pointed to the ocean of energy suffusing the universe. Other words are aliveness, the Light, the Inner Fire.

The sacred ground may be experienced both within and around the individual and in and around the natural world as it is an intrinsic dimension of our world. It is not separate from the matter of our bodies and daily world although often outside our daily consciousness and awareness. Materialistic cultural assumptions and unconscious psychological patterns separate us from experience of this deep, pervasive interiority. Edward Whitmont, Jungian analyst and author, wrote of the importance of correcting the habit of treating the mind and matter as though they are fundamentally separate. We are now offered a fundamental shift in self-understanding of crucial importance.

As a biology student I suffered from learning the western split too well. Thomas Berry writes, our materialistic universe that comes into being by random process has tragically narrowed our identity and that of the natural world. He writes that a profound change in human consciousness can remedy the deep pathology of western dualism.

We do not live in the universe, but we are the universe in human form. Swimme writes "Each child is situated in that very place and is rooted in that very power that brought forth all the matter and energy of the universes." (Swimme, *Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* pp. 103,104) The deep self is at the center of our being, or we can say spirit field. Many of us seek to connect to this too often hidden dimension of life. The Jungian analyst and author, August Cwik, teaches in a lecture we are what we want but it is hidden from daily consciousness.

After that awakening experience in the bedroom, I thought to my surprise that I knew in a felt, nonrational (not irrational) way the answer to humanity's problems! Now that experience of knowing was finding a home in this change in worldview. We do not live in the universe, but we are the universe in human form. There does not need to be a leap of faith as required to leave an objectified world, but a difficult journey into the fullness of our identity and of the world around us. This fundamental spiritual identity is now supported within this change in worldview, so it is of foremost importance to all of us. Many people of course have found their way within many sacred teachings and stories of eastern and western origin.

Omid Safi, professor, and the Director of the Islamic Studies Center at Duke University, writes mysticism is central if there is to be a human future. Brian Swimme writes the same thing. It challenges our materialistic paradigm which divides the personality into mind and body, a split accepted for many centuries from Greek and Cartesian thought.

In light of the fundamental change in our assumptions, I could now consider freshly the awakening mystical experience in the bedroom and some other memorable experiences I had as a child under the magnificent white oak where we played in the New Jersey sand. A subtle felt experience would capture my attention. It seemed that something present, but unseen, was

seeking my attention. I regret I could not speak of them, but I have not forgotten them over these many decades. Humanity is now invited to a major transition that affirms the revelatory value of many forms of unidentified experience. Brian Swimme's video series was a turning point in my life as our transformed worldview offered a home for those experiences, the experience in the bedroom and other places.

Teresa of Avila wrote about how important it was to her to learn of God's constant indwelling presence in all of creation. She writes that some unlearned people told her that God was only present by grace, so she was troubled. She wrote in her book *the Life*: "A very learned man from the order of St. Dominic freed me from this doubt for he told me that God was present and how God communicates Himself to us: this truth consoled me tremendously." (*Life* 18.15) I too was consoled in the same manner when I learned the same thing in Brian Swimme's video series although now offered within the language and discoveries of our contemporary world view.

One name given to the many dimensions of remarkable changes in worldview is the New Story. Thomas Berry wrote that the universe is not a place, it is a story which is clear from the unbelievably long evolutionary history of our planet and universe. Our origins can be traced back 14 billion years. It was certainly a new story for me. I thought everyone must learn it and understand the remarkable changes in our self-understanding as people fully and deeply belong within a spiritual story. Now I knew what I wanted to teach! I gave workshops at Friends General Conference (an annual gathering of Quakers) about this transformative change in worldview. I also started, with the help of others, two New Story Groups. Upon learning of our transformed worldview, I could not have been more deeply awakened and joyful. I wrote the book *Awakening Universe Emerging Personhood, The Power of Contemplation in an Evolving Universe*.

The Immanence of the Spirit Has Been Known for Centuries

There is certainly a convincing congruence between the breakthrough from physics about the nature of matter and the world-wide witness of mystics. Many people throughout history have experienced firsthand the transformative ground of our being. Amazingly western science, which had placed me and much of western culture in an objectified world, now offers a wide-open door to spirituality. In my book *Depth of Belonging*, I wrote about my joy upon learning about this remarkable new worldview. The change in worldview shows that our very person and the natural world are permeated with energetic, nonvisible ground. Mystical experience arises integral to our bodies and the natural world.

Rufus Jones wrote "There is a large amount of reliable testimony coming to us from all peoples that have a literature, that persons, often of unusual sanity and wisdom, have had invading contact in the depths of their souls with the central creative Stream of Life and have become dynamic centers of spiritual energy." (p.58) He writes of "The mystical doctrine of the union of the soul at its deepest center with Soul of the Universe." (p. 59)

Even though a door had opened for me with my confidence in the depth of my belonging, the sacred presence was too often not available. As Rumi wrote:

Why Was the Sacred Presence Too Often Hidden to Me?

How could the fish not jump
Immediately from the dry land into water
When the sound of water from the ocean
Of fresh waves spring to his ear?

I could not jump. I could describe exactly where some unforgettable experiences of the sacred happened as they were of very great importance. Yet, I longed for more frequent experience and more integrated experience of being deeply at home.

I was fascinated to learn that the James Webb Telescope uses infra-red light to make it possible for astronomers to see dimensions of the universe not seen using visible light, the light spectrum that has been used traditionally to explore the night sky. The unexpected discoveries made by astronomers using the James Webb telescope are a compelling example of becoming aware of what has been hidden. Could I learn in some manner to know what had broken forth within me in the bedroom, a reality I could not know with my daily consciousness? Was there a different mode of search, of looking and seeking in my situation so I could know what was too often hidden? It is remarkable that what we search for is a reality permeating our world but hidden to our daily consciousness, often by wounding and cultural assumptions. What might be the way that I could know what has been hidden? Is there a more revealing manner of seeking? Why have I not been able to enter the deeper dimensions of my person and the world around me as I would like?

Born Within Tragedy

The loss of a young child is one of the most difficult experiences that parents can suffer. How could my mother hold me with love and attention given the death of her four-year-old son David just four days after I was born? Normally the newborn infant is held, nursed, watched carefully and is the recipient of deeply felt love and joy. These meet the irreducible emotional needs of the infant. My mother could not nurse me as she had my brothers, Ken and David. She could not intentionally push aside the severe suffering to be able to turn to loving me. In psychological language it is known that a person cannot cathect (invest with mental and emotional energy) and decathect at the same time. So, my mother could not intentionally put aside her grief (decathect) to attend lovingly to me. Her capacity to love and enjoy me was buried by her grief. She certainly did all she was able to as she was a good, faithful person.

D. W Winnicott, an English pediatrician and psychoanalyst, wrote about the physical and emotional 'holding' which is the mother's capacity to identify with her infant. How could my mother identify with me in that sense? For the infant, the sense of feeling real, feeling in touch with

others and with one's own body and its processes is born with the care of the "good enough" mother. My holding environment was not adequate but fortunately not entirely inadequate. My mother could not nurse me as she had my brothers. I lost weight as she had trouble finding a good formula. The loss of love and care reaches deeply into the infant and young child as the soul/Self is not fully awakened and brought into being. The soul/Self offers guidance and integration of our person from a deeper consciousness than our rational mind and popular culture can offer.

I fear that not only could not lovingly hold me and care for me, I absorbed her suffering and supreme grief. There was no joy and celebration about the newborn. There was no party to celebrate my birthday until I was twelve years old. I must have been a burden to my mother when she heard my cries, knowing she should respond. It was my grandmother who responded from time to time although I do not know how often as she did not live with us. The depth of the personhood of the infant is not adequately touched and nourished when the mother is not "good enough" as D. W. Winnicott explains. There is a loss of a full fundamental identity in the child and then subsequently in the adult.

The words Self and Soul are close in meaning as they carry the fundamental pattern and guiding force of each life. Soul is a sacred, integrating dimension of our person including of course the body. The soul is that which connects a person's consciousness to their inner depths. When the soul is nourished and awakened, it becomes central to the identity of the person with its sensitivity and embeddedness within the sacred Ground. Early in life a deep identity connected to the inner source of life develops. There is a felt sense of connection, belonging. It is said that each soul is the guard of the treasury of life. There is little openness in the person to become aware of Presence when the depth of our identity, the soul, has not been fully nourished and brought forth. I was not readily able to be aware of the insights and leadings of my soul as the patterns that protected me from suffering narrowed and blocked openness to the guidance and wisdom of soul. The patterns that had protected me from loss of attention and love are the same that kept me away from openness to the Self/Soul and its sacred ground. I unconsciously avoided experiencing the suffering again. I was expelled from the garden until the healing of those patterns would open the gate to the garden.

Trauma, The Wound Is the Healer

For too many years, I was not conscious of the hidden psychological patterns formed early to protect me from my mother's inability to embrace me with love and attention. The patterns to protect myself from that loss were active for years and years. In several ways I was diminished by those patterns.

If we seek to be open to the sacred depth of our being, we are risking an encounter with repressed trauma we have had to bury within ourselves. At the same time this makes trauma an

access point. It is essential that the inner situation is made conscious, otherwise it is not recognized, and it becomes fate.

Rumi wrote: "The wound is the place where the light enters."

Alchemists say, "only the wound heals." As the protective patterns that arose to bury ongoing experience of the traumatic situation become conscious and with felt experience of the suffering they have buried, there can be an internal healing. The hope of the opening pathway invites us to undertake an honest and difficult inquiry. The suffering must be experienced again.

Though it is very difficult to experience the suffering once again, when it is recognized, and the suffering need no longer be buried. An integration of repressed dimension of the Self/soul can gradually occur. There is more freedom of choice and self-understanding as one becomes free from needing to protect oneself from experiencing inner suffering again. On the internet, I listened with great interest to people's stories about the difficult consequences of trauma they had suffered. I gradually began to pay attention to some of my emotional and behavior patterns. I had thought of trauma being caused by overt events like sexual violence and experiences in war not an early situation of an infant. I knew the family history but I did not know consciously the trauma caused by the consequences of my mother's devastation.

Was I wounded? Unfortunately, I had not really been consciously aware of this possibility. Could the effect of David's death mean that my mother was not "good enough"? Why was I not conscious over so many years of being wounded? The wounding was early and the behaviors to protect myself from the early suffering were largely unconscious and unrecognized. I did not know that the mystical experience and other awakenings were an invitation to healing. Now confident from the new story and the witness of many people throughout history who have told of their experience of the sacred permeating their being, I dared to be open to identifying the patterns that had developed so early to shield me from the severe loss of attention and love. Those now unconscious patterns that enabled me to block the suffering at the same time narrowed my personhood. The talks online about trauma spoke to me. Can I lay down a heavy burden?

The gate is narrow and the way hard that leads to true life. We ask Rumi's question again: How could the soul not jump when the sound of the water from the ocean of fresh waves spring in his ear? Why was my soul not capable of jumping? Difficult honesty and attention and often unplanned coincidence of events or the help of a therapist open the door to becoming conscious of the patterns. It is difficult to know the patterns in a felt manner as they arose in a time of suffering, making it necessary to experience the very suffering in which the initial modes of self-protection developed. While certainly not intentionally planned, I think the events that began to change things, and my willingness to do this, depended on our transformed worldview. I dared to be open to become conscious trusting that my fundamental identity and its inner ordering is larger than those unconscious patterns with which I had identified. I realized that the patterns were not some primary flaw or deficit in my person. Learning about trauma allowed me to recognize the possibility of becoming conscious of those early protective patterns now no

longer needed. And given my confidence in the ongoing Presence I would not be stepping into a dangerous emptiness.

The Healing Power of Being Heard: Mary, the Mother

While lying quietly in bed one morning, I was hoping that an interior sense of quiet and warmth would arise interiorly as it had at times on other mornings. Then I began to question why I was so upset that a valued friend abruptly cut off an important conversation. I knew rationally my friend would call again or I would call, so why was I upset out of proportion to the minor event? When I was living in New York City I sometimes called a friend hoping we could get together. She was busy professionally, so she often did not have time to be with me. Although I knew of the demands of her work, I took her unavailability personally. Now I was remembering this and feeling the same way. I was upset because I had been left alone once more as I had been as an infant. I was abandoned when I expected and needed more ongoing attention. The need for a loving relationship with my mother had been broken too often. The sudden ending of the telephone conversation had awakened that trauma response in me. Now with this conscious recognition of its origins, I might respond differently to such situations in the future.

In another telephone conversation I was heard in a particularly important way. I described to a friend an insight about a topic we had previously discussed. She responded with enthusiasm and delight in a manner that I knew I had been deeply and joyfully heard. When I told her how much I appreciated her words she told me that a little red gnome-like figure (soul figure) familiar to her on previous occasions, was dancing for joy inside her when I spoke. This type of figure is recognized by people working with soul/self-imagery. My friend's joyful affirmation of what I had said was not simply rational appreciation of what I said but came from a felt interior hearing and knowing expressed by the dancing figure. My cries for my mother's love, attention and hearing were not deeply heard as that was impossible for her at that time. Wasn't the great awakening power of this conversation due to the deep, soul level of her person hearing and responding in a way my mother was not able to? This heartfelt response helped allow an unheard dimension of my being to come more to life. I must have been heard on previous occasions but only at this time, after so many years, could I fully receive being heard. We can hear a new thing only as we are ready. (Steere) The joy of being heard by my friend helped me have the courage to recognize other costly patterns. The wounding and partial loss of soul and the cost of that was gradually becoming clear to me.

At a weekend retreat some years earlier I recall being heard by Douglas Steere a much-appreciated Quaker professor and author. His talks touched my soul. When he spoke with me, I knew I was heard. I have not forgotten that awakening but the patterns I only recently was becoming conscious of were too deeply hidden at that time for me to sustain that awakening. Thank goodness for people who can hear in this manner. Douglas Steere wrote that to "listen" another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.

Several healing traditions have arisen within human history involving the feminine expression of love and care. There are stories in the Catholic tradition about healings occurring from devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, that speak to the fundamental sacred role of the mother. These are of particular interest to me given that I know the importance and meaning of Mary because of my experience of the cost of the absence of a nourishing, loving mother. Rabbi Rami Shapiro, author of *The Divine Feminine in Biblical Wisdom*, speaks of sitting on the lap of the divine mother. (online) Teresa of Avila compared the relationship with God to the mother-child relationship and thought the individual is lifted in God as the infant is lifted to the mother's breast. (Asper, p 55) Tao is feminine. In the online Mystics Summit, it was suggested that the recognition of the sacred role of the mother needs to be universalized. (Mystics Summit)

Mary has for many people become the name and feminine image that speaks of the loving mother's embrace of suffering and tragedy. Statues and images of the biblical Mary holding her crucified son can awaken the sacred depth within the observer so they too many embrace their losses, inner wounding and suffering within themselves. They may find healing as the loss is not the final story of their lives. The love that was missing in the past is now carried by Mary's image and story that can bring a healing conjunction, a healing integration of the wound and the loving sacred feminine within the suffering person.

The inner wounds of a person contemplating Mary can be held within the healing sacred feminine dimension evoked by her image. The person reverently pondering the sculpture may be awakened to know that she too can offer healing love to her wounds and losses. As Mary holds her son, we may also embrace our wounding and that of others.

My suffering was from not being "heard" at a soul level which includes being embraced physically and my cries and needs deeply heard. I think the listening and caring of my friend during that conversation when I was heard by her inner dancing soul figure was an occasion when the sacred healing energy was expressed based a deep listening within my friend that when spoken became a healing sacred voice for me. My inner depth, my soul, was truly "heard" and I could embrace and receive what she said. There is healing as the caring person, a Mary, expresses in some way her inner divine love and expresses it. My soul was strengthened so in turn it could embrace the wounded dimensions of my person.

People who know Mary's story of loving embrace of her son or other stories of expression of the divine feminine can learn to listen to and trust that the sacred depth of that power within themselves will emerge again. It is important that as my life goes on the awakened divine soul dimension within me can become an internal Mary. I do not need to criticize myself and suffer over the wounding but reluctantly accept the consequences of my early wounding. With the awakened inner compassion and love the costly suffering can be heard and healed.

How David's Death Impacted My Life

The patterns that follow have become clear to me. I describe them based on my personal experience and understanding of the consequences of the trauma of my early months and years.

I now understand that my lack of awareness of my suffering and loss of love in my infancy resulted in lack of empathy for the struggles and sufferings of others. By protecting myself from the suffering caused by my mother's inability to love me I have unconsciously avoided a full felt response to another's suffering.

It has been especially important to me to do well and achieve academically. This pattern of needing to achieve is valuable in many ways in our culture but it pulls attention away from experiencing many positive engagements and one's unconscious suffering and the central need for healing. I studied too many long hours when my children were young and so became unaware of some of their needs for companionship and attention. They have suffered from the consequences of some of my wounds although they thrive in many ways. The passing on of trauma from one generation to another is widely recognized.

As a young child, I had no opportunity to laugh wholeheartedly and to have fun. The loss of full personhood has included the loss of spontaneous vitality. I have enjoyed many things a great deal, but I lacked full, spontaneous enjoyment. I remember well an occasion involving our group of nine college classmates who lived on the third floor of an old building on campus. My classmates were carrying on in our living room about some event. I stayed at my desk across the hall as I did not know how to engage in such frivolity and nonsense. Given my early history I did not belong in such an occasion requiring a freedom to be silly and laugh wholeheartedly.

Once when my husband and I were watching a dance in St Mark's Square in Venice, a young woman, perhaps a young teenager, caught my attention. She clearly loved to dance, was full of energy and almost childlike. I started to cry as she touched something in me. I felt she was deceived, that such dancing would be brief as she did not know in her innocence how life really is.

As I have written, I too often did not ask for help when there was an opportunity. I feared, without realizing it, the buried suffering might come to the surface. I was protecting my persona, my facade that covered my suffering.

I think my struggle with accelerated heart rate, tachycardia, is from an underlying anxiety that developed in my early situation. Also I assume it is a consequence of pushing myself to hard to achieve hoping to compensate for my low self-esteem.

I could not assume easy acceptance by comrades nor easily offer friendship. The basic invitation to fully respond was buried and was not brought forth. It is recognized that if you have a lack of experience of love it is hard to love. I did fall in love with my good husband.

I have not had much discipline regarding meditation and prayer. Understandably, I was prone to giving up when there was no response to my hopes. My waiting and longing did not bear fruit when I was an infant and young child. One silent retreat offered by Douglas Steere was particularly important to me as I experienced a strong invitation and inner movement toward knowing the sacred fullness of my being. But I was not able to sustain the experience when I returned to daily life. I resorted too quickly to my old busy patterns.

Rufus Jones explains there is no necessary dualism between the divine Spirit and human spirit. "There is but one possible separation between them, namely sin which like a cataract destroys vision, not the light, and which, once removed, leaves the two spirits face to face." (Jones, p. 66) I have not identified these patterns as sin, but they are of that nature as they caused harm to others and alienated me from my full spiritual being. I now appreciate having learned this compassionate understanding of the source of much human sin.

Fortunate Ways I Was Sustained

It is important to say that I have been fortunate to be sustained in several ways by life on the farm without which my life would have been much more difficult. As a young girl I spent hours picking blackberries that grew by a long ditch. Although blackberry stems have very sharp thorns that must be avoided, I enjoyed picking them and I was pleased to earn some money selling them by the quart. I sometimes packed sweet corn and sorted peaches that would be taken by truck often driven by my brother to Philadelphia. We ate fresh sweet corn and ripe peaches at many meals. I loved ice-skating on our pond, sledding down the barn hill and down the lane. I sometimes played in the hay in the barn with friends. Our dogs Sally and then Taffy responded wholeheartedly to me. We always had a cat or two who often purred on my lap. I could watch my father milk our two cows by hand as he leaned his head against the cow's side. We often saw the barn owl fly majestically out of the barn as night fell. The earth is often a great mother.

Family and the local community were very important support. Both my mother and father's family lived nearby so we gathered on holidays and special occasions. I played for long hours with two young boys, Bruce and Doug, who lived across the street. I recently had wonderful conversations with Bruce sharing memories from 70 years ago! It was a great pleasure to call to mind playing in the New Jersey sand, riding bicycles, and playing games. Fortunately, I was a good athlete and a good student, so I found a sustaining place in high school. When I was in high school my mother picked me up late in the afternoon after her work when I had finished hockey practice, basketball and softball practices and after games against other high school teams. I remember fondly that my mother read to me every night when I was a child. I am grateful that over the years I was supported and sustained in many ways. How exceedingly difficult it must be for people who are not sustained in some manner by their community and the natural world.

Beginning to Sing

I have described in these pages my search as an adult to find support and understanding to respond to the invitation of the mystical experience. Although some pathways that did not seem initially to help, by a long, circuitous pathway a way opened for me from some of my academic studies, several retreats, discovering and embracing the New Story and work with the early trauma.

I intend that this essay be a form of singing, a sad song in many ways but an important song for me as a person who was born into “an impeded stream.” (Wendell Berry, in the poem “Our Real Work”) I did begin to sing joyfully after learning and understanding the new story and its remarkable personal significance for me, human identity and culture. My workshops and occasional talks and gathering with friends to form groups who study and celebrate the wisdom of the new story have been a manner of singing.

I have returned to my Quaker heritage seeking to find wisdom in that tradition as well. Quakerism and the New Story have much in common as Quakerism has often been identified as a mystical tradition. I abandoned Quakerism because of the objectified worldview I learned as a science student and the wounding of my very early years. I did not believe that the Inner Light was available to me as promised by the Religious Society of Friends. It was through Brian Swimme’s teaching of the profound change in worldview that I could embrace the promise of the Inner Light. I hope Quakers will study and gradually embrace the new story as it can only strengthen the tradition as it is placed in our comprehensive new sacred story. Quakerism can also embrace and celebrate the Christian message and tradition although understood in the context of our transformed worldview.

Prayer of Quiet

I am now wondering if my recent experience of what I think Teresa of Avila would have called the prayer of quiet arises, at this time, because there has been important inner healing. The prayer of quiet is a profoundly attractive experience of the arising of a centering inner movement. It is described as an infused recollection that quietly captures attention bringing great gratitude. The spiritual depth within my person is, I dare believe, quietly arising as it is no longer so firmly blocked. Rufus Jones wrote: The soul becomes in fact, a channel of the Infinite reality

Experience of the prayer of quiet suggests there has been some inner healing, a *coniunctio* – a coincidence of opposites within the psyche. The coincidence of opposites addresses the situation when there are opposites in the psyche, one healing and one wounding. The opposites in my history are the invitation of the mystical experience which could not be embraced and lived as it has been opposed by the wounding that prevented experience and lived expression of that invitation.

Coniunctio, writes Daryl Sharp of Inner-City Books, refers to the archetypal image of the union of opposites. There is an unfolding and deepening of consciousness within the depths of the psyche. With a coniunctio, the sacred healing power of the soul can arise in the interior of the wounded person. It is the goal of individuation involving the conscious unfolding of the Self/ soul.

Incendence

Teresa of Avila's description of the prayer of quiet is very helpful and valuable in the context of her interior castle image and her confidence in the immanence of God. We may ask how the prayer of quiet is understood in the context of our transformed worldview? Remarkably, the prayer of quiet is well understood as belonging within what Thomas Berry calls incendence. Berry has proposed the word incendence to describe the descent of the soul within our transformed worldview. This has been important to me as it avoids the word transcendence that can easily suggest that the experience of the sacred means we have spiritually moved beyond or outside our inner being. The experience is distinct from daily consciousness but it arises integral to our being. Transcendence and incendence are not entirely opposites as both involve experience of the sacred but incendence avoids the assumption that the sacred is above (trans) the person and the world around us. It keeps the sacred imminent to the natural world. It is especially important that the sacred is not pulled out of our earth being. The worldview I learned as a biology student did pull me out of the sacred within me and the natural world

David Sparenberg writes in an article from Counter Currents available online that what we need and are ultimately groping for is the sensitivity required to respond to the psychic (spiritual I would say) energy deep within the very structure of life itself. My pathway that I have described is of this nature as the healing of the wounds did enable a descent into the interior of my being, an incendence.

The Prayer of Quiet is Healing

The prayer of quiet is a resolution of my troubling question and anger about the lifelong costly wounding caused by the consequences of a random accident, my brother falling in a ditch as he played. Doesn't this healing prayer of quiet mean that the wounds of the random events have been healed at least in part? The healing coniunctio, not a rational decision, speaks to how the sacred depths of the psyche address the costly fragmentation caused by the consequences of a random event.

It has been important to learn from Sarbmeet Kanwal, a physicist, that randomness is fundamental in quantum physics. He teaches this opens the door to creativity and possibility in evolution and within our person. In the Newtonian world I was taught, random events are not part of a creative whole but are only open to being addressed by our rational efforts. Now within our New Story, we can seek to learn to cooperate with the choices and directions opened by the

random event. However difficult the consequences, they do open new directions for our lives. The awakening spiritual experience and the tragedy when I was born did compel a search for an openness to a resolution not addressed in the Newtonian world I had learned.

Rufus Jones writes an understanding he found in Ghandi's thought: "...something vaster than man's will or thought or scheme or plan flows through the sincere and dedicated soul." (Rufus Jones p.59)

The healing within the embrace of the sacred, often best imaged as feminine, is of the same nature. Sometimes my early cries were not lovingly heard but when I was truly heard, the defenses protecting me from that costly loss were no longer needed and the energy they captured was integrated (a coniunctio) within the soul/Self. In the story of healing occurring with my friend, who was Mary for me, there was healing of the consequences of a random event.

I can reluctantly accept the loss and consequences of the tragedy that was suffered in my family. The new story opens the door to a more comprehensive order in which the consequences (wounding) of the random event are carried and may be healed as just described. I can reluctantly embrace the consequences of that random event as they have been healed at least in part within the healing dynamics of the psyche. I am no longer relegated to being separated from the fullness of my being.

With the recognition of the consequences of the family tragedy I may let go to my belonging within my community, family and the natural world. We are held by the indwelling divine, valuably imaged as feminine especially when the wounding is very early. Some traditions have called this comprehensive hidden sacred (spiritus) dimension of our world the embrace of God. James Hollis says God is a personification of archetypal healing energies integral to the Self/Soul. There is much wisdom in the many branches of spiritual traditions but often expressed with images that are now hard for us to hear.

My Song

I have gained more personal confidence and authority and sometimes connect with others from a different interior place. Now I can recognize I have created some paintings that are beautiful whereas not long ago I could not. At a recent exhibit I actually believed someone who said a particular painting is beautiful. I can own my insights that arise from an unexpected identity. Sometimes I can reject tasks and expectations that are not congruent with my identity as I gain awareness (knowledge) of who I am and what I am led to do. On my daily early evening walks I enjoy the wonderful variety of dogs, the carefully selected beautiful flowers in front yards, the bees confidently flying to the next flower, the magnificent oak trees, the attractive design of many houses, young children who have just learned to walk and people of all ages and colors. I am at home with the wide variety of people walking, some with crutches and canes, talking and sometimes begging in Central Square.

The song of the new story is the offer of a deep belonging of various human communities within which there can be a change in consciousness that can move our culture to address our precarious ecological future and global human power struggles.

Now I finally understand, at least in part, what that awakening mystical experience was about. It was an invitation to healing so the fullness of my being could gradually come to life. We may overcome by grace not by will. I seek to have compassion for myself, letting go of the anger about the costs of the wounding. I am slowly becoming a different person, one who can even celebrate life! I hope to continue quietly along. May we all learn to be more compassionate and may there be further healing and unfolding in all of us.

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Bio:

Mary C. Coelho has an M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary and a PhD in Historical Theology from Fordham University. In addition to writing about the importance of the New Story, focusing particularly on the spiritual journey in our new context, she has led workshops and worked with the formation of New Story study groups. Her work includes exploration of the consequences of trauma on finding our way spiritually. Mary is a watercolor painter who has exhibited widely. She is a signature member of the Northeast Watercolor Society.

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“It was upon grasping some of the fundamental discoveries of the New Story and integrating them as possible and appropriate, with my theological studies, at Union Theological Seminary and Fordham University, that I began teaching and writing about the spiritual pathway that has opened for us. This integration, when coupled with understanding and experiencing how the consequences of trauma have blocked the deepening of my spiritual pathway, a profound healing, life-giving pathway opened. This pathway can help humankind address the costly consequences of trauma, certainly by no means new, although freshly understood and available to us within the New Story.” *Mary C. Coelho*