

In the Beginning and Now

Joan Dallaway (2006)

When I 'retired', I toyed with the idea of writing a book. It would be called '*Don't Let Mushrooms Grow on Your Soul*' - wording originally from an interchange between Mathew Fox and Rupert Sheldrake curiously buried in my memory - its sentiment standing like a sentinel within my being.

As a child I was fiercely curious. I was adventurous and, I'm told, always running away. Perfect wisdom I think for one whose soul will not tolerate mushrooms! There is always more! So much to explore, experience, share, enjoy and celebrate. CPE is one such adventure for me!

History

Born in Wales, the third of four daughters I was named Joan. In the Anglican Service of Thanksgiving for the birth of a child, there is a space for parents to tell the story of the selected name. My parents would have said that they hoped for a boy who they would call John, but Joan is what they got! Throughout my childhood years I tried so hard to be John to my father, his "mate". Puberty brought the inevitable witness to my femininity and the sad loss of the closeness we had shared.

My birthdate is the date of the death of my eldest sister Joyce's death. I was conceived and carried in the womb of my grieving mother. My then remaining elder sister was called Shirley, so named by Joyce. Joyce had declared that her baby sister was to be "Shirley Temple" so called after the then child film star. When I was seven years old our baby sister June arrived, Shirley developed TB and our lives were irrevocably changed. My father, twenty years older than my mother, never really recovered from the trenches of World War 1. Following that war he had returned to be a miner and lived with the constant threat of disease or death from mining. At June's birth and Shirley's illness, coupled with the stresses of a world again at war, he became overwhelmed by grief and responsibility. My mother soldiered on courageously, assisted by her unmarried sister, but my days of curiosity and adventure were subsumed as I took on the role of 'responsible caregiver.' My life became serious and mushrooms began to take hold!

My mateship with my father had taken me on many adventures, walking with him to the top of Betws Mountain where he had taught me to take off my shoes in order to experience God in creation. It was here that I learned to see, hear, feel and smell God; it was here I learned to know the deepest gift of close observation. These experiences and my role of caregiver powered me into the caregiving roles of ministry, admitted me to the world of theological training and CPE. CPE's gift in return was to assist me to delve deep into where the mushrooms had taken hold, to scrape them off my soul and re-ignite my spirit of curiosity and adventure. I had a passion to discover and to unearth. Like a miner, I plumbed the depths within me, and was privileged to share in un-earthing with others. I often felt like an archaeologist at first digging deep, then with feather strokes brushing off the crust of ages to find the core of unique creation hidden beneath. CPE dug and brushed me into realisation of my vocation to priesthood, one held deep and secret within me as woman growing up in a "man's world" where priests were definitively NOT women! The mushrooms were scraped off this construct to reveal the deeper mythology and a theology of God's will for me. I was 36 years old; I had deeply enjoyed the roles of teacher, wife, and mother; now these roles were to be broken open to the core within me that connected them all. God had called me to be priest and I was ordained with those first Anglican women to be priested in Aotearoa/NZ in 1978.

The Impact of CPE

Personal

In our home we have a painting bought during my first CPE unit. It is of various shades of blue, from ultramarine to cobalt with a vivid white multiple cross piercing through its central darkness. It is like a super-nova explosion. This painting expressed the major impact of that first CPE on me. It was as if God's hand broke through to my mushrooms and let in the light. I returned to the interrupted journey of my pilgrim soul. I read widely and voraciously, was encouraged to test my vocation and entered a diocesan training for priesthood; such joy in learning to theologise all aspects of life. I was given *Zen and the Art of Motor Cycle Maintenance* and asked to write a theological reflection on its content. I reconnected with my early learnings with my father, to experience God in all things.

Relationships

I am told by my family that they wondered what had happened to me at this time. I was not the person they had known! I had a new assurance. I was clear about what I could and would do or not. The old "shoulds, oughts and musts" began to fade. I was undoubtedly less easy to live with! Social constructs were deconstructed and my old, but still very youthful curiosity returned with a vengeance to ask meaning-seeking questions.

For the first time I knew collegiality; I was not alone on this pilgrimage. I began to make what have become lifelong allegiances with CPE colleagues, so very precious when everything else seemed so transitory. For my final supervisory training I went to Australia where my colleagues taught me to play, to drink red wine, and to meet at the pub on a Friday evening to reflect on our week at CPE, our lives and our questions. They also introduced me to an infinity of reading resources about pastoral care and human development.

Professional

My first CPE was a stepping stone from which I stepped out of teaching and into pastoral ministry. Years later I know that I haven't stopped teaching but have simply integrated it into being a learner. In pastoral ministry I learned the reciprocity of learner and teacher. I have been ongoingly blessed by those with whom I have been called to care. I learned what an Aboriginal woman once shared, that my liberation was caught up with hers; my growth came from within the struggle of shared pain, conflict and celebration.

At this time I was studying psychology, psychotherapy/counselling and theology. These disciplines sometimes claimed me in ways that caused splits and divisions. I committed myself to seek integration in all I learned, to find the core where the dissonances found harmony. I am deeply grateful that I took this climb - to enjoy Matthew Fox, Starhawk, Sam Keen, Meister Eckhart, Brueggemann, Bettelheim, Robinson, Bowlby, Rogers, and Clackson etc. - and to enjoy my colleagues, students and clients for their wisdom that enabled me to soar. These were heady times, truly mountain-top experiences which often fed me in later steps through darker and more conflicted paths.

Theological

The greatest gift I now carry in my 'kete' is the gift of unknowing! I cannot "know" in the sense of expert knowledge that speaks of any fundamental "truth"; I can sit within the "Cloud of Unknowing", enter the struggle for meaning that is my own and another's, to be curious, to explore and to experience revelations. This keeps me asking my curious questions as at the beginning of my life. I do not have the answers for my own or another's life, yet paradoxically I am asked to be willing to share the fullness of my realities. Somewhere in that mutuality is the third other, an apprehending, a revelation that I experience as *metanoia*, as *koinonia*, as *God*.

Conclusion

CPE for me is not just a discipline: rather it is a way of life. A life lived moving forward not knowing, while looking back, reflecting on the discoveries along the way. A gift of my commitment to integrating wisdom, experience, and knowledge has been the emergence of what I have called the '*three pastoral questions*'. They live with me each day: 1) "*Where are you?*" (God's first question to all created beings);

2) "*Will you be whole?*" or "*Do you want to be whole?*" (Jesus' question to the man at Bethsaida, and to me today). Jesus' continuing comment was "for if you do, then take up your bed and follow me". There is a discipline to be followed, ongoing relationships to be maintained;

3) "*What do you want of me?*" (Jesus asked this covenant question of the blind man, and in my blindness I am to meet it daily). What is my covenant?

My answer to myself is: "Keep moving, as pilgrim mushrooms cannot grow in such environments!"