

Newsletter- March 2007

Dear friends,

As of March 9, I will be halfway through my planned three-year sabbatical (Sept. '06 to Sept. '09), mid-way through the year set aside for stillness. I want to take a moment to let you know how things are going, but it feels difficult to speak or write without falling into old cadences that belong to who I was but am no longer. I do not yet know how to allow the words to flow from the emptiness, from the sacred spaciousness that I am discovering is the only constant in this being alive. So this may be, of necessity, a bit rambling and disjointed.

Thoughts about longing come, but they are new, embryonic and only partly formed. I have only just recognized in myself a deep and defensive aversion to wanting, a life-time strategy of attachment to not-wanting developed in the hopes of preserving the illusion of an wholly independent (and therefore hopefully safe) self. The cost of this protective strategy- a loss of ability to really receive all that is offered in each moment- is too high, but even knowing this I am occasionally, for moments, plunged into old terrors as an illusion that offered so much comfort for so long is shattered.

Each day is mercurial, nothing like the one before it. Some days are dull and others are filled with vivid color. Some moments are calm, filled with infinite peace, and others are agitated and overwhelming. Change is the only constant. What can I tell you that is for certain? That I am healthy today. That even as my menopausal body surprises me with signs of aging that seem to belong to someone else, I feel a vitality I have not felt since I was a child. That I am grateful to be alive, to have this time and space in which to find the stillness and wander away into distraction and return to the stillness, over and over again. That I love this earth. That each new day I am finding my way back to the wilderness within that sustains life and passion. That I am slowly replacing grasping expectations with soft hopes, determined resolutions with constant prayer.

I am reminded of lines from Dante's *La Commedia Divina*, sometimes translated:

*In the middle of the road of my life
I awoke in the dark wood
where the straight road was lost.*

I will tell you the truth: this being still, this choosing to face each day without agenda or plan, waiting to see where the impulse to move- God's soft whisper from deep within- will take me, this staying with not-knowing what will come next has been one of the most challenging and rewarding times in my life. I sleep when I need to sleep for as long as my body needs rest. I take all the time I need and want for daily prayer, meditation, writing in my journal, yoga, reading, snowshoeing in the deep snow and sitting by the wood stove watching the fire. Most days, by the time I have taken these inward journeys it's time to prepare dinner. I stay in touch with close friends but often I see no one but Jeff when he returns from work at the end of the day. I watch the chickadees, junkos, scarlet cardinal and squawking blue jays at the birdfeeder. I study the

tracks in the snow drifts around the house and in the woods, seeing there the stories of deer, coyotes and a multitude of bunnies.

I don't want to give you the impression that I am living in a bubble, unaware of the larger world. We don't have television and our internet connection is of the slower-than-molasses-dial-up variety, so input comes pretty exclusively and selectively from books, CBC radio and occasional DVD rentals. Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* has inspired Jeff and I to educate ourselves about taking our home off the grid with renewable energy and reducing our overall energy needs. Watching the blatant spiritual materialism of *The Secret* (a movie that takes the well-known truth that your mind can have a profound influence over many situations and twists it into the promise that your mind has complete control over all situations!) was discouraging. Hearing about the growing popularity of this movie's message to focus on ego control and unquestioning consumerism, I feel a great sadness. On the other hand, Andrew Harvey's recorded presentation on the transformational power of the sacred feminine as the dark mother offers me a way of seeing my journey during this time, provides courage for the fires that reveal my shadow and sweep away my illusions, gives hope for rebirthing individually and collectively into new ways of being in and with the world. Having stepped away from being in the world as writer/teacher/public speaker, I feel myself in the transformational arms of this divine feminine. Often I feel I am disappearing. On a good day I am filled with excitement and curiosity to see what will remain when all I thought I was is consciously recognized as merely thought. And I write in my journal:

The tightness inside I hardly knew was there is slowly unwinding. There are muscles, tendons, and ligaments, beliefs, concepts and ideas that have been continuously striving to get it right, to reach for and hang on to some "ideal" way of being that are loosening a little each day. This tightening has been going on for over thirty years, so perhaps it is reasonable to expect this unwinding, this undoing of the habit of trying to take a little time. Like a spring wound too tight, if it is released too quickly the flexibility needed for opening and closing- the movement of life- could be lost. I trust the Sacred Mystery, the God I have known all my life, to speak to me in a way I cannot miss when the time is right for moving in the world again.

On other days, days that are harder, the sense of disappearing makes my chest tighten with fear. My mind reaches for information, seeks to create a "program," make plans and explore future possibilities. I on those days I want to find some reassurance that I can find a "straight road" out of the "dark woods." But when I reach to know where this journey will take me, when I resist the meandering of this time, I am instantly and overwhelmingly exhausted. I dream of an old woman, a Grandmother, who tells me, "You must make friends with your tiredness." And again, I write in my journal:

How many levels of letting go are there? How many layers of giving up this war with reality, surrendering the compulsive daily movement meant to reassure ourselves that we are doing something that will "make a difference." I have dropped down below surface layers of hanging on and pulling away, but I am still miles from the bedrock of being. But ideas of time and distance do not really apply here. Willingness and grace melt ceaseless struggle in an instant. The gift of sweet surrender meets all resistance like sunlight dissolving a whisp of cloud in the clear blue sky. And it is a gift, this surrendering, not something any "I" can achieve or make

happen, a generosity, a continuous flowing toward me whether I am mindful or forgetting, at my best or my worst or- more often- somewhere in between.

So, I make friends with the tiredness, the occasional impatience, the moments of anxiety and distraction, the hours of not-knowing. I welcome them, knowing they do not interfere with but in fact are part of what is longed for and needed. I let go of wanting to be anyone in particular, or any way in particular, and for an instant, I am free.

May you be well and happy. May we find an internally and externally sustainable way of living together on this green earth.

Oriah