

September 2007

The News

As the third and final year of my three year sabbatical begins (Sept. '07- Sept.'08) I wanted to send along an update. After a year of slowing down, followed by a year of sitting still, I begin now, a year of dreaming. I'm happy to report that I am well. I have probably not been this healthy or had this much energy since I was a child. That's what comes of being at home, sleeping when I need to, eating well and allowing myself to be still. This summer, as I neared the end of the second year, I started to wonder, what's next? What did the old women who appear in my night-time dreams, the Grandmothers, mean when they said I would spend the third year of this time dreaming?

In July Jeff and I went up to a wonderful place, Kukagami Lodge, in northern Ontario. The only guests at the small off-the-grid lodge, we spent our days canoeing and reading and listening to the loons at this wilderness retreat. Then, on the third day, after doing my morning prayers and meditation, I sat with my journal and wrote out an outline for a novel. A novel, just like that! And since then I have been dreaming- writing- the story of Isabel, a twenty-seven year old philosophy student who has been drawn into the workings of a dreamers' wheel, a group of people dedicated to and trained in the ancient shamanic practice of lucid dreaming together to hold a place for the co-creation of a new dream of the people, a dream of wholeness that will help guide human beings through the current and impending ecological crisis. Of course, Isabel, as a rational modern woman is skeptical, and there are other forces at work- those who oppose the work of the dreamers and are willing to go to great lengths to stop Isabel from joining the wheel. . . .

You get the idea. The most surprising thing about writing fiction has been how much fun I am having. Most days I am anxious to get to it just to see what happens and where Isabel's adventure will take her. I am about one third of the way through the rough draft (and I can see that fiction will require many rewrites) and I plan to just keep going. I still don't know if I will return to doing any public speaking or workshop facilitation, but I trust these things will become clear as the year unfolds. In the meantime, I am dreaming/writing the story of Isabel and the dreamweavers.

I want to thank those of you who have been in touch via snail mail and email during this time of silence and solitude. It has been lovely to be reminded that I remain, of course, deeply connected to the world. If you receive this newsletter more than once please forgive me and know I am spending my time finding out how Isabel escapes from the bookstore basement where she has been trapped instead of updating and integrating my mailing list.

Below is a brief reflection I wanted to share with you.

May the adventure continue.

Blessings, Oriah

Gratitude for Gunfire

Lately, I've been thinking about how much life's little difficulties help me show up for and appreciate my life. This has occurred to me as I find myself giving thanks in the morning for the quiet where I live, for the whisper of the wind in the pines, the song of birds calling the sun up, and for the police who may or may not choose today for target practice in the quarry about a mile from our home. That's right- the police have a rifle range within easy listening distance of our wonderful home in the woods. When we first moved here we were told the officers used the range periodically and no more than once a week for short periods of time. Home on sabbatical it became apparent that the shooting is sometimes more frequent and seemingly unpredictable. I was devastated. I seethed silently, I fumed vocally, I threatened to pack up our belongings and find a new place to live.

After a few weeks of this, I called the police training facility and asked about the shooting. The lovely man in charge of the schedule has since done his best to limit the shooting, arrange it at times when it is least disruptive and let me know when it is going to happen. His consideration has made all the difference in the world. With my anxiety about living in the midst of never-ending gunfire dissipated, I discovered something else: knowing there would be target practice Thursday, I found myself really noticing and sinking into the quiet on other days whether I was doing my morning practice, pulling weeds in the garden, or washing the kitchen floor.

uddenly, I began to really savor the silence, knowing that it- like everything else- would pass. That's when I started including the officers who use the firing range in my prayers of gratitude. And I mean it! Their noise has helped me fully receive and appreciate the gift of the quiet that surrounds me most of the time. I'm not just making virtue out of necessity. I really taste the quiet in a new way when I know there will be times when it is not available.

This got me thinking about how hard it is to be mindful of and really appreciate the things that are more or less a constant in our lives, The times when things don't match my preferences can be teachers of deep gratitude. There's nothing like illness to make me appreciate being healthy, insomnia to make a good night's sleep feel like a gift, a loved one's absence to make me think fondly of the very idiosyncrasies that previously drove me a little crazy. I'm not suggesting that we have to go out and look for or create lack in order to be grateful for what we have. Change is constant. and so there will be an ebb and flow of those things we experience as both desirable and undesirable. Nor am I saying that we should never take action to change conditions. When I'm ill I go to bed and take the herbs that will help me recover. Someday we may move, and if we do, it may in part be because we want to be away from the firing range. What I am saying is that instead of seeing the things that are not the way I would like them to be (like folks shooting guns where I can hear them) as nothing but barriers to my peace and happiness, I can recognize how they help me deepen my gratitude for my life.

Thinking about how this works with external conditions in our lives I started to appreciate how it works with internal states. Moments of agitation and fear really heighten my awareness and appreciation for moments of deep peace and fearlessness, so how could I not be grateful for them all- the agitation, the fear, the peace and the fearlessness- as they come and go?

Remembering what matters, things I thought I could never forget, is sweet at least in part because it ends, for a time, the pain of forgetfulness. And the remembering is savored fully because, being human, I know forgetfulness will return. Really knowing that all conditions, internal and external, shall pass, helps me show up fully for this moment with curiosity and gratitude for whatever it has to offer. Including the conditions that do not line up with my preferences in my expressions of gratitude I am more able to love what is and then, hopefully, take action from a place of mindful appreciation instead of fear.

So here's my thanks to the Ontario Provincial Police for their target practice in my area, and for all the other things that sometimes feel like obstacles but offer me a chance to live with a deeper sense of gratitude.

Oriah