

**Jane Allen**

**DISABLED**

This winter I was offering a series of Saturday workshops. A client told me that a young woman with M.S. was interested in coming and wanted me to phone her as she had difficulty in speaking. I phoned and found the first group she could attend was - 'The Seven Ages of Man' advertised as follows:

*"Change can seem threatening, as can ageing - at any age! But change is also growth and blossoming which we miss if we hold too tightly to our expectations. A day to re-evaluate ourselves and look hopefully to the future."*

I was slightly anxious - could she look hopefully to the future? Her speech was very poor, did this mean she was nearing the end - would the workshop be too much for her?

I need not have worried; April epitomised the whole focus of the workshop, the group and I learned from her. She arrived early, I went to help her with her wheel chair. She gave me a direct look and said, *"If I go at my own pace, I can cope"*. That resonated with me -I had once had heart trouble and also needed my slow pace to be respected.

Reliving a peak experience I was aware of how the exhilaration of that moment freed her speech. I felt both humbled and excited and needed to express it in the following poem when I got home..

**A SOUL**

April you came like a breath of Spring air,  
    your eyes - sharing so much of your spirit.  
You never moaned about your twisted body,  
    you asked not for preferential treatment,  
    but rather that you might be allowed to move at your own pace  
    wanting to be independent -  
    pulling your wheel chair up the steps after you.  
In the group of strangers you spoke with such courage and confidence  
You spoke too of a journey of two miles in your Tricycle -

It's completion "As exciting as climbing Everest!"  
but only two miles!"  
Lets acclaim that triumph as loudly as we acclaim  
Everest's conquerer.  
As much courage, fortitude, effort and endurance,  
on a minute scale.  
Do we, with straight bodies,  
mirror such qualities?  
April, your coming brought me such joy -  
a glimpse of Heaven on Earth -  
Thank you.

This I sent to her.

The next workshop she came to, she said, "*I'm a shy person and don't often talk, but the last group made me feel so welcomed; it gave me so much courage and I know I talked and talked - it was you who gave me that courage*".

This group had a focus on Body, Feelings, Mind. After one exercise, April said to her partner, "*I like you, but I've begun to dislike the majority of people*". Later she was horrified that she got in touch with rage, "*That's not me!*" She was able to work with the rage at being trapped in a body that didn't work - but also the rage at those people who saw her only as a disabled body.

She is now more determined to develop her mind and to accept her own worth in a group of 'ordinary' people.

I hope she gets more chances to be alongside the 'ordinaries', and that they will recognise her strength and joy, as well as accepting her weakness. It's up to me and you.

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