

Narelle Grace

## I FELT LIKE WRITING

**Creative writing as therapy**

**Wednesday**

I've felt like writing for days. I don't know why - nor do I know what. Perhaps it's the loneliness getting to me - hitting right down in the gut. Last night after Group I sat in the car and cried. I'm crying now, just writing this, and the writing and the page are blurred. I remember thinking, with my forehead resting on the hard, supportive steering wheel and my arms hugging my belly: "What do I need? What do I want?" The answer came back muddled, racing: "Someone close; companion, friend, lover; bodies, sex, warmth; clinging, feeling, caressing; confiding, understanding, sharing; an ear, a mouth, a person who leans and is leaned on, who gives and receives. Mutual exchange". To this I replied: "Yeah well. I always expect too much". . . . Yet it seems so little really.

**Wanted. Part-time.** A mental, spiritual, physical emotional, wave-length kindred spirit.

"ON EARTH? As it is in HEAVEN?" YES. HERE. NOW.

Sitting there I felt my tension and my needing; cursed my tears, not knowing where to take them, wanting desperately to dump them on some broad shoulder, or at least a willing one. "Don't be so sorry for yourself", I ordered and carried on sobbing, still rigid inside. Later, looking into the night, accepting despair, alone, telling myself: "You're not the only one". It didn't help. The battle continued. For me, I **am** the only one. "Stop whining". Negation.

I hate being a "psychiatric 'patient'", another statistic, an agoraphobic, a 'mental' case. Classified. Labelled. I hate the fear and the insecurity and the seeming never-ended-ness of the whole thing. That's what the Group is all about, you see. It's for humans like me - scarred, lonely, anxious, phobic, burdened unsupported etc. - ad infinitum.

But mostly it's a weekly social event, a happening, a meeting place where, for a while, I can almost feel "normal" - amongst the "abnormal"! Where my optimism, pessimism, bizarre sense of humour and empathy interplay with abandon throughout the cadences of conducted orchestration, gathering courage and healing; offering and receiving.

But when I leave, the world outside reminds me that to the friendly psychiatrist I am a patient/client/person; to some Group members I am an upstart who presents and acts so much more OK than they; to my family I'm an enigma, barely the same any more, a daughter/sister/mother who is no longer forever reliable; to myself I am a stranger and nuisance; to my **real** friends I am me - changed, but me. Thank God for my loving, long-suffering, baffled friends. Then there are those who don't know about my "state". To them I am a competent mother, woman, housekeeper, counsellor, nurse, and a bright, perceptive, mature University student. Somewhat eccentric, but nonetheless witty, single-minded, pleasant, tough and wilful. Crazy, the entire scene. How I detest the gloomy challenge of everyday housework; the built-in expectations; the total responsibility of lone parenthood.

"Ladies and gentlemen, observez la différence" - between what I appear to be and what I really am. And I can't even claim schizophrenia. It's all too easy at times, the trickery. Like the black velvet cloak a very fat person dons in order to look thin or at least to camouflage those unacceptable rolls of non-digested Self abhorrence.

Wishing doesn't do any good. Wishing that the psychiatrist, whom I view foremost as a person with probable human foibles and troubles, could be asked home to dinner (and might accept!) Heaven forbid. Fraternalising with the PATIENTS. On a personal level OUTSIDE the sacrosanct office confessional. Added to which, I'm a female - an UNATTACHED female. Eve, the seductress. Ah Medicine, whence flees thy Professional Image? "Mea culpa, mea culpa . . ."

Wishing too that I were working beside him, his kind, as I once did. Because, damn it, I'm trained and experienced; and I'm skilled - but I'm also afraid. Wishing I could just be allowed that small vote of confidence which would make so much difference (but of course the fence is there, and I'm on the wrong side of it now). O venerable system, I will not be crushed. My refusal of homage is complete. Inner reserves are my assurance, though invasion is so tiring and energy so scarce . . . Wishing that someone, simply someone, would recognize my knowledge and personality and warmth, my complexity and simplicity, and enjoy utilizing them, sharing them with me. I frighten people. I scare them off. (*Don't I, my loved one's?*)

Either too strong, too weak, too direct, intelligent, dull, quiet, real, unreal, easy, strict, positive, negative, old, young, tolerant, dogmatic, liberal, open, closed, angry, confused, sensitive, happy, loving, noisy, self-possessed, passionate, aloof, familiar, self-sufficient, introspective, outgoing - and so on . . . T-OOO MUCH# A network of junctures sprouting polarities. Like the word 'love' reversed: **revolt/revolve/evolve**. **Danger! High Explosive!** Fragile: handle with care. Weird; fey; that's me. DIFFERENT.

Boy, what a tirade! But it's all true. Not a fantasy. I've been **told**. Still I believe we're all like that basically, behind our façades. Unlimited possibilities. Of course, the *cut-and-dried*. *I'm all right, What the hell's she on about?* fraternity will have stopped reading by now, (if they began) or will have tossed the paper away in disgust --- or fear? That they might be contaminated? Dis-comforted? That's all right. Some die-hards never admit the varying degrees of madness which, unheralded, visit us all; yet I guarantee that most of them have worked-off, smoked-off, swallowed-off, drunk-off, belted-off or otherwise evaded or blotted out the inevitable day of reckoning. Then I suppose, there are the few lucky ones who find their path relatively straightforward and uncluttered. Perhaps in tribal neverlands, though I hear even there they smoke oblivion.

Comparing those "sane" to the vulnerable, warm, giving, loving, creative nut-cases who waft in and out of the Group, learning from each other, swapping good news and bad, terrors and joys, little steps forward and large strides back, I wonder who is the poorest? (richest?) I know that my arms ache to enfold, to encompass; my body screams to be touched, to be held, my mind overflows to my lungs, waiting to rush out on my breath in a torrent of words that find communion with another; my spirit soars, wanting nothing more than to be joined in its flight, while my feet tread the ground looking for other feet to walk in step; and my eyes behold much that could be conveyed so beautifully in the total silence of a look or a hand-clasp. I feel so wasted. I know what I am, what I am not. My capabilities, my weaknesses, my oddities. What hurts is that I can live with them. Most others can't - never could. So I hide, try to fit into 'the mould'.

With loathing. "One day . . . ", I tell myself.

It's all right to talk. My life runs ahead of me out of my grasp and beyond my reach, turning corners before the rest of me and playing hide-and-seek in the forests of my imagination. Always running, always chasing. Rainbows. Not pots of gold. I manage to pay most of my bills somehow. Money won't buy what I want. I had money once. It created the space I'm in today, in a sense. The setting anyway. I prefer not to have much tangible wealth. After all, what good is a world trip to someone who is too apprehensive to venture a few miles from home? Fear can be bought with riches, and peace can become expensive, but in the end one coin is the equal of both, symbol of their co-existence. And though that co-existence is basic to all human function, the balance is delicate, difficult to sustain. For me - for many of us. "Mid-life crisis". Is that where I'm at? "It's an inner journey, dear". Painful.

(The book assures me soothingly: "You may be phobic, **but you are NOT insane**".)

*Try telling THEM that!*

Without a firm belief in miracles, I'm convinced I would never survive. Mind you, I'm equally sure that we ourselves effect them, through faith in the boundless compassion of special others and the magic of creation, which is so elusive at times. Yet I'm certain it's always there and ripe for the picking - only sometimes we miss the opportunity and must wait for another season. Wanting everything yesterday makes me so tired of enduring, of biding time to grow. Patience is not exactly my forte, and I find it a drag, but I'm learning the hard way (as usual).

"Go easy on yourself. Give yourself permission to . . . "

to love, to hate,	to cry, to feel,
to hurt, to live,	to fear, to heal,
to ask, to fail,	to share, to keel,
say 'no, stand firm,	accept, be real.

## Thursday

So much for that philosophy. My eldest son walked in a while ago with his father's de-facto's (mistress's?) child in tow. Does that sound complicated? My stomach curled up and I didn't even want to see the kid - not that it's his fault. At seven, he doesn't understand the complicated mess of the adult world. However, that doesn't help me. I scowled at Rick and called him into the corridor, asked him what the hell he thought this was and get that kid into the car and tell him to wait a few minutes. When we returned to the lounge room, I carefully avoided looking at the boy. As he was ushered out the front door by a very angry Rick, he called a child's cheery "See ya" and then I felt lousy. I know Billy exists, lives with my former husband and is definitely a reality - but I don't want to face that in my own home - not being the sophisticated (socially adjusted?) type.

To top it all, Heidi, who lives with her father since she doesn't like my rules and prefers his lack of supervision, has 'phoned to say she won't be over to see us this weekend because she has "so much work to do". (Sigh!) She's staying at a friend's house though. If I sound cynical and disillusioned, that's probably true right now. I discovered recently that 'well-adjusted' daughter Kara, who lives with Leon and me, has been using various drugs for more than a year, and is dependent. The drugs I can deal with, but the deception and sheer lack of trust have really knocked me flying. Duped. The biggest battle in the last six years has been my attempt to be a "good" mum, whatever that means; understanding, communicating, promoting responsibility, being around, etc., etc. - and just when I thought we were "getting there" (where?) - CRASH. "This too will pass" . . . Soon?

Well, someone suggested I tell my story. Story? It sounds like one long chapter of self-pity so far. Maybe it is. I'm giving myself permission to growl, to be frank, to express what I feel for once - and the lecture pad hasn't curled up yet. That's one thing about paper. It remains stable and unperturbed through whatever excesses of emotion are poured across it, accepting with absolute passivity the foulest language, the most sacred secrets, the far-flung reaches of whimsicality; absorbing one's mind through the tip of a ball-point pen. Consider the power of that combination. The depicted soul. Especially through the ages; the pervasiveness of the written word. Symbols. Culture. Revolution.

In eons past, would have I carved these thoughts and feelings into stone, or pencilled them in sand, or painted them on my body, a cavern wall, a soft-stretched hide? Who knows? And in the future? To

what or whom will my great-great-grand-children (if any) entrust their darkest hours and their deepest joys? Only paper and sand allow them the anonymity of fire and water, the consumption and obliteration of their overflowing fathoms, the surety of absolute confidentiality and impartiality.

There I go again. One silver thread leading off into a labyrinth of intriguing possibilities that beguile my thoughts and fill me with wonder. How can I expect anyone to move beside me at such a pace - on and on? The quiet times are few but intense, and just as demanding in their utter stillness and immeasurable depths. The essential me. Extremes craving acceptance. A centre admitting longing as destiny and fulfilment as ecstasy; each equally precious to the experience of the other. (*Why did you move so far from me? How great your distance and how complete.*)

Kara is outside killing her goldfish. I feel overwrought and quite sick. The fish has been ailing for some days now and we haven't been able to find a means of saving it, so of course the kindest thing to do is end its struggle. I know I'm not the fish and my struggle is different, yet I acknowledge a strange affinity with this vulnerable creature, at the mercy of outside forces and inner frailty. Actual pain is within me as I write, the tears behind my eyes burning. "Goodbye fish. I'll miss your red-tinged scales glinting in the sunlight as you darted about your green-plant, cool-sand, gravelled ecosystem; the way you flipped to the surface whenever I approached or spoke to you; the studied stare with which your eyes dared mine". The air-bubble filter is silenced now and the tank is nothing but an aquatic terrarium, calm and lonely. Salty tears for a freshwater fish. The brevity of his beauty.

An old clip of a Beatles' "Down-Under" concert is belting away on the T.V. - "Gonna Have Some for the Night". Tell you what mate, I'm not. Could do with a bit right now too. Oh dear! Ladies don't talk like that, do they? Ladies are circumspect. Faeces! (Just to prove it). I mean, I could have said "crap" or "shit" or ----, or something **worse**. I undertake to wash my mouth out with soap, should I ever venture so far into the four-letter depravity of existence, so commonly and openly the preserve of male supremacy. Balls! I'm going to bed. Good night.

## Friday

I had the most fascinating dream. (Very Freudian). Met a friend at a group gathering of some kind. He is my guru/confidant; brilliant, earthy, rare. We were overjoyed to see each other again. It's been months. We stared and clasped eyes, smiling eyes, that beamed great orbs of love across the room. Gliding together finally, we sat on the floor, he talking, talking, listening, responding, observing, and I likewise, while drinking in his dear features. We were sort of twined around each other very comfortably with lots of bits touching. His eyes and face looked tired and lined, yet all of him was vibrant with life, as always. The crowd stayed peripheral, our awareness of them transcended by an awareness of ourselves as a unity, a one-ness - so close, so together. I will ring him today. The dream had a sharp quality of reality to it. I remember that he is flying overseas soon and I want to tell him: "Fare well. Enjoy".

Feel tired this morning. Listless. Not sleeping much lately and dreaming a great deal. Too much is happening, inside and out. The morning is shining all over the place, invading the curtains. Pulling them way back I can see the street's Spring birches, poised and motionless in their new-lime fringing, white limbs bowing gracefully to the hallowed cosmic opulence. Cars, 'planes, hammers, children's cries, twittering birds, bees, the dog and cat - I can hear them all as I sit here writing. Why am I afraid to face the day? To glory in it as I once did? To travel even a short distance by myself? I, who not so long ago, was rebellious, eager, adventurous, confident, boundaryless. Where has she gone, that wild gypsy me? Maybe one of my poems says it all. Listen:

*SPRING --- Time that dreams are made of  
Chasing bright moonbeams across a studded sky  
Straining at heartstrings taut from Winter's stretching  
Bursting with promise of fruitfulness and life.*

*here trapped within the confines of the flesh  
whose leaden limbs foil flight on freedom's wings  
a soaring spirit searches for its soulmate  
to share the tearing joy of beauty's pain.*

Once upon a time, yesterday seemed irrelevant; today a mystery;  
tomorrow part of a future stretching enticingly before me - beckoning.  
I looked forward surely, forever undefeated. Not so now, as I stand  
on the edge of nowhere, aware of the drop beneath me, immobile.  
Come - take my hand, walk beside by uniqueness; accept my capricious-  
ness; share my loves, excitement, futility, tears, joys, my fire; ap-  
preciate me as I do you, whomever you are, friend or foe. Is that  
too much to ask?

"Sometimes".

Often?

"Yes".

NO! . . . . . no . . . . .

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## **BOUNDARIES**

You drew a circle round me in the sand  
and said  
'so far, no further'  
but my errant toes crept out  
in exploration  
to know  
forbidden ground.

You closed the window on my garden  
shut out  
the mobbing roses  
but my fingers slipped the catch  
and gathered in  
the finest flowers.  
They nod their greeting  
from clear glass and water  
on my sill  
to rooted sisters in the soil.