
MY OWN STORY

by

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Are you sitting comfortably?

It just depends on how you look at it, it always does: all my life is at least two or three stories, all equally true, and so is probably yours.

After two marriages and my second divorce, one day I walked down Harley Street and saw all these prosperous sounding names. I had left Derbyshire and my job there with the Education Department. I was unemployed. Free, at a loose end, I looked at those names. Many, like mine, central European. That's me, I thought. There was a notice in the entrance to a block of flats. Flat to let, no deposit. I couldn't believe my luck. In Harley Street? A flat, just like that? A few telephone calls later and I signed a seven year lease, rent £2000 per annum, unfurnished. In a few days I had furnished it, for about £500. That was in 1971. I was very excited and rang all my friends to tell them. One lived across Regents Park, I had vaguely known her and her husband years before. Come right over, she said, come for lunch.

As I walked across the park, I thought, what shall I tell her? Shall I tell her I am newly divorced, unemployed, my life shattered, trying to build a new career, in a new

part of town I didn't know and had few friends, the high rent that I had to pay, or shall I tell her that I had arrived in Harley Street at last, all the opportunities of starting something exciting, my groups flourishing, lovely new furniture and carpets, my new freedom, everything to look forward to? Either story was true. I left it to play by ear. What would I tell her? In the event she was so full of her own news and troubles that I didn't have a chance. She never asked. Sometimes I am a better listener than talker; and it takes some encouragement to get me going.

The moral of that story is important to me. It reminds me of another occasion when my uncle, a specialist doctor from Vienna, came to England and all he was allowed to do was to help out as an assistant in a hospital. I was only 20 then, in 1941, and just starting at Cambridge, and we met in one of those coffee-houses in Swiss Cottage frequented by Austrian refugees. He complained bitterly about life in general and fate in particular, and I noticed that most of the others bent over their cups of coffee were similarly inclined. I could only dimly understand their plight, their misery, their feeling of failure. I had come to Britain three years

previously and I had found a country full of promise. I had escaped from a stereotypical student career all mapped out for me by my elders and possibly wisers but now I was free and had to look after myself and everybody was only too happy to help me in any way they could, I found no discrimination and no rejection, but then I hadn't been looking for any. In fact I was very happy.

And that is the story of my life. I was never born. You don't believe me, do you? I escaped from a butt on the back of the devil where he carried me, as he passed my parents' house, or rather the people who became my parents. To prove it I still have this dent on my left ear, where the devil nearly caught me as I escaped. But I was too fast for him. Or her, as the case may be (even then). I ran to my mother who became my mother, and have been hiding under her skirts ever since. I have always believed that I was precious, different. Until I soon found out that almost every other child sees him or herself equally precious. And so we all are.

Although I always found help when I asked for it, I knew deep down that I had to look after myself, for ever more. If I were to begin a family, I had to look after them, too. Nobody would ever hand me anything for free. There was no free meal ticket, as the Americans are wont to say. A man, I knew without even questioning it (I only question it now that some women friends have complained about their fate in having to look after themselves after a divorce, for instance) that man's fate is to provide, to get

himself going, or there is nothing. It takes a man to bring the wages home. That's the stereotype that has been drummed into me from - well I can't say birth, now, can I?

Strangely, women complain that they 'service' their men, look after home and children so that he can go out to work, to build his career while they have to start all over from scratch when he walks out. Strange, this. Or perhaps not so strange. At my groups, specially at the man/woman relationship workshops, we often talk about this. And out of some 400 men who have taken part, all, without exception, said that they were envious of women. Women had it all, they only had to smile and beckon and the world was at their feet . . . while of a similar number of women all but about 10, were envious of men. If most of us are envious of the opposite sex, what does that mean? I mean, what sort of relationship is that, based on such envy? And anger? Still, there was a small number of women who understood the issues at greater depth, I think, and who could well see that there was nothing much to be envious about . . . but they were still angry, with most men.

Harley Street didn't last that long. After two years of running group sessions several nights a week and several massage sessions a day just to make ends meet and pay the rent, I realised that I was not cut out to be a high powered therapist catering to the neurotic rich. That had been my hope but most of my clients were teachers, social workers or other professionals. I also let the flat to a medical practitioner who wanted a Harley Street address one afternoon

a week. I had some trouble with homosexual men who wanted more than a massage. I felt that bit by bit I was working by rote, switched to automatic pilot, without much of me in it, I just didn't have enough of me to go round. One day I had a letter from the lessors to say that they have had complaints that wailing, groaning and other loud noises and singing had been heard from my flat. As that had been on a Sunday morning I tried to bluff my way out by saying it was a religious occasion. But time was running out. I found a buyer who was willing to take over my lease and furniture for £2000 which gave me enough of a deposit for my next move. But before I left I had an interesting session with LSD.

I was terrified of my first LSD experience. The devil inside me was still black, and I had been told that whatever is inside me will come out. Deep down inside me there was this black box full of black coal. I kept it well hidden. It was covered in brown velvet, soft fur. It looked harmless on the outside but I had never opened it. I had heard from a friend that during and after an LSD experience you feel suicidal, she wanted to throw herself out of a window and was only restrained with difficulty. The real world becomes dark and unreal, full of menace. So I was told. Never undertake such an experience on your own, I was told, have someone with you whom you can trust to look after you.

Well, here was this bright young woman with a lovely sumptuous flat in Hampstead. She was very keen to have LSD with me and if I were to bring it along, she would provide some extra lovely tidbits to eat for

lunch, caviar and such. All experiences are enhanced manifold, so she said, and taste was one of them. She knew. I didn't. It was my first time.

In the end, the blackness never came. I lay beside her naked body gently sucking her nipples and floating in a dreamlike world, the chandeliers on the ceiling swinging to and fro, up and down, the whole ceiling weaving, gently undulating. I shall never forget these sensuous five hours I floated and soared with nipples in my mouth . . . I can still recall them, and from that day on I had learned what sensuousness was. When eventually it was almost over and the spell had gone and we made love, it was an anti-climax. And on another occasion, similarly, no blackness at all. Casper and I and Gillian and Heather, all four of us lying about my flat in Harley Street, the two women groaning and twisting on the sofa, the two men, Caspar and myself, drawing a diagonal line across my carpet and trying to walk on it without falling off, it was hilariously funny. But the groaning got to me. It was no effort at all to go to the kitchen and prepare some vitamin C, the antidote, for Gillian, who felt sick. And although my world was weaving and shining brightly, when my front door bell rang I answered it and acted totally normally. I was very disappointed with this. Never in my whole life could I let go so completely that I was taken over. I was never totally drunk, never beyond help. I was always and always have been in control. Pity. But the colours and the memories stayed. The brilliant colours of flowers and the greenness of the

grass, for days afterwards. At least some evidence that I had been under a spell. If it is true that LSD brings out your innermost hidden person, I now know that deep down inside me, far from being black, I am really very funny, amusing, not to be taken too seriously.

Hate, hate, hate, write, write, write, and then write some more. Yes, there are some more aspects to this story, and they are all equally true. There is this inner pressure, drive, nervous energy, boiling slowly. A small trickle of a wild mountain stream that can be contained. Freud's wild horses, well reined in. I sit in this café and read the Guardian, gently simmering as I read about German Pershing missiles - how is it the Germans are now a nuclear power? Hess is dead. And about time, too. I feel like shooting everybody in sight; too many people about altogether. Some actually do it. There is this man who shot up a busy shopping centre, Rat-tat-tat-tat all lie down and die. The good with the bad. All gone. Some only wounded. Hospitals are over-stretched. Premature babies kept alive by all possible means. Not enough money but always enough for nearly-dead premature babies. Put off 300 hip replacements for another year, no matter what pain in the meantime for all these people, but send more than a million pounds to the Falklands EVERY DAY, since 1982, for five years now ... How many hip replacements for one million pounds every day?

I look at the people in Brighton as I walk along the streets. Who would I keep going and who would I let die?

Precious few look like they are worth keeping alive. They are half dead already. Sour, bitter, disappointed faces, turned into themselves. Poor me, poor me. Precious few seem worth saving. Robert is worth keeping alive. A lot of promise, deeply sad and uncertain of his own worth. My father always thought murderers should be hanged. One day the penny dropped. I saw him as the murderer he wanted to be, all this hate. If he had to control himself, so could they. If he couldn't get away with it, nor should they. Shoot them all. Hang them. And I see a bit of myself in him.

Back to Harley Street. There was this social worker who was full of hate, too. "I am a psychiatric social worker" she said with a smile, "and I know all about my emotional problems. I only want you to work on my back, that's all. I don't want you to start dabbling in anything else. I am seven months pregnant, and the pre-natal midwife tutor who knows your work thought that the pain in my back might be helped by massage".

Her name was Geronda. I started in the usual way. First session, her back and her neck, a deep posture-restructuring massage. Geronda's back had no pain in it anywhere. Where the pain usually was, there was hardly an echo of it now. There was no pain in any part of her back or neck apart from the usual tensions that are present in almost anyone when they come for the first time. But as I worked on her back my fingers started to ache as they had never ached before. I had to rest frequently and my hands were trembling with fatigue. Whatever

was going on? I asked myself.

For the second session I worked again on her back and neck, and on her feet. Again there was no appreciable pain, and there had hardly been any all week. There was little reaction from her at all, no dreams, no images. At the third session, when I worked on her left thigh, the pain came back with a vengeance, and she yelled. There was a large muscle knot in her left thigh and the pain shot straight up into the small of her back where the pain used to be. I had to work very slowly and carefully then, partly on her thighs, and partly on her back. Make the pain come, sooth it away, make it come, make it go . . . "Talk to your pain" I asked her, And later "be the pain and talk to Geronda, see what it wants from you . . ." and it all came flooding out. Her relationship with her husband, the problems she faced in life, her anger, her fury of being stuck with an unplanned pregnancy, her fear of going back to work, the times she had spent in a psychiatric hospital as a patient . . . She yelled at her pain, she had her pain scream back at her, her thighs, her legs who wanted to run away from it all, her back who was fed up carrying the heavy burden of her life, all complained bitterly. "Go away pain, you don't belong to me. I don't want you, what do you want from me, go away . . ." "I have a good home here in your thighs, the more you push me away, the more I shall make life hell for you. I don't want to go and I won't have you push me out!" How can we come to terms with this conflict, I asked her. See if you can find out from your pain what you could do to make life less difficult for both of you.

And she had her pain say to her "Make peace with me, let me live. I am a good friend to you. Don't fight me, don't push me. I want to make friends with you if you will have me".

Next day she rang me almost at crack of dawn. "I have had two dreams last night, can I come and tell you about them? I have written them down, they were so vivid, the first time I have remembered a dream for many years". We spent some hours working on her dreams. Well, it's a long story. One day I'll tell you more about it. Suffice it at the moment to tell you the gist of it.

She was in Canada, pursued by Red Indians. She hid under a bridge in the river, but they spotted her. They shot three arrows into her. White feathered arrows. Two in her back, one in her thighs. She screamed with pain and tried to pull them out. Eventually she tore them out and left a bleeding wound. Gradually her dream changed. The Indians became her mother, her mother was furious with her for losing her virginity in Canada. And that was a fact. Talk to the man who made you pregnant. "I want to find out who I am, where I am, what I am at. I want you to ask me about myself. I want you to be a good father and teacher to me. I want to be shaped by you. I want to be taken over. I want a tumble of sympathy. I want you to take me to bed and . . . no, perhaps I don't. You will not ignore me in bed. Not even I will ignore myself in bed. I take notice of me. I am angry with your neutrality. There is no direction, no shape, no movement from you. I am embarrassed, I feel silly. You are not interested. You fail me. I ask

for help and you don't help me. You use me, I am being used by you as I have always been used by everybody, you particularly. I want to use you instead. I want to use you in my own way, for me, to help me, I look up to you, you bastard, I ask you for help and you fail me. I want, I want, I want . . . oh, I want so much! And you give me so little. I am a high class wanter but only a learner maker. You don't even look at me. I love you and you leave me screaming inside, tense, unfinished, frustrated, ignored. Yet I say politely: I am all right. I am all right, damn you, I am a little girl who wants to please you. You don't even ask me where I am or what I want. And I don't make an effort to tell you. An effort? I don't make an effort? What is all this about, then? I make a hell of an effort but I say: I am all right. You go to sleep. I am afraid of you. The danger I feel in you makes me alive, stimulates me, I feel on edge. When you go to sleep I expect more from you. A hell of a lot more. I am furious. I hate you. I killed the child inside me and I am dead now, I am dead. I carry your child, but I am dead. Oh the pain, the pain! I tear your arrows out of my flesh and I hurl them back at you. They go right through you, you don't blink an eyelid. Nothing, nothing, nothing! No substance!!!"

She turned to some cushions and hit them with her fists, flaying them with her full force. Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Your neutrality is nothing, a vacuum. It is a waiting, to let me take my turn, my trip. To let me take what direction I want to take. You don't push me, you wait for me to push myself. No help from

you, no direction, no pushing, nothing. You refuse to produce your version of me. You don't help to shape me. Nothing. I am not you and you are not me. You are you and I am I. The initiation, the direction, the shape, energy, must all come from me. What you offer, all you ever offer, is space around me. I feel free in my movements, my anger, my despair, my joy, my pain. O feel free, tall and strong. So I don't really want a daddy anymore or a teacher. So I don't need to be the little girl anymore, no more reassurance. I get into these roles that are in me, I see myself in them, recognise them, dislike them, feel them, discard them . . . my guts are getting weaker, I am staggering . . . I am staggered. I am reacting to you in a way that is new, not pieced together from scraps of old experiences stuck together by grim determination. I am new, I am new! I feel the potential in me to create something new . . . a child! I arrived wanting to be 'directed' and I called it help', and to be tumbled sympathetically. And now I leave you, I leave you, free of you, free in myself for not wanting to be helped, contained. I don't need you any more . . ."

She said the last sentence very softly and sadly, and buried her head in the pillow she had bashed so furiously before, and cried.

Well, this is the story of my life, too. It is all true. All stories are true. Only we don't always believe them to be true. My little boy is still alive, he lives inside me, happily enough. I wouldn't do without him.