

Courage and Simplicity

Jean Clark

It takes courage to stand where we stand, simply as we stand.

Bani Shorter (1982)

As I was sorting through a seemingly endless pile of papers, I found this piece of writing. It speaks to me in new ways now that I am four years older. Since *Windows 7* does not appear to have saved it, I shall type and edit it a little, and enjoy it again.

'Why was *Border People* returned to me yesterday by someone whose name I cannot decipher? This morning I opened the now fragile booklet – and the words which met me were these: **"It takes courage to stand where we stand simply as we stand"**.

I am standing now, in my eighties, and it is taking courage to risk being who I have become. '*Courage and simplicity*'. Such wonderful words and ways of living. I try to live my age, with full acceptance of the body I inhabit. Not to complain, but simply to stand, not knowing for how long, not knowing how my living will be as the months and years pass.

Since then I have received a diagnosis of a 'slow-burning' cancer, and am less able to be active, due to arthritis. And yes, it does take some courage to stand, or sit, where I now am, but despite limitations my spirit still sings.

My spirit is young
her words can soar
and yet
my body tethers her,
sets harsh limitations

I do not look ahead
it is enough and more
to live each day
fully.

June 2014

Now another border crossing. Liminality again, that place *between* where I have choices; to move forward towards the new country with open eyes and an open heart, or to close my eyes and my thoughts, pretending that death will not come.

I know that I shall want to travel onwards. The new country may have rocky paths, where I could stumble. There will be mountains of remembering and deep pools of wisdom where I may dream; forest glades where I may sit on soft grass with old friends, and always in the distance, the shimmering blue sea and the rolling ocean.

Ten years ago at Cortijo Romero in Spain, we were in the orchard, doing a guided fantasy where we were to meet a wise person and ask a question. My question was, 'How long do I have?', for I was then seventy seven. To my surprise I did visualize a wise woman, and she responded: 'You have as long as you are'.

I knew this came from a deep part of my self. I had pen and paper and wrote this poem in response:

How long do I have?
'As long as you are', she said.

I am
So long as my heart is open
My eyes see and wonder,
My ears hear the silences
My words flow into poetry
So long as I love.

And when I have danced my life,
Then let me go
Into a place of stillness,
**Rapt in silence,
Life completed,
Lived.**

A few years later I bought a copy of *The Life Cycle Completed* – Extended Version with New Chapters (1982) by Joan M. Erikson, Erik's widow, and found that she had written about ageing as **dance**, which she identified as the ninth stage of the life cycle. Writing in her nineties, she sees inadequacies in what gerontologists include when they use the word 'gerotranscendence'. They neglect to speak of the new and positive gifts of old age. 'Perhaps they are just too young!'

She says,
I have found that 'transcendence' becomes very much more

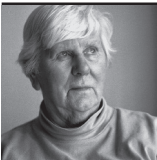
alive if it is activated into 'transcend**ance**'... which may include play, activity, joy and song, and above all a major leap above and beyond the fear of death. It provides an opening forward into the unknown. Oddly enough all this demands of us is an honest and steadfast humility.

What companionship she offers me as I contemplate the territory on the other side of this state of liminality I am yet again passing through. 'The great dance of life can transport us into all realms of making and doing with every item of body, mind and spirit involved', she writes.

I discovered in my fifties that I can dance, that I loved to dance, and until my early eighties I could spend a whole week with others doing 'Biodanza', the dance of life, both in Spain and then at Findhorn. Now I cannot dance with others because of arthritis – though I can play music and sometimes dance, as I watch the wind in the trees.

Joan Erikson reminds me that, in my aging, I can still dance my life. She tells me that 'to grow old is a great privilege. It allows feedback on a long life that can be lived in retrospect'. Several years ago, I wrote my life story and called it *And Then It Happened That*. Just at that time, my rather tattered copy of *Border People*, by Bani Shorter, was returned to me, and there were these words:

"It takes courage to stand where we stand simply as we stand." 📍



Jean Clark has lived through times of extraordinary change, with a sense of adventure and curiosity. Married, with two children, she was appointed first student counsellor at Leicester

Polytechnic in 1971. When her marriage ended, she moved to Norwich, creating an independent therapy practice. She is now a great-grandmother and writes poetry about ageing. Jean edited *Freelance Counselling and Psychotherapy: Competition and Collaboration* (Routledge, 2002).

Readings

Clark, J. (2010) *And Then It Happened That: A Life Fully Adventured* (for availability, contact Jean at jeanclark26@btinternet.com)

Erikson, E.H and J.M. (1998) *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review*, New York: W.W. Norton

Shorter, B. (1982) *Border People*, London: Guild of Pastoral Psychology

NOTE: We are planning a special theme issue on Ageing in 2017. If you should be interested in contributing, please contact the editors. (Eds)

KEEP CALM...

- YOUR JOURNAL NEEDS YOU!

PART-TIME VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATOR NEEDED

The NEW AHPB Board is looking for someone who can devote several voluntary hours each week to administering the *Self and Society* subscription base. In order to fulfil our obligation to the new owners, Routledge, and so provide subscribers and members with the amazing benefits you'll all have once the whole archive back to 1973 has been digitized, it's essential that we keep our subscription base healthy and up to date. This would involve tasks like fielding inquiries from subscribers and dealing with re-subscriptions. Though not essential, some previous experience of working with CRM and Excel databases would also be an advantage. Full training will of course be given. We can also offer our new volunteer free membership of the AHP, and free entry to all *Self and Society* events. Full training will of course be given.

This commitment would be of great service both to the AHP and to Humanistic Psychology more generally; if you can spare a few hours a week, do contact us at: editor@ahpb.org It's also a wonderful opportunity to work with a fine group of people in the AHP and S&S, as you'll be a vital part of the journal's management team. We look forward to hearing from you!