

## 12th August 2021

How to attend to your own self-care if you are a therapist? This question comes to the surface or erupts from below when you feel tired, overwhelmed and have little time to stop and breathe from your therapeutic work. Even if you are not a therapist, how do you care for yourself and in your own way?

I have been considering this aspect now that my private practice is expanding and I need to manage my day and time in a controlled way. I have asked myself the question - what does self-care consist of and how does an individual 'attend' to this aspect of their lives? I am discovering that which one person finds relaxing or refreshing another person may not. I have colleagues who find meditation is their go-to practice, or perhaps Mindfulness gives them what they need. I know that, for me, both create a state of anxiety that I am 'not doing it right' because they create conditions that have my brain firing off salvos or ideas in all directions.

when you meditate I know that you have to relax, let what comes into your mind arrive but let it go. For me, what comes up in my mind when it is stilled are some new words or ideas that spark me towards an idea for a poem or piece of prose and unless I write it down I will lose the taste and texture of what it is and my way of using it, of saying what it has said to me. I end up ever more active and stressed that I've not been able to 'do what I'm supposed to do!' I give up and write the poem anyway!

Mindfulness has a similar effect but being in the moment, for me, constricts my mind in a whalebone corset that creates a struggle in me with the words coming into my mind. Words that have links to the past and the future as well as the moment. I feel like a bard who must always travel to tell his stories and sing his words to the strumming of his harp. If I cannot have my words then my life is not worth very much to me. Mindfulness is one struggle too many for me to keep attempting.

For me, part of my self-care is based on creativity, creating words, poems, stories and ways to reach out and connect with others. But, that need not be all of my self-care. When I can manage it, I read, almost anything but sometimes I balk at the need to read and want more. I like movies, theatre, musicals and plays but, once again, there are times I cannot settle down enough to enjoy or fall into those comforts.

Only this week I have stumbled upon something unexpected that has drawn me in to its beauty, its compelling force and its awe inspiring journey to becoming something more than the sum of its parts.

I have become addicted to the live camera's on the slopes of the Iceland volcano of Geldingadalir in Fagradalsfjall on the Reykjanes Peninsula, 20 miles from Reykjavik. It started erupting in March this year and is now a growing tourist attraction.

I have always had an interest in volcanoes and earthquakes since I was a child, when I loved the beauty of the colours of the lava and was overawed by the sheer power of nature and the insignificance of humanity alongside it. I still am, but now I am aware of the passion that lives in me when I watch that power. I have discovered it is not reliant on another person to supply or tell me it is mine. Perhaps the volcano is but a reflection or a metaphor for what is within me? Or is it only now, as I struggle with questions about my sexuality and who I am when I acknowledge this, that I dare to feel the passion that has always burned in me?

I doubt I will ever get to stand on an erupting volcano such as this active as I have always yearned to do, now that I am older and less mobile but watching the feed from AFar TV is almost the next best thing! Maybe one day I go one better than standing on the top of Mt Vesuvius (1989) when it was only steaming gently and get to Iceland to see the creation of more land and be there, watching, in person not on a camera.

I realised that this is a type of self-care. I am refreshing myself by feeding my imagination and watching something so amazing and beautiful, as well as learning much more about volcanoes too. Each time I watch I seem to find a little bit more of me and can accept that within me. I ask if I am the mountain? Perhaps - I am a Taurus, an Earth sign, so I can accept my affinity for this wild powerful earth. For me I can take a few moments over lunch or during down time between clients to check on the cameras and see if the crater, from the fissure called Nar is resting with no activity but steam or smoke, or active with a wonderful lake of lava with fountains of molten rock over 300 metres high! Who could not be impressed by that power beauty?

If you would like to check it out [click here](#) for a link to feed #1 and from there you can find a link to feed #2. Maybe I should post this with a warning? Beware, this activity is addictive and can swallow time!

## 30th July 2021

Anxiety seems to be emerging as a new pandemic, not just with clients but with friends and family and all for very different reasons.

Some are finding their anxiety increasing as the Covid restrictions are lifted and life can begin to return to some sort of 'normal'. These are the people who may have health anxiety around existing conditions where their immune systems are in a very low state and they are unable to deal with simple infections. These people are remaining with the way they have been existing during the whole of lockdown and feel afraid of other people around them relaxing too much.

Other people seem to be anxious about how much they have missed out on or lost and the new epidemic seems to be around social anxiety and loneliness. It seems to be keeping some people away from places they frequented prior to the pandemic and they question why. Do they still feel afraid of the virus or of mixing

with lots of people? I have begun to realise from my own feelings in this area that this may be down to an older aspect. Perhaps these people were previously not really that keen on crowded places or a lot of people but did it because it was expected. Perhaps they are re-evaluating their lives, having easily slipped into feeling at ease and comfortable with the lockdown isolation. Not being around people felt good and it was a relief not to have to make excuses or go to things that they did not enjoy very much. My understanding and feelings are allowing me to acknowledge and accept this is part of me.

There is another group of people, these are those who are equally anxious and who are now feeling discriminated against, they are the people who believe the opposite of what the government is saying. Who see the pandemic as a government controlling conspiracy and that the vaccinations are being used for that purpose. They say if they refuse the vaccinations they will be denied entry to communal places and may be unable to find work. It is not a view I hold but I respect that others do but it does make me uncomfortable. These people have anxieties around belonging, working and being able to live their lives as they choose.

What is emerging, sadly, is that the world is dividing itself into either this or that belief about many subjects. I notice that over the last few years this polarity has become more prominent. Think of the opposing sides this country took over Brexit and the vociferous protests for and against. Consider also how America became a polarised nation when Donald Trump was in charge. Now we have more issues that are splitting people apart, those that believe the pandemic threatens the world and each government is doing it's best in the face of the unknown, using what knowledge they have to immunise, protect and keep society going but opposite that view is that the pandemic is all a conspiracy blown out of all proportion with massaged figures and the media in the pocket of the governments, where the vaccinations are being used to isolate those who do not wish to have them and refuse to participate in the control of the vaccination passports. How do we live with this and find a common, middle ground? I have no answers, only that I believe we have to reach out and try our best to understand and live with the wildly varied opinions.

For all this anxiety around the pandemic, no matter your beliefs about the truth of it, life is still there to be lived, within you and externally. Issues around life and death feel to be so much more important but there is still very little conversation or dialogue in general about this. My dream is that death will be spoken about openly, the fear of death and dying would be acknowledged, and people could be open to discussing dying so that they may live before they die. How can this be encouraged? By being willing to listen, to talk and not to walk away or ignore it.

Underneath all of these ripples and whirlpools of society other issues and choices are buffeted as we hang onto our lifelines and our safe places.

Perhaps the steps I take now will aid me in finding acceptance and bring me closer to who I am so that I can use this awareness and strength gained from my-

self and others can make some difference and demonstrate a 'bringing together' that might inspire others to follow in their own ways. I feel that this new way of being is still in the process of being born and will pay a repeat visit in this blog shortly.

Meanwhile, there are my words, pen, paper or computer keyboard to create my poetry and actually believe what others call me: a poet. Can I use my words to create a narrative for myself that touches others and weave a web of belonging.

Be well and stay safe, whatever your belief.

## 13th June 2021

I so enjoyed the writing prompts on the NaPoWriMo website for 2021 that I decided to go back to the first year on the site, which is 2013 and work my way back to 2021 but without the slight pressure of getting a poem a day completed if I got busier. Not only am I finding it fun but it is helping my own wellbeing and my self awareness that is so vital for my work as a therapist.

I found something totally crazy on the website and though I would offer it here because it was a way of writing a poem that I'd never tried before. If you can, do give it a try as it is simple to compose and fun to do.

The prompt I followed was on day 24 of 2013 and was about words buried in words, but that sounds negative so how about words hidden in words or words discovered in words, that is so much more enticing.

The prompt suggested writing a self-portrait poem using your own name. You put your own name into an anagram generator and write a poem from this. I tried it and got over 2,400 but only looked at the first 100. My composition is below.

If you want to give it a try then here is the link to the anagram generator I used [click here](#) for a link to the site.

First part: The words that came out of the generator for my name

mahjong quiche sup, ace humping Josh qi, cages him John quip, machine jog push, impeach jug nosh qi, aces jumping ho qi, come sigh Josh quip, ocean high qi jumps, champion she jug qi, spinach home jug qi, chaos hinge qi jump, hags pumice shag mice John qi

Second part: What I made from that

Push the machine to impeach and cage Josh,  
with a sigh for the ocean high jumps,  
that hinge on chaos, humping the mahjong  
quiche of spinach and pumice nosh.  
John shags the mice home in a jug,

jogging comes with a sigh, she  
champions the ace hags quips.

It doesn't matter it makes little sense (or does it?) as that is part of the fun. You could try putting in other words and phrases in to see what come out. The unpredictability is the fun part and it plays with words so you see them in a different way.

## 6th May 2021

National Poetry Writing Month (NaPoWriMo) has now finished but the website remains and there are many previous years to delve into for prompts and inspiration. I have got a great deal out of the month and have found a love of Joy Harjo, who is the current American Poet Laurette and whose poetry is extremely involving and moving. She displays vivid imagery with her use of words and as I read her poems I can see what she is describing and the feeling. If you'd like to read more about her and her work [click here](#) for her website.

Some of my own work from last month struck me as very different and more passionate, erotic and daring. I went to places darker than I usually go and that is saying something for me. It was good that it took me into areas I didn't usually traverse and introduced me to new parts of myself that I needed to meet up and converse with, however difficult that might be. My configurations of self are intriguing and mysterious but exciting and I am gradually getting to know them better. The two I am going to discuss here are just two of many I probably have within me. Person-Centred theory on this aspect has really opened up my internal world and improved my awareness and offering of the core conditions.

At the moment I am in dialogue with two parts that are totally opposites to each other, not really linked to NaPoWriMo although I could focus down more during the writing time. One is a very wild female who is full of energy and bounces around with that energy and is all up for confrontation, rage, passion, sex, dancing and waving her swords around. This woman really does talk a lot at speed and has strong ideas to get things done and she rarely sits back to contemplate her work, she is forever telling me what to do and how to do it, what to say and how to show myself to the world because she knows best. She has wild long hair and a glowing crystal over her heart.

The other part, which I found strange, is male and is the total opposite. It is this part of me that is still, silent and observant of others, but it gave me the word 'cold' that I am still exploring, not very gracefully I may add! He stands there, having given me this word and gives nothing else away. I picture him as tall, contained, cold in manner and demeanour, decidedly arrogant and as imperious and impenetrable as if he was wearing armour. He is not letting me or anyone else anywhere near him and I think that he might have trouble recognising a feeling, an emotion if it bit him! He mostly ignores the other part and her chatter

and vibrancy. Yet, and this only emerged a few days ago, he is willing to wait for me to really get to the bottom of the words he gives me, no matter how long it takes. He is patient. I have found that, as a character, he comes into my life at intervals when there is something important getting in my way, that I need to look at. If I let my mind run on I would almost wonder if something had occurred in his existence that means I am the penance he has to pay for redemption but that is, perhaps, over dramatising the figure within. I picture him as strong and brave but almost vibrating with some hidden energy or meanings. I wonder if he wants me to awaken something in me to awaken the same in him?

When I revisited the word 'cold' he silently told me it wasn't finished, yet I had a real lightbulb moment. He was a bigger part of me than I realised. Cold was indeed a part of who I am but it was not just negative, I may have a part of me that is a cold person, cold was about strength, my strength and my knowing. It felt to be in internal cold but was more iron than ice. It was that I could step away for a moment to look at things from an alternative viewpoint but I could also choose to let the fire of passion encroach if I dared.

I really wish, though, he'd given me a clue or two, not just stood there imperiously waiting for the penny to drop in my brain but I suppose that is the benefit if doing it yourself! I wanted him to tell the chatterbox to shut up so I could think and take the awareness down into my body, her body, as they feel to be linked. There are other times when he seems to have reached the end of his tether with her irritating behaviour because he reacts with anger to the her and then there ensues a huge argument where both will end up sulking for days. When the rowing starts I throw up my hands, pull on my jacket and leave them to it. I take myself out for a walk and come back when they have simmered into a sulky silence so I can actually enjoy my cup of tea in peace.

A prize to the person who can name these two parts. I have my own names for them and I will tell you next time what they are. One fictional the other historical. Both have things to say to me and have obviously been trying for years to be heard, I just have to learn to listen to each in the most appropriate way for them.

## 11th April 2021

April is National Poetry Writing Month and I am taking the opportunity to try the daily prompts that are on offer on the NaPoWriMo website [click here](#) and finding some days more challenging than others but I am learning more about poetic forms and trying something new, even if it doesn't work out.

The website also has links to poetry readings, performances that are recorded or live (be aware that this is an American website so all times are according to their time zones) and they have links to poets' posts on their own websites so there is a lot of information on there. I am trying all the prompts and if they work well I may be able to adapt them for writing for wellbeing workshops.

I have tried a couple of new forms -Shadorma and Fib and more information can be found on the website above. You can write a single stanza or link more than that together.

### Shadorma

Is a six-line syllabic poem with format of 3/5/3/3/7/5 and I have to admit that I have always struggled with Shadorma's though I adore Haiku. Here is my attempt for the Shadorma on day seven of the month of April.

Orange juice,  
a sticky sweetness  
glues my foot  
to the floor.  
Sickly adhesion cracks loudly  
grabbing carpet fluff.

I had never heard of a Fib, which is based on the maths theory called the Fibonacci Sequence where each number is the sum of the two previous numbers (maths was never a strong point with me, I see figures or statistics and my brain turns to mush). There is more to the theory but that's the part that a Fib is based on.

### Fib

It is another six line syllabic poem with the pattern of 1/1/2/3/5/8 and here is my first attempt/draft for the prompt and I feel a little more sure with this.

Kiss.  
Breathe.  
Touching.  
Caressing.  
A lover's hands,  
imagination beyond dreams.

So maybe give the prompts a try, there are examples to help you with new poetic forms and if poetry scares you this is the perfect place to have a bash and realise it isn't as terrifying or stuff as what you may have learned at school or thought.

## 18th March 2021

How can so much time have passed by between blog entries without noticing or is life too full and busy to take time out of a day to just be?

I know that some people find meditation, Mindfulness or Yoga relaxing and spiritual but I am not one of them!

I try to meditate and as soon as I start my brain starts firing off all sorts of ideas everywhere and before I know where I am I have forgotten to 'let them go and

return to the breath' and have picked up my pen and notebook to jot down a line or two for a piece of prose or fallen into writing a fully formed poem that speaks of who I am, how I am and what I want in those minutes. Perhaps this is what meditation is for me? All I know is that I have 'failed' with the instructions, that I have not 'done' what has been asked of me and therefore I am 'different' from everyone else and 'wrong' so do not fit in. I do not belong.

Mindfulness - is it a good concept or a dangerous path to tread? Being in the moment can be beneficial at times - in moments of anxiety and trauma originating from the past - as it can bring you back to the present, giving distance to events in the past that still seek to control you. I ask myself if being in the present moment so much denies learning from the past, prevents us finding strength from the adversity of what made us who we are? Are we denying a part of us that could help and support us? What of good memories that will be mixed with the bad or adverse memories? If you only live in the moment it feels to me, and this is my own take on it, as if we have no past and did not exist then. If we only live in the moment and do not think or dream about the future then what is hope? Where is hope? What are dreams made for and without them how can we strive to grow and be? I want to believe and say that I can be mindful of certain moments but that I am who I am because of my past, my history and will become something new or more by dreaming of what I want for my future. If I am not 'doing' Mindfulness as rules dictate then, once again, I have 'failed' with the instructions, that I have not 'done' what has been asked of me and therefore I am 'different' from everyone else and 'wrong' so do not fit in. I do not belong.

As for Yoga, I think I threw that one out of the window long ago when I could not get into any of the positions because of my physical limitations in my movements. Sitting cross-legged was certainly not conducive to relaxing in my mind or body. I was in too much pain. Once again, I have 'failed' with the instructions, that I have not 'done' what has been asked of me and therefore I am 'different' from everyone else and 'wrong' so do not fit in. I do not belong.

Why am I talking about things where I feel I have failed, where I feel I do not belong? Perhaps, during Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions I have become aware that I have sought to 'belong' to a community, to something bigger than myself but, after many years of 'failing' I no longer know what to do to try to reach out to belong? Is it that I fear rejection or that I fear acceptance and have never experience this so I am afraid. Is this simply a reflection of what other human beings are feeling at this time or am I alone?

I feel these questions are not just mine and that I am simply voicing or using my words to tell other's stories from my own perception. I realise that this entry sounds very negative, very dark and depressing. It is not intended to be but is simply how it is. I reject toxic positivity because it is in the darkness that light shines brightest.

Most of the time I rather revel in my difference, the solitary path I have chosen and that I have a freedom to choose and not belong to anyone or anything but



sometimes I question my choice and wonder if I did reach out would there be anyone to take my hand and invite me to belong?

## 1st January 2021

Greeting for the New Year, may 2021 be an improvement on 2020. I hope you stay safe and healthy.

Now I will have to get used to writing 2021! It just doesn't feel like a new year has started again but it has and I worry it will fly by just as fast as 2020.

It seemed strange that with 2020 being controlled by Coronavirus the time still raced by at a gallop when it felt like life was standing still. I could hardly believe it when we reached December, I thought we were still in July with very rubbish weather!

I have been reflecting on the year just gone and have come to a strange realisation. I own this as mine so no-one else thinks I am applying it to them as each experience of the time will be different. I have felt, lost, adrift and alone and couldn't identify why it felt more than the events of Covid-19 then I realised that I was comfortable facing up to what might happen to me, to family and friends. That death might come travelling past them or linger too closely. While I could accept that I felt that others, though they spoke about it, experienced it and grieved for the lost, wanted to say 'fine, done that so let me get on and grieve but I don't want to talk about it right now, it's too much and I am not ready.'

The media, both news journalist and social media mentioned it, focussed on it but distanced it with a need to be positive to get through this time. Death became a table of rising statistics! I can understand that and accept that is one way of trying to cope with these strange times but it is not mine. I seemed to surrounded by bubbles, not the support in Covid kind, but shiny bubbles of positivity, struggling to maintain the smile of happiness or at least contentment and acceptance through finding ways to grin or go wild. To live fully in a time when it's impossible.

I have realised that, for me, it feels a false positivity, a sort of turning away from the sadness, the pain, the bleakness, the loneliness, the losses, the deaths and negativity inherent in all these things. That's fine if others want to cope this way for the time being but I feel it has negated my way of being. I feel like I am being 'told off' for focussing on the darker, more frightening things that I am comfortable with. I feel that the message coming from all sides is 'you must be light, happy and positively forward looking to better times'. It reminds me of the saying 'this too shall pass' and others find it hard to stay in the now. Now is pain, loss, loneliness and boredom and it is where I am, we are, for now.

There is a phrase that keeps popping up for me 'toxic positivity' and the smile on the mask that people sometimes feel the need to wear feels decidedly fixed and frightening. If they look too deeply inside then they will fall apart so not now, not

at this time when there is little end in sight to this restricted living. They seem to want to save it until another time, when this virus is controlled and fading, then they will feel it distant enough and they can control their own emotional turmoil better than now. This is what they need to do to get through this time and that is fine but it is not my way.

My way is to face the loss in the face of this dystopian event and not be made nothing, negated because I am comfortable with the darkness and loss and all surrounding it. Yet the pressure on me to 'conform' to the current norm of positivity and happiness wipes away me, my self and my being. So for me, my struggle is different to many. I try to remain true to myself, to my being, to my strengths and no hiding behind 'must be positive to get through this'.

That sounds like I am a really dark and miserable person but I am not. I can laugh and enjoy the same things as other people but right now my way of living and being feels unacceptable. Perhaps the reason lies in my past, of being read poetry as a child where poets were not afraid of death and dying and saying farewell, to reading science fiction novels where the world ended in one way or another. Maybe it also links to my nursing career where I felt that the time I spent with the dying helping them live as they wanted to before the end helped me face the fact that death would come to us all. Perhaps I am not living fully during this time, or getting as much as I can out of the life that is possible at the moment but that is how it is right now for me and that is OK.

So in the face of the smile I will maintain my composure and not fall into the yearning for 'better living' as that's not happening right now. I am contented enough with how things are for me and I have my writing to explore what is happening.

When the virus begins to fade and the buried emotions come to the surface when the iron grip on them relaxes I will be here to walk beside those who need a steady companion who is unafraid of whatever may emerge and can hold the boundaries for safety. Remember me in that time of need for I can face the tsunami of feelings you may find and feel afraid of.