

## **5th January 2015**

We are now at the beginning of another year and each one feels to me to pass more quickly than the last. It can feel like life is slipping through your fingers and you are missing out on opportunities and feel down and depressed at this time of year. Days remain short and the nights long and dark. The lights we put up for Christmas will come down this week and that loss of light can make these first two months of a year feel very long indeed. They are long, dark, cold and empty as there is little sign of spring to come.

Yet, as I walk round my garden I notice that my patio rose has buds of new leaves appearing and the nearby trees seem to be offering buds to the cold, frosty air. Maybe those signs of new life can bring hope when the land lies fallow in the stern grip of winter. Soon the evenings will grow lighter and once the mornings grow brighter too we will all feel like a weight has been lifted from our minds and our steps will grow more positive.

## **17th February 2015**

It seems a long time since I added anything to my page here and sometimes things strike you as relevant to your life and chosen way in life at unusual times and in unexpected ways.

On the evening of Saturday 14th February I went to a live opera relay from the Metropolitan Opera at Cinema City, Norwich. Now I am aware that opera is not everyone's cup of tea and that's fine but for me it touches parts of me that other music cannot reach, to hash up an old phrase. It was an unusual double bill of *Iolanta* by Tchaikovsky and *Bluebeard's Castle* by Bartok. Both based on fairy tales. The moments that struck me deeply were in the rather lighter *Iolanta*. It was Tchaikovsky's last opera. The translation of the libretto in this particular aria by *Iolanta* who said words was that said tears are good, she feel better after releasing her tears. There was also a point in a Doctor's aria where he sang about change only coming if it is wanted by the person. That person must know the truth of themselves to decide to 'get well'. If others want something for another person but the intended person doesn't, any 'cure' will not be successful. He also sings about the mind and the body being linked together, which sounds a 'modern, New Age' type of comment that is hard to believe this was written in 1892.

That struck me as very linked to my work as a counsellor and writer. Others can want you to change, to get over what is wrong, to be 'cured' of your pain but unless you know what causes that pain yourself and want to get through it, it rarely succeeds. I think Tchaikovsky was ahead of his time with his thoughts on this.

*Bluebeard's Castle* was a much deeper, darker psychological affair, easy to see as a fairy tale of an evil man and just as easy to see it as the exploration of your own mind with the opening of the doors and the fear of power.

An evening that gave me pause for thought and reflection when I had not expected something so deep to emerge and touch me.

## **26th February 2015 - Death Cafe on 22nd February**

I have taken a few days to process the Death Cafe event held at the Colney Woodland Burial Site as I wanted to have things settle for me. I have difficulty with the title - the movement originated in the United States - as it sounds very stark and can be off-putting. It is basically an afternoon spent talking about death with lots of cups of tea and cake. The basic idea behind it is that if we openly talk about death and all things connected it loses some of its power to create such overwhelming fear in us. None of the group of people who came along avoided talking about death and their own mortality.

As I reflected after it did feel that it achieved its aim. I have never had a fear of death. I have been present at death as a nurse and with family members and I have looked at my own mortality since I was a child. I have been comfortable with death most of my life. I am very aware that not everyone is and it was only as I sat drinking my tea, eating my cake and talking, that I realised I had been feeling very constrained, disconnected with the world at times because by being open about something that seems to be an increasing taboo I felt much more at peace with those around me, more relaxed and accepted.

I realise this sort of open forum is not for everyone but if more people were open about their fears around death then I feel, strongly, that it would lose a lot of its controlling power, freeing the individual to live their lives before they die.

## **21st March 2015**

There is an inspirational quote hanging on a panel of wood on the wall that I note every time I visit a local cafe, with the best coffee in town I may add, that has great meaning for me, how I live my life and for the work I undertake. It is by the American author, artist and speaker Vivian Greene.

"Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass... it's about learning to dance in the rain." (All copyright belongs to the author).

For me this means that life isn't perfect and if we try to make it so we miss so much of our lives until we are faced with the prospect of old age and regrets of not living our lives as we hoped. So perhaps it is about taking a risk, accepting that things can't always be perfect and enjoying the moments that arise, be they sunny or rainy. For life passes quickly so maybe it's time to try something new and find new ways of being in the world and with others.

**1st April 2015**

I have just returned from a weekend Person Centred Encounter Group that was challenging and reaffirming of my way of being and my way of working. It was held at Cliffe College in the Peak District and aptly situated in the Hope Valley, Calver. Unfortunately the weather was wet and cold and I didn't get out to walk round the area. I admit to being a 'fair weather walker' but just being with others in the group and soaking up the atmosphere was renewing.

It was my first time with the Person Centred Approach Network and I am still processing things that came up for me. I would like to return next year if possible to build on this start. I attended to connect with others in the Person Centred approach and see what would be triggered in me. I went hoping that it would enhance my practice and I think it will but the process of integrating the information and awareness will take some time.

It was good to be around others working in or interested in the PCA and hear them integrate the core conditions. It did leave me feeling abit awed as there were some there who had been working in this way for many years more than I have but, the excitement and challenge was worth it. Add to that the centre we stayed in was modern, warm and welcoming, although the vegetarian menu needed abit more imagination, it added upto a good weekend away to reconnect with my chosen way of being and working. I have no doubt that I have settled on my correct path and that it is not easy for either a counsellor working in this way or the clients who come to us. Us counsellors are only experts on our selves. We need to understand and accept our selves so we can assist our clients to find their own way forwards and not get in their way.



**15th May 2015**

I have a new photograph on my home page. It is of some fungi growing on the bark of a tree in a green filled spring forest. It was taken by a friend at Hodsock Priory, Blyth, Nottinghamshire just a couple of weeks ago. It spoke to me at once and created a positive and hopeful feeling that I asked if I could use it and got the go ahead.

It whispers to me of strength in adversity. Of life being able to cling on and grow in what might be seen as a dead wood. There is hope for growing into something better in our lives, no matter how difficult or adverse the conditions seem. Sometimes it takes patience and a willingness to get lost in a dark, seemingly dead place to be able to emerge with something new. It is something to hold onto when all hope seems to have deserted us and we can see no way out of our dark dense forest.

Life holds on until the conditions are just right and then begins to wake. Very much like how I work as a counsellor in the Person-Centred approach. By offering the 'core conditions' of empathy, acceptance and realness in relationship I hope to create a space for new life and understanding to grow for my clients and often in my own life as well.

**1st July 2015**

On Monday 29th June I attended a conference held by a brand new Norfolk wide charity that I am involved with called The Butterfly Tree which will be offering holistic therapies for the dying. We hope to have a start-up date in September 2015. It consists of a network of counsellors and complementary therapists who will offer their services and expertise to the dying, their families, carers and friends. There will be a charge for the services. If you are interested in joining the network or have any questions then please do email Helen on the following address:  
thebutterflytree14@gmail.com

The theme of the conference was Death and Dying and the Coordinator, Helen Martin, asked me to read a poem. I said yes, I would be happy to read one, I would write one especially for the afternoon. Helen then asked if I would open the conference and read my poem then. I agreed feeling honoured to be asked and nervous, as I not comfortable addressing big groups but I felt I could manage it.

I used my own writing for wellbeing exercises to help me focus on the theme and would like to share the poem here with you. It is a free-form poem. I am happy for the work to be used by others as long as I am credited as the author.

## **DYING**

Dying.  
For us all it is  
a journey we will take.  
Dying can be lonely,  
fearful and unknown.  
For my dying  
I would desire  
a touch, a word,  
an understanding,  
unafraid presence  
to allow me to be heard.  
To hold my hand.  
To walk with me  
to the opening door.  
To help me find  
the words and actions  
to bid family and friends,  
and this world,  
farewell.  
To help me place my soul  
on that path.  
Who can help my family see  
and share these moments.  
Someone light of being  
but able to be in the dark,  
so that I may feel  
comforted and at peace,  
knowing my family are held,  
and I can say...  
...goodbye.

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### **27th July 2015**

It is the unexpected, unasked for moments that surprise and awe us when are often rushing from here to there with no time to notice ourselves or nature.

I was driving home yesterday evening and drove through a very sudden heavy shower. Behind me the sun was shining brightly on its way to the horizon and in front of me were heavy, black clouds and the most bright and beautiful double rainbow, so bright that the colours changed the colour of the barley field ahead. It lasted for a good 10 minutes, a gleaming companion on my way home along a country road.

The following few lines of poetry were ones I just jotted down on getting home. Totally unrefined or edited or polished. Pure writing for wellbeing and the rainbow certainly made my being feel well fed.

### **To End the Day**

A double rainbow shining,  
against dark clouds, bright.  
Leaping up or soft weeping  
down towards coming night.  
Sky brushed by colours holding  
Earth's hopes in light.  
Ephemeral moments, fleeting  
Glimpses of beauty feels just right.

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### **19th September 2015**

Sometimes it is easy to lose focus of what is important in your life and when that happens we can stumble around trying to find something to latch onto, to look forward to and to replace what we think we have lost. It can be that what we want or love or are striving for is still there in our lives but we have lost touch with it and cannot reconnect with it so feel abandoned, adrift and bereft of purpose.

That is something like my own feelings recently when plans I had did not come to fruition as quickly as I had hoped. I had lost touch with my belief in the world supplying what I need when I need it. I have also discovered in my life that I often need to 'get lost' on a journey, back track to where I took a wrong turn to get back on the right road again and travel on. I had begun to lose the focus on my own writing and how it worked for me and my dream of offering that to other people in a gentle, flexible way, without the rigidity of formal writing groups or set exercises. I seemed to have forgotten all I knew about this and couldn't find a way to get myself back there.

It was only through a meeting with another writer interested in writing for wellbeing today and a few lines in my own notebook in my six minute free write that I found my way back to where I had started and knew that was where I needed and wanted to be. By talking with Karen I realised I knew more than I thought that I did and I began to believe in my own abilities again. I can find my way on the path I have chosen and I can help others find their own way too. Below are a few of the lines that began to clear the overgrown path and show me the way again, very much as my view of the sea and beach at Overstrand near Cromer expanded when I emerged from the trees.

"What is six minutes in a lifetime? Six minutes in a day? Is there one moment of enlightenment or just the trudge through the dark days with eyes glued to where feet are placed so that the passing scenery of time is ignored? The dream disturbed me. Too many thoughts going round in my head, too many to sort out just one theme; knotted threads tangled into a ball of confusion where images rise and fall like waves on a beach and I cannot hold onto any of them. The narrative has been fractured and moments of the day gone, all subsumed into one another until it was impossible to separate dream from yesterday's reality. " ©Jacqui Empson-High Sept 2015

## **2nd October 2015**

I took part in an experiment last weekend, nothing set in a laboratory or anything formal or official, I listened to a piece of music on BBC Radio 3 that was the longest piece ever broadcast on that station. It was 'Sleep' by Max Richter and was eight hours long - playing from 12 midnight to 8am. The idea behind the piece was that it was played live overnight before an invited audience and that listeners to the radio station could listen in as well. It was part of Radio 3's 'Why Music?' weekend, looking at how music effects us. They had been asking listeners for their pieces of music that created 'the tingle factor'. It was looking at the psychological effect of music as part of this and I am interested in this area though I am not a musician and cannot play any instruments.

I settled down to sleep with the music playing on my bedside radio alarm clock and cannot claim that it improved or worsened my sleep as some listeners declared. I do not think I heard much of it with my 'waking' ears but amazingly it seemed to work at a very deep level indeed on me, for the following day I found I had some memory of the feeling of a dream I know I had had rather than images and that I was more receptive and aware of music and how it made me feel. All I can describe it as is that it got through my usual walls and the rush of life that I and we all live at now and touched me in a very deep place. That effect has not diminished at all. I am responding to music on a much more emotional level than before and it is enabling me to explore my own 'self' to a deeper level now than before. As a Person-Centred counsellor my 'self' is what I bring and use in my work. I feel it has been of benefit not just in my work but in my life and way of being.

## **7th November 2015**

It is very grey outside and the wind is pulling the leaves from the trees, they swirl around and fall like snow in winter. I am a person who enjoys the wind in my hair and against my skin. It feels different to last weekend when we held the first meeting of Lapidus - East Anglia at Star Throwers, Melton Road in Wymondham. I had been nervous about it as I had arranged the venue and seemed to be the lynchpin for the group. How many would attend? Would they get something from the meeting and

enjoy the presentation from our invited speaker, Monica Suswin? Would they find the venue and feel comfortable there? I was a little anxious and need not have been as my previous career in NHS administration was all about organising and getting things correct to run smoothly.

We were a mixed group of therapist and writers who believe in the power of words and writing for wellbeing. We have the beginnings of something new and we can all see what opportunities may open to us under the umbrella of Lapidus. We plan to have a small get together over coffee every couple of months and then to invite a speaker once a quarter. I hope that we can start something that will grow and bring together the words of writers and the therapeutic ways of counsellors/psychotherapists. Maybe there is a flower being nurtured towards blooming and becoming something of beauty.