Growing Awareness:
The Nurture of Nature & Self
“And what if the magic word were indeed ‘transformation’? If the darkness existed precisely in order to welcome the light?”

Susanna Tamaro, *Listen to my Voice*

My sincere thanks to Dr Kristin Diemer who has been so much more than a mentor to me throughout this process; to the oases community and to my fine family for all their support.
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Preamble

Entering oases graduate school followed a convergence of a number of synchronous events around 2007. I had long known about Schumacher College in Great Britain, through my former colleague and friend Wayne Williams (who it turns out is an ex neighbor of oases facilitators Chris Lloyd and Alan Brown’s). I was interested in their Masters in Holistic Science program. Having taught Herb Production and Organic Agriculture at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE for almost fifteen years, when the Institute was preparing to offer Degrees and Associate degrees, I was interested in moving into the higher education provision within my workplace.

During my enquiries with Schumacher I was actually offered a free place as they were just about to begin the new year, wanted more participants and liked my background. Initially very excited, I quickly realised it was impractical for me to pursue at this point as I had three young children and could not move half way around the world readily.

One day I heard Bob Randall talking on the radio. His charisma captured me and I noted the organisation he mentioned, Borderlands. I looked up their website which led me through to oases. oases was almost brand new and it seemed it had come along to exist nearby (relatively when compared to the UK) when I was ready to participate.

I went along to a breakfast and open morning and I most remember meeting Tricia. Everyone was very warm and friendly and it seemed an incredibly supportive space. My former literature lecturer, Roberta Munro, had recommended I seek out the services offered at Augustine nearly twenty years earlier and now I was here and ready to be here.

I wanted to write a book and there were blockages to this that I vaguely recognised would have to be tackled if I was to find the momentum to manifest the work I had in mind. Somehow I felt that oases was the place to put myself to work through these impediments. In my Year 12 yearbook I had identified my goals as “...to be happy, to write a book at some stage.” Sounded simple enough but I yet to produce any manuscript or feel that I was fulfilled.

On a family holiday to Margaret River during late August 1999 I had a dream or vision about the book/s. They were a series of progressive primers to introduce those who hadn’t discovered the plant realm to the joys of the vernal world. They
were clear and they sort of still are but the synapse, bridging between the intention and production, proved a stumbling block during many starts.

I was only just pregnant with my daughter, Cleo Lily. She is now thirteen. I have given birth to three beautiful children who have brought me and taught me so much. The first clear lesson Cleo taught me was one of self love. I would tuck her in when she was very little and ask, “Who loves you?” She answered, “You love me, Daddy loves me, Gracie loves me..” and she added, ..” and I love myself.”

This work is a labor of love as are my children, Grace, Cleo and Rex. I dedicate this to them and to the lessons of love which have shaped my life.
Introduction

In an early Integrative conversation (2008) we were encouraged to illustrate key learning moments in life. This proved valuable for me, as I was able to link the love impetus in each example and gain some insight into my ontological orientation. I have looked for love. I certainly feel I was born into a loving family and being held in that feeling is the first thing I depicted.
Sun shining, I next show myself in cross backed bathers lying on the warm edge of public swimming pools my parents used to manage, young, free and happy.
Next is my room and there are palms and bamboo fringing a back bedroom with a card table full of my creations. I had ‘hobbies’; growing and using herbs, teaching myself to make potpourri, incense, soap and remedies. Preparing film cartridges from bulk canisters to shoot, develop and print black and white photographs, wheeling a little trolley into my mother’s laundry at night to transform it into my darkroom.
Late one night whilst I am washing up in my laundry darkroom the doorbell rings. My older sister and I are home alone, just fourteen years old I answer the door. My uncle is on the step and my aunty and cousin are right behind him as they enter. I am worried right away but my mum isn’t home. Our grandparents are called around and eventually my aunt tells me, “daddy died tonight”. The self I have shown grieved for so long, shutting the door of my room each night to shed the tears I could not share.
Here’s the ‘snake’ of a road, the South Gippsland Highway. It’s the road to home, the valley fringed with verdant hills that have hugged me through my emergence into adulthood.
Sailing, whilst giving a sense of freedom, plundered some of my independence. Here I am happily being fed mango in the hammock under the boom but I have fallen into a trap. Working out what I want has been a part of the learning and whilst in ‘paradise’, living onboard a yacht at Hamilton Island in the Whitsundays, I determined I wanted “a bathtub, a bookcase and a garden.”
The final scene shows five ‘happy fats’ and in a sense comes full circle from the first. My fairytale has since fractured and the growth toward acceptance is one of the main frames for my heuristic research.

drawings by Marli Draper 2008
Organic Ontology

I came to Oases ready to explore my ways of knowing, or not knowing. I was going to say I felt comfortable with this but when I review my journal it records my sense of self consciousness. I wanted to get to the heart of it though, to the core of what I could learn. It was almost immediately obvious to me that this exploration would be an inner one.

In Integrative Conversation, an important relational method of inquiry used throughout the Oases program, fellow participant Simon posed the dilemma about whether to focus our efforts locally or globally. This generated significant insight into my approach, which was to regard my body and the selves of my psyche as the very community that I needed to work with. In other words, my project was me. I perceived a community of ‘selves’ that needed support, reaching out in tiers of intimacy, self, partner, children, family, friends…charity begins at home.

I sought, using heuristic techniques, to better understand self and to honor my unique being with a view to being able to align more authentically with my intentions. It is about forgiving within not condemning without. I began to realise there were plenty of things in the world that ‘needed work’ but one of them, often overlooked, is the self.

My role is soul
My project’s me
My goal’s not gaol
But Liberty!

(Marli Draper Personal Journal 5/2/09)

For me, what had transform was myself. This is really doing your homework! It would begin as I realised this and it would not end because there would always be new awarenesses and experiences to integrate. As I expressed where I would begin, with self, I became aware of the resistance of others to this challenge. “You can’t do that full-time” was a response I recorded (Personal Journal, 2008) Indeed, this is not work that can be ‘parked’ or put away. I wanted to work with my ‘selves’ to de-compartmentalise and reconcile all the aspects of self. I was aware that it would require more than what could be described as sustained effort and that I would be setting myself up for failure as part of the mix. I would fall and get up again.

Upon reflection, I don’t think that I was aware of the scope that such a seemingly narrow frame of reference would encompass. Looking in is as myriad and immense
a task as outward seeking. It helped that I could correlate the concept to the relationship between what is unseen and what is manifest in plant morphology. The impetus to grow is what we share with all that lives. Despite vast differences in expression of this growth it seems innate, it is a natural and spiritual force. My premise is personal; growth in nature is our way back to ‘god’.

I have an abiding interest in growing. Whilst I appreciate that there are other pursuits in life, for me this feels fundamental. Plants make food out of soil and sunlight. They are the bridge between the sun and the earth, making food that sustains other lifeforms. They are alchemic. I am interested in what becomes, how it becomes and what it becomes from. I am fascinated by the impetus to grow and be sustained.

I have realised that I make analogies constantly between the growth I discern in nature and the growth of the individual. I hope therefore to elucidate what I feel is quite an unique approach, offering insights about plant life and linking them metaphorically to our growth. I intend to enhance our understanding of plant life and our selves and the critical relationship we share. I will cluster the themes of self development as they progressed throughout my study to correlate with botanical phenomena.
The questions of growth, and how to facilitate fine growth for myself and for the world about which I care has been the focus of my questioning since late childhood. It is to this I have devoted the bulk of my personal and professional endeavours. Very simply I have asked, “How can I grow?”

Methodology

Heuristic research, which Clark Moustakas refers to as “a process of internal search through which one discovers that nature and meaning of existence and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (Moustakas 1990) seems instinctive. It is how we make meaning and follow our heart.

Using an heuristic frame, my research charts a course of personal ecological understanding. The beginnings of this process do not coincide with the commencement of this project I now realise, but were embarked upon when I first created a garden, around the age of nine. Specifically, it was a herb garden; I grew to understand and apply the healing properties of therapeutic plants to help my sick father.

“Heuristic Research process include moments of meaning, understanding and discovery that the researcher will hold and savor. From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning and inspiration” (Moustakas 1990).

I have always been an autodidact but only quite recently realised what one was. The intent to find things out leads to a progressive, self-directed learning pursuit. It frequently feels fortuitous; the way one aspect of learning links in or leads to another. In-tuition, an inner knowing or tutor has played an increasingly important role in my learning as I have learnt to listen to these inner prompts. There are other knowings too; synergies and synchronicity with others that have intimated the tacit, a wellspring perhaps, of universal knowledge. There is much to be said for this groping, “..to an important degree, all discovery is deductive” (Polanyi 1969). Almost apologetically we pick up clues from all places, the imperative obsession with objectivity thriving despite its implausibility.

In an unwritten rule of research, we are not permitted to be shamelessly subjective and yet the ideal, so-called objective perspective is a misnomer. This contradiction
has plagued me for years. Attempting in my earnest way to avoid bias and 
judgement has been counter productive and involved personal cost. Coming to 
embrace my way of being and of seeing, recognising many of my filters, has given 
me a new confidence to share the meanings I make and a deeper connection with 
my desire. I now confidently confront and examine my ontological approach as an 
integral aspect of my work.

My research methodology is auto-ethnographic as well as heuristic. Roth (2005) 
describes “legitimate ways of establishing inter-subjectivity that escape the false 
dichotomy opposing objectivism and subjectivism.”

The process I have used has been qualitative and personal. Continuing to read 
widely, I have selected and absorbed texts from a wide variety of fields. Many have 
offered significant insights which I have then integrated into my praxis, exploring 
their meaning and possibilities within my experience.

Specifically I have charted a course of personal praxis; action and reflection. 
Earnestly, as is my way, I have sought to explore new ways of thinking and being 
in the world, reframing my experiences with new found awarenesses. Roth (2005) 
reassures, “practical understanding testifies to our being as belonging to a praxis 
that precedes all objectification.” I take this to mean we cannot escape our integral 
subjectivity and we need not apologise for but explore and integrate our framing 
processes.
There have been key learning moments and I have endeavored to record them. I have journaled quite diligently since embarking upon my research and I have used the process both to record significant ideas that have come from my experience and encounters and to generate new insights through processes that include free writing and poetry.

Various physical, psychological and spiritual therapies including yoga and meditation have helped illuminate my unique patterns and promote healing. Honoring the nature of the heuristic processes, I have allowed time for my feelings and power to percolate and direct my subsequent activities. “The heuristic research process is not one that can be hurried or timed by the clock or calendar. It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity, and integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey” (Moustakas 1990). This statement rings very true to me.

Sharing my experiences with others, most particularly my friend Julie, I have been able to make more meaning, sharing and developing insights in collaboration. In dialogue and reciprocity we can develop, like trees in the forest whose roots systems become one. In the words of oases facilitator Ken Fernandez, “We become who we are through others”.

With courage, I have ‘removed the veil’ from a number of dark personal themes and literally faced them. Liberation has resulted, a peak numinous experience coincided with some major movements in my life during the first year of my studies.

Committing to the process of self examination and reflection, I have integrated my learning as I have progressed and it has meant that there have been massive changes in my life. I resigned from my long term role as an horticulture and agriculture lecturer and took up a role as reporter and photographer for a regional paper which I also subsequently resigned from. I have retrained as a teacher and am now teaching adolescents with special needs.

I attempted to reconcile my relationship but was unable to. I have left my marriage and that has meant I have left my living laboratory, our farm, moving into a town house that is a great ‘fit’ for us, myself and my three children.
Using autoethnographic method, I have analysed and interpreted my cultural assumptions (Chang 2008). Closely examining my life, I have let go of old patterns and made new meanings.
The artifacts

During the course of my investigation, I used journaling and photography prolifically as way to articulate and to capture what was taking shape, transforming. This diligent approach to process has resulted in the production of artefacts that effectively illustrate the progress that was made. Form was created through reflection, in the attempt to document, to express, the meanings and resolve that were at my edge. I have made a conscious choice to challenge some of my own limitations and to deeply investigate the nature of my own unique paradigm. The artefacts I created; a peony patch, poems and photographs and a short film are linked in their exploratory and expressive intentions; to see, to develop.

In pursuit of the question, “what will nurture or nourish me?” I express my interest and desire to understand, experience, share and express intimacy with the natural world. My photography is presented interspersed with the text throughout this work as I am equally comfortable expressing both in words and pictures.

My poetry collection, *Poetry from the Pool*, is so indicative of my process, it’s clear to me upon reflection. I want to affirm that the name I have given this collection refers to the quenching of my thirst as I came to be able to explore so freely within the oases spaces, as opposed to the desert of the mainstream. There is also a Middle Eastern influence acknowledged, inspired and satiated as I was by the Sufi poets.

I could perhaps perform a reading my poetry now, though they’re deeply personal words that still move me to tears. I could not have contemplated this even late last year, as they were the band-aids to wounds hard to share. We are all deeply wounded. Many of my poems now work for me as little mantras and I feel they came through me, not from me.
Initial Investigations

There is a dearth of literature that conveys the correlation between human psychological and spiritual growth and plant growth, although the use of the growth metaphor to describe human progress in these areas of personal development is abundant. My earlier career explorations of ‘alternative’ science led me to Goethean based science. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe envisioned a fuller integration of poetic and scientific sensibilities that would provide a way of experiencing nature both symbolically and scientifically, simultaneously (Miller 2009). Originally published in 1790, *The Metamorphosis of Plants* suggests ideas that seem still to not have been taken a lot further, although its influence survives on the periphery. Studying botanical form, Goethe proposed the Urpflanze, or archetypal plant, concluding that protean force drives leaf development and the dynamism of metamorphosis develops the structures further; tendril, flower, fruit, etc. Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza influenced Goethe’s ideas about causal reality; that there is an inner and an outer aspect to what appears, becomes physically manifest. Utilising both sensory and intuitive perception, “Goethe’s scientific approach seeks the higher goal of illuminating knowledge from within. This way of knowing - from the inside- is rooted ultimately in a harmony or
identity between the human spirit and the informing spirit of nature, wherein ‘speaks one spirit to the other’” (Goethe 2009).

The discovery of this work was a springboard of possibility for me; I had not found, during my undergraduate course in Horticulture at Burnley, a reference to such a lively and reverent scientific approach. Offered now was a way in to making sense of the life expression to which my eyes are drawn. Life-force or ether was the mystical factor that one had to add to the non-living parts to make sense of how something manifested life (Colquhoun & Ewald 1996). Integrating Science and Art, New Eyes for Plants illuminated becoming in nature; in the leaf sequence exercise the growth progression is clearly articulated. The sense of a pulse; expansion, contraction, up, out, centre, periphery is visually conveyed.

I often (though not always) date my books when I acquire them and this practice shows I was enthralled. In late ’98, a month after New Eyes for Plants I had purchased In Partnership with Nature. Bockemulhl (1981) urges transformation of the whole human being in his capacity to think feel and act, making no apologies for the spiritual aspects of the approach. This time in a contemporary context, Goethe’s insights are enlivened and developed. Touching on correlations with human phenomena; “upwards we find ourselves in the life of thought, related to the light,” (Bockemulhl 1981) these works of spiritual science opened a path to exploration of new ways of thinking about my discipline which integrated my sensual experiences.

A practical method of growing, Bio-Dynamic Agriculture, was developed by Rudolf Steiner, who was heavily influenced by Goethe’s ideas, around 1924. Here was organic agriculture, ie. a growing method that does not employ the use of herbicides or pesticides, with an integrated spirituality. A Winter’s Tale (ABC 1984) showed me how expertly Biodynamics was articulated in Australia by Alex Podolinsky.

Proceeding from observation, methods have been developed and refined from information intuited by Steiner. Preparation 500 is made from cow manure, buried in cow horns over winter, which becomes trans-substantiated (Podolinsky 2000). To bear witness to the real results for me has been the basis of investigating further. I have now been growing biodynamically for over ten years.

Seeing the effectiveness of BD practices in transformation of the soil and consequent plant growth led to my deepening appreciation and thirst for understanding of the integrated nature of life. “Whoever presses forward to the higher mysteries sees things which the illusions of the senses conceal from ordinary human beings” (Steiner 1993). I searched hard to develop my enlivened ‘sense of
humus’ and to deepen my understanding of what would promote and enhance growth running the concurrent themes of self and plants.

I visited a local Biodynamic farm without realising it was biodynamic. I was very disinterested because it was part of a ‘Beef Week’ tour we were doing which had not inspired me but as soon as I got to this farm my senses came alive. It was hard to put a finger on what is was. Something made me sit up and take notice. Biodynamic farms operate wholistically, treating the farm itself as an organism and to the greatest extent possible keeping it a ‘closed’ (minimal input) system. I have come to regard them as having a unseen, maybe magnetic, field around them and this led me towards examining Rupert Sheldrake’s work.

Perhaps in alignment with Goethe’s approach to nature, Sheldrake has found what he calls ‘formative causation’ to account for the habits of nature. The main reasons that developmental biologists proposed the idea of morphogenetic fields in the first place was because organisms can recover their wholeness and recover their form even if parts of them are damaged or removed (Sheldrake 2011). Perhaps morphic fields pertain to the ‘formative forces’, the etheric, of Goethe and Steiner’s work. Centric and periphery, or inner and outer, light and dark, expansion and contraction are some of the polar forces working together in the physical manifestation of life imbued form. Seeing the patterns, there are repetitions in form, repetition of similar ideas, in a of a broad range of thinking about the nature of nature.
“All my life I have had a burning interest in the manifestations of
nature” (Feininger 1977). Concurring with such sentiment, this treasured volume
of macro photography and wonder has been a ‘heart’ book I’ve had for many years.
More pattern is pondered in the wonderful work of Theodor Schwenk, who draws
our awareness to the meanings and movements of water working in nature, in
micro and macro organisational forms. “Every idea - like every organic form -
arises in a process of flow, until the movement congeals into a form” (Schwenk
1996).

Sharing my discoveries with my students, one of them told me about Mandelbrot,
whose work I had not yet encountered. With words of love, Mandelbrot rises to
the challenge of exploring and articulating what he describes as ‘plastic beauty’ in
The Fractal Geometry of Nature (Mandelbrot 1977). A contemporary ‘marriage’ of
mathematics and manifest form, this work has revolutionised many integrated
sciences. Working openly with intuition he devised a formula for what he coined
‘self similarity’ the replicable, scalable, oh so familiar patterns of nature.

It is a wonderful thing to work practically with the earth, these deeper
understandings in place. Many moments I have become lost in encounter with
nature and found myself smiling. There, I am home.
The Growth Metaphor

Your soul will stay forlorn
Until you come to know:
To die and be re-born
Is Spirit’s way to grow. (Goethe in Hauschka 2002)

I want to share with people why growing is important, how they can help plants to grow and how that would help them grow themselves. From my formative times with my father, as I absorbed his interests in growing and cooking, I explored the theme of ‘self-sufficiency’. A catchphrase of the ’70’s, it was all about what we now refer to as sustainability. ‘Self-sufficiency’ was more earnest and perhaps more idealistic than our current ‘sustainability’. Now there is more knowing but also more cynicism, perhaps warranted as many purported sustainable options appear to me to be ‘green-washed’. I distinguish here because I am interested in authenticity and integrity. To ‘go through the motions’ does not produce the quality result.

The blinkers have come off with maturity and I have dedicated my efforts towards understanding and sharing insights that support and promote life. My way of being is to explore ideas and to share them with others, deepening our understanding as we make collaborative meaning. It has been a way of ‘cross pollinating’, increasing the diversity, the mix that is potent with potential. I have learnt so much from exploring the concept of ‘self-sufficiency’ including the assertion that, “Self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue” (Freire 1970).

I’ve spent most of my “career” teaching people how to grow. My connections have deepened. Sharing information with others is powerful, influencing the ways we understand. It is such a thrill, sometimes, when you can see ‘the penny drop’. I enjoy someone else’s learning as much as my own. I can recall in 2008, lecturing to my organic agriculture students about the emerging global consciousness. I could see some of them glazing over, they did not understand my verbose and esoteric explanation. Then I summed it, “it’s about we, not me”. I knew they then began to understand and it was a fine moment.

Schopenhauer’s leading metaphysical claim is that the inner being of the natural world coincides with our own inner being, and that by becoming aware of our inner being, we can become aware of what everything is in itself. The core of this awareness, Schopenhauer (2012) calls “Will” – the driving energy that he discovers deep within himself.
Polanyi concurs “...our understanding of living beings involves at all levels a measure of indwelling” (1969). He distinguishes outer knowledge, that he calls focal - ‘knowledge by attending to’ from inner or subsidiary knowledge- ‘knowledge by relying on’.

There may be a moment, or moments, when we realise. To me, it is about what we wake up to. As we transform other things also transform; this alchemic capacity is tremendously munificent. Transformative processes are inextricable; when we can accept and flow with changing nature we can grow well, knowing our part in the whole. Starhawk, in Dreaming the Dark, sums up this sentiment for me, “When we really understand that the earth is alive, and know ourselves as part of that life, we are called to live our lives with integrity, to make our actions match our beliefs, to take responsibility for creating what we would have manifest, to do the work of healing” (Hooks 2009).

Many people regard ecology as alien. We see ourselves as separate and this false but pervasive sense of separation has a huge impact on our ways of being. “When we include ourselves as parts or belongings of the world we are trying to preserve, then obviously we can no longer think of the world as ‘the environment’ - something out there around us. We can see that our relation to the world surpasses mere connection and verges on identity” (Berry 1995).
I had moved away from myself, too far from home, but I am back and I need not much more than a pen, paper and a shutter (sensor) to make my mark.

*The Seed.*

When a seed imbibes water and begins to germinate, the radicle emerges first. Always root first. Down it goes, anchoring, grounding, tapping source. What becomes the stem then emerges as it sends the first leaves skyward. These cotyledons don’t look formed, they can photosynthesise however and they shield the first true leaves passage towards the light.

Firmly established, the plant can grow to reveal its distinct form, given through a combination of genetics, environment and a more subtle influence Sheldrake refers to as a morphic field, for want of a better term. I am very interested in the unseen impetus which is correlated in many cultures, ideas and traditions.

When you plant a seed of it is a gesture of possibility, positivity. You can nurture something tiny into existence, manifest a physical or even an unseen presence. In the emergence, something real ‘comes to light’, seeking ever upward. We use the metaphor of light often and lightly, but it is indeed a powerful truth.

Fellow oases participant Sarah had an insight that resonated profoundly with me. It was to remind us how we design our own lessons and manufacture our own meaning. These ideas have underpinned many of my reflections in the learnings of the past few years. Ruth, another participant in the early sessions, talked about her GOAL - Generous, Openhearted, Active Love. I wrote in my journal, “a real beacon of light, learning to love is to me what it is all about” (Personal Journal, 2008).

In early oases days I feel self conscious, contrived, intimidated, trying to find a way in to the work. Still I can feel like this and that the explanations of what oases is are unwieldy, but it has help me germinate seeds in my life that are growing.
I want to explore the spark, connection, a joke, a smile, the transitory. A ‘head’ note of a perfume. The head or top note of a perfume is exquisite but not lingering. Highly volatile, it is the first emanation, an attraction that is often gifted mainly to the wearer as they apply it in their intimate custom. The moment a seed coat cracks, first eye contact with a newborn. The seed contains the promise of a magical moment and then there is that moment. The seed is contracted possibility and when the correct conditions coincide expansion occurs and the organism (or idea) germinates. Very often this is a private or unseen process.

The seed is a reminder that the moment may wait or sleep inside. It may bide its time before it falls on fertile ground or is near enough to the surface. “A culture is nothing more or less than the realm of human thought made visible” (Hauschka). Much may come to later hinge on that seemingly minor moment of transformation, when the seed from potential into process. “From little things big things grow” (Kelly 1991).
Metamorphosis

Describing the changing of form, the Oxford (1987) dictionary even uses the word magic in this definition. What does drive this change?

Goethe (Miller 2009) intimates the pulse, expansion and contraction of the plant archetype from seed to senescence. Elongation, planar spreading, indentation, raying; four beats like much music. The first two are ways of expansion, up and out, the indentation or differentiation is a contraction to character and the raying a bolt to the periphery. Watch a weed over time; a sow thistle does it well and you can see the cycle. What strikes me is when (it is most pronounced in what we term annuals) plant ‘shrink grow’ their leaves become finer as they mature. Steiner develops Goethe’s observations, noting the first two physical expansion stages are linked to the physical plane and the contraction, transition to flowering mode, linked to etheric activity. Interestingly, there is little known about the levitational pull of nature, with its force even being referred to as anti-gravitational (non-down, not up!), to rise by the virtue of lightness. Levitation is perceived as magic! There is a link, more than in language, between light (illumination) and light
(weight). We focus on Newton and the downwards forces. Like a glass half empty instead of half full. Perennial pessimism I perceive.

My friend Marita told me about the beautiful story she wrote about a chrysalis that became a butterfly. She had stuffed the story into a briefcase, forgotten about it, then later given the bag to the op shop. Bert van Bedaf, journalist whom I later replaced at the Great Southern Star when he was ailing (he has since passed) bought the bag, discovered the story and publisher it in the paper hoping the author might come forward. Marita was reading awhile before she realised she was reading her own story. She met with Bert and the follow up was published, showing them out the front of Marita’s shop in Leongatha which had a big butterfly decal on the front window.

Sharing this remarkable story with me, she asked me what it meant! She missed the obvious metaphor. I was bursting with the understanding that was so close to her that she’d missed it; that her creativity was bursting and had found its own wings, its own way, literally, into the light. Express it, have confidence, let it out, it said to me.

Now Marita has too passed and I mourn the loss of a guileless soul. Darkness and doubt surround her death but in life she was a light and to call her memory to mind is to recall a radiant being and guide toward truth.

Becoming aware of the interplay of outer and inner forces, gross and subtle, known and unknown, we can more readily accept our lack of control. Change is unpredictable and it cannot be prefigured (Whitwell 2004). Vast opportunities for exploration abound from relaxing our grip on our situation. There is much courage and ego relinquishment in a more human approach to self and others. A lot of our activity is goal orientated, mechanistic, not examined. But change comes, invited or otherwise.

In her poem 501, Emily Dickinson expresses,

“Narcotics cannot still
The Tooth that nibbles at the soul” (Dickinson 1960)

There was for me, at my recent point of development or change, seemingly no choice but to grow. I began to embrace the notion that feelings are embodied - where is the feeling in my body? I remarked to a friend that my head hurt then further clarified that it was ‘all the bits without hair that hurt’. My face. The awareness was literally ‘in my face’.

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For a long time, I had been ‘sitting on the fence’. I began to imagine one of the beautiful wrought iron fences, the loveliest fence, but not to sit on. Ouch! When you know, it is painful.
If you are feeling DoWN drop the ‘D’ O W N

Oh What’s Next?
OK With Nothing

Change it around N O W

Now Offers Wonder
New Opportunities Worldwide
Next Option, Wow,

You’ve W O N

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 12/8/08)

Ecology of the Edge

Somehow South Gippsland is my home. I feel I am a fringe dweller. As an emerging adult, one of the things I knew in my heart strongly was that I would leave town. I love SMelbourne, as I call it; I was born in Prahran but a self imposed exile was always imminent. I knew where I’d go to, down that snaking road to the Prom, where the hills start to hug you. Held in by hills and covered by canopy; well there’s bald bits because they did such a good job of clearing the Mountain Ash forests a hundred or so years ago. It turns out some of my ancestors settled here. Now I’ve moved to the town where my father was born.

The edge teems with life, with possibility; for an organism there is light and shade, cover and beyond, dynamism. Site of much movement, where there are footprints, there is fertility. Life leads to life. Mandelbrot’s fractal formula fascinates me, you
cannot measure an authentic edge, eg. a coastline, except in linear estimation as “there is no question it is much longer than the straight line between its end points” (Mandelbrot 1977).

I find our built environment very hard and harsh, sometimes I despair why we still build boxes to enclose us. I find it enervating and I long for an alternative. “It is ironic that we have made wildlife refuges for...but not for ourselves in the places where we live day after day. We understand the that the loss of habitat is the most disastrous event that can occur to a free creature. We fervently point out how other creatures' natural territories have become surrounded by cities...noise and other dissonance, as though we are not surrounded by the same, as though we are not affected also“ (Estes 1992). The truth expressed here takes my breath away and I long for us to bloom where we belong.
Canopy

Where I would be would have a canopy. Without a cover of plants, the soil becomes baked and hard but vegetation, higher and higher forms, will try hard to hold the soil together, to soften and to cover. Nature is modest. You notice wherever there is opportunity, plants will grow if possible, even in pavement cracks.

The goal seems to be to soften, to become. The plant grows, dies, then in the hidden humic process, fertility can be held for new life. This is the very practical foundation of what we may crudely term sustainability.

When we sense our critical connection to nature we can soften. It is cooling, calming. Thinking about my way of seeing, I seek softness. My way of being, open but with some protection. A canopy is a covering, a semi permeable shelter. I can see now that some of my work has been to stay open but give myself some protection, to build resilience and to focus more inwardly. I have tested my tenacity.
A Stand.

During a particular meditative experience I got to a point where I felt quite uncomfortable. It was fear. The clear question that arose was of fight or flight. The answer was iterated and reiterated, Stand. Many times we feel the urge to move or to attempt to control when what is need is just to be still, to be calm. To not move a muscle. “Don’t just do something, stand there!”

I have had to learn to ‘stand it’. I have had to withstand the urge to run, retaliate or hide and confront the lessons life has revealed to me. During the Entering the Ecological domain retreat at Moora Moora, my first poem emerged which helped me to hone and articulate the learnings offered to us directly by nature.

It must be easy
to be a tree
no busy day, no demands
just to grow, right where it stands

“The seasons animate
dress or denude me
make me wave and whistle
silent company I keep
no talk, which is cheap”

The tree didn’t ponder my
human predicament but if it did
may have wondered
why, with choice, didn’t I
drop by more often

“The birds are busy as you see
they do not compare with me
busy with a capital B
A part of the madness,
ext fouler
power prowler
thinker stinker
faster master
playing the game of shame”

“I’ll wait for you, I’ll be
here in the same spot
before and after, all along
I’ll have some air to share
you can give me a pat
and that’s that”

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 25/4/2008)
Mary Oliver has powerfully appealed to my (self) expectations and reassured me that I do not have to ‘bow down’ or kowtow to others. There is such strength and resilience in standing your ground.

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.  excerpt from ‘Wild Geese’ Oliver (2004)

Regain your territory, recapture your spirit, nurture your strengths. Stand still and stand firm. Keep your resolve. (Fuller 2009) The embodied feeling this time had been in my back. I had a very painful (physically and mentally) experience when my back ‘went out’ and I was lying in bed confronting the issue. I realised I was “spineless” and at that moment a clear choice emerged. When I put these urgings into practice it changed the dynamic of my intimate relationship dramatically. There is prose I have written but the poetry says it so succinctly.
You can only take
What’s on offer
I’ve shut up shop
I do not proffer
My riches readily
I hold myself
More steadily

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 7/8/2008)

“A firebrand is a burning ember, life that is in each of us and that provides the spark and energy to speak against what distorts, hides and denies our being and truth. It is that which awakens in us when we must declare our independence or when we discover a new formula for living.
The motive of the firebrand is not to attack or destroy others but to bring to light a basic truth, to take a stand, and to declare and own who one is, especially in the face of perceived violations of one’s values and rights and interferences with one’s goals, purposes and meanings” (Moustakas 1995).

The firebrand has awakened in me. It sounds powerful but in fact it is confronting. There are layers of fear in this work for me and they keep coming. It sounds spectacular but it is difficult; the dictionary (Oxford 1987) defines firebrand as ‘kindling strife’. Just a wee spark to begin but with potential power all recognise. Something may succumb to being burnt.
The Dark Night of the Soil (Wirzba 2007)

I have had a recurrent dream that there are places in my home I don’t go to. Each time there were different details but the theme was always, ‘you don’t go there’. Leaving well alone, not going there, *burying*, there’s the soil analogy.

Rooms in my house I don’t enter
Let alone clean
Modern massive and untouched
With access from here as well as
Alternative Entrances
Fear is in my face again!
Quick! Get it a Room!
New Spaces I could utilise
Might Need Makeovers
Or an Exorcism
Harsh Light throws Heavy Shadow

Marli Draper, Personal Journal Sep 2009

This feeling of overwhelm, sensing things we know are there, under the surface, but are not ready to explore. We don’t want to disturb the soil, to uncover what is there. It might be rotten. My journal bears the admission; ‘My way of being tries to ignore a lot of the ‘stuff” I don’t want to deal with, but of course it doesn’t go away...’ (Draper, 2008). Compartmentalising my suffering, I have hid it in shame. “Our contemporary civilisation elicits a great variety of feelings while at the same time inhibiting their expression” (Ferrucci 1982).

We prefer not to serve the soil, or enter the dark “ground” that is creation’s life and death, because it entails our submission to the unknown and incomprehensible (Wirzba 2007). I felt Milligan’s pain acutely when I read the following poem. It was one that undoubtedly helped me realise I could express how I feel, and process the pain, with poetry. Exposing the previously the unsayable, unsaid.

*Feelings*

There must be a wound!
No one can be this hurt
and not bleed.
How could she injure me so?
  No marks
  No bruise

Worse!
People say ‘My, you’re looking well’
.........God help me!
  She’s mummified me-
  ALIVE!

(Milligan 1979)

There is a wound of separation. We separate ourselves from our ‘selves’, from others, from God. We do this for protection but it doesn’t work. Wirzba describes our obstacle as self, our “tenacious need to maintain the separate, external egotistic will” (2007). Ken Fernandez, a beloved oases facilitator, grouped the ‘sky god’ religions, illuminating for me how we represent God. Sufi poet Hafiz, so poignantly, through Daniel Ladinsky’s translation, applied the salve, the reassurance that God is indeed near.
We Might Have to Medicate You

Resist your Temptation to lie
By speaking of separation from God

Otherwise,
We might have to Medicate You.

In the Ocean
A lot goes on beneath you eyes.

Listen,
They have clinics there too
For the Insane
Who persist in saying things like:

“I am independent from the Sea,
God is not always around

Gently
Pressing against
My body” (Ladinsky, after Hafiz 1999)

Within the dark night of the soil is the recognition of self betrayal. This time, the issue is in my ‘core’. This correlates with my weakness in this area identified by Louise Mahler in the Voice Mind Body unit I undertook at oases. When we examined posture I had to modify my stance considerably to give good stability and not be pushed from behind. My masseur at the time, Morgan Wyaani, identified an ingratiating tendency, seeking the goodwill of others and in the process, diminishing self. I have worked to heal Dan Tien, the lower centre of gravity in the body, most particularly through Pilates. Much of my learning over the past few years has been around the theme of self betrayal. Poems have come in and healing begins to happen.

Fellow oases participant, Genevieve, talked about bring uncomfortable with stepping into her own power. I think many would relate to this, I certainly did and it is something I can see know I have been mastering. Pinkola-Estes (1992) laments that it is women as well as men, that are afraid of women’s power. We give it
away. All too readily. It is like a hot potato. “We tend to let things happen to us, rather than direct our choices in life, manifesting our own desires and will” (Gurmukh 2000). We attempt to control others, which is futile, and neglect to take responsibility for ourselves, which is vital.

Some women, we put ourselves last. Over earnest in our role as caregivers, our energies are spent on others. There is a huge gesture of love involved, no doubt, but self love is forfeited. I recognised it clearly in a student I had grown to love, who was dying. She conveyed the message in words and from beyond the grave she went to prematurely. She sacrificed herself for her family. This poem is hers:

Poem for Jen

Goodbye hello
I’ll let you know
all things must go
no tears

farewell my friend
reached journey’s end
they fly you know
the years

hello goodbye
you now know why
no self deny
no fears

come and gone
body’s worn
briefly here
I shone

Marli Draper Personal Journal 23/11/09
Through his writing, Clark Moustakas shares a considered and delightful approach to discovering the world through your unique self. *Being-in, Being-For, Being-with* (Moustakas 1995) seemed to speak directly to my process at this point.

“I have often encountered root meanings in relationships, events, and conditions that enabled me to move beyond pain and alienation. I have understood more clearly the doubt and suffering that must be faced in coming to terms with betrayal; feelings and memories connected with old hurts, abuses, and rejections; and fears, shortcomings, and inadequacies aroused in moments of struggle, defeat and failure” (Moustakas 1995).

And so, you can resist, but in the end you surrender to the soil. If you can let go, submit what needs to die, to be laid to rest, there may be new life. We must sacrifice our suffering, said Daumal (Bonasse 2005). I am learning to own my power. This is very new to me. I have learnt so much. I was going to remark that it has not yet brought me to a new place but it has.
A sense of Humus

We are of the soil. It is deplorable in our culture the way we waste waste. Soil is the site for organic waste transformation and yet we do not use nor even readily acknowledge its capacity. It is time to consider how much water we use as a conduit to flush human waste away. This water is then considered ‘black’ and a lot of energy goes into separating the solids from the water. The most beautiful contrast with the waste of our waste is correctly composted ‘humanure’ that could fertilise a flower.

The new shoots of Promise today
Arise from the nourish of Yesterday’s spoils
Such is the nature of Nature

Humus is the magic that comes from the muck or waste. I love to teach people what humus actually is. They might say soil, or compost, they can describe it. The thing is it is processed. It is the excreta of an microorganism that ate worm castings from the worm whom ate cow manure from the cow who ate grass. The humus forms a matrix, a stable and embeddable structure of exchange. It is the ‘good shit’. The words ‘humble’ and ‘humus’ come from the same semantic root (Jenkins 2005). When we have enough humility not to turn away from the muck, we can assimilate and transform it.

When we do not process our waste it builds up. We humans desperately need to deal with our shit, practically and metaphorically. We need the rich reserves of transformation, growing from darkness towards the light.

More humour is required, people are so earnest and serious and closed. We need to be open and feel our feelings and connect with one another, to show them a path of hope and possibility. We need to find everyday transcendence and the courage to surrender.

“You must be a lotus unfolding its petals when the sun rises in the sky, unaffected by the slush where it is born or even the water which sustains it” (Sri Sathya Sai Baba 2008.)
Being unaffected by the slush is not the same as ignoring ‘what lies beneath’. My journal records, “I have learnt that I am choosing to grow and that it is painful and a process that you can’t see the results of immediately. I will have to be patient. Learning to love myself. I come first then I can give to others. The analogy of fitting my oxygen mask on the plane before fitting my children’s comes to me here because it did not come naturally to me. I have had to learn this. I am my community. Learning not to deny self. Learning about what I know that I hold in other parts of my body than my head” (Marli Draper, Personal Journal 2010).

Oases Spiritual domain facilitator Paul Sanders introduced the notion that god is a shit stick. “A monk once asked Ummon, "What is the Buddha?" Ummon answered thus: "A dried shit-stick!" (Note: A 'dry shit stick' was the medieval equivalent of toilet paper. Hence Yunmen's reply is sometimes translated as "Something to wipe your arse on!"” (Wikipedia) It was blasphemous enough to breakthrough. I examined and owned a lot of my “issues”.

Sometime in the second half of 2008, I had an major awakening. I became light and life-full, almost crazy. I understood. So powerfully not externalising god. The unlearning is so hard and we hold so strongly to our beliefs and patterns, we get so sure and determined that to surrender to not knowing is very difficult. When I got to ‘nowhere’ it was liberating. It broke down a long held, culturally instilled myth that was making non sense, a dualism that did not ring true.
La Madre (The Mother)

From the processes within mother earth, matter (mater is Latin for mother) becomes manifest. The humus matrix (from the same etymology, mother) with the power of the microbe is the womb of our organic existence. Combined with light and water, these processes make life possible. Earth and heart are anagrams.

Becoming a mother myself was an incredible learning experience. Those nine months of anticipation prepare us in many ways, but the process of birth taught me more than most of the many texts I read in preparation. Patience, pain, beginning and ending, an incredible bond with an innocent and empathy with other women. I gained more insight into familial relationships; my relationship with my mother and my sister, who was ‘with’ me.

I remember the wise, warm smile other mothers gave me. I look at pregnant women now, looking a babies, ripe with expectation. It’s a connection to the past and the future and offers present parallels of kinship with mums discovering similar joys. It’s a huge informal club of members with shared interests and experiences and membership is free and automatic.

Childbirth is a beautiful place to begin to work with pain. Grief is good too but let’s work with birth. Open to experience. In giving birth, you have to surrender to fully open your body. With the gift of a child imminent, there is certainly a sweetener. The pain comes in waves, which you ride, and there are gaps in between where you rest. For me it was very much like being in strong surf. Accepting where you are helps you avoid getting ‘dumped’. I can remember buoying myself up as the waves washed through my body. Acceptance and surrender were critical, not an ounce of energy wasted on resistance. Then you go through, it moves and changes and there is more. It peaks but you are getting so close. There becomes little more than trust that you will make it. Focus. Effort. Reward. Relief. There’s a point where pain pitches so hard that it breaks through. Sometimes you pass out but other times you pass over.

Birth and breastfeeding feels phenomenal. We are creative in the fullest sense of the word. New life, made with love and patiently and painfully born. Such anticipation, to meet our babe, familiar yet fresh. Overwhelming excitement and exhaustion, “Our baby!” arrives and we are in awe, the midwife prompting us to look at what we’ve got. Graced with a girl. Transformed: physically, physiologically, mentally, spiritually. I am mater (Latin ~ mother).

The potential to shape a life in every sense is powerful and awe inspiring and it belongs to us. It must be a conspiracy that it is not universally held in higher
esteem. Our omnipotence is obvious. Many times I have heard the sighs of relief from men and non mothers, that they are spared the pain of birth. For me it has been so insightful, it has brought me out of my youthful selfish cocoon and unearthed so many facets of deeper understanding. My ‘milk bar bra’ runneth over... (Marli Draper in ‘BirthWrite’ 1997)

They're young and close
Just full of joy
My darling girls
My beautiful boy

I can’t detach
but that’s OK
I may be able to
One day

All we need to know
They know
I’m learning this
I’m letting go

I’d relinquish
All else beside
These precious three
I burst with pride

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 7/8/08)

Not so much now, but for a while I collected ‘other mothers’, usually friend’s mothers, whom I could admire, engage with, share support. Now I guess I take up that ‘other mother’ role myself. Feeling into the beingness of this love in action, it is a need and a mutual benefit. I understand and anticipate the needs of others based on my recollections.

Coming to this, I can speak to my relationship with Mother Earth. I feel her pain, coming to the mourning sacrificial notions. I can feel the imposition, the manipulation; her soft resourceful renewal capacity is not revered. We find fertility foetid, confronting I suspect.

I have made a connection here, around my mothering and my aspirations for a canopied world. I don’t fell nourished by the physicality of modern life, the straight
lines, the harsh surface, the barren, the banal and the homogenous. I butt right up
against the destruction of the soft vernal squelchy life and I cry.

We are more permeable than plants but we have an ever increasing psychological
shell that is shielding us from acknowledging the shocking truth of our deepening
illusion.

A New Leaf

The beautiful metaphor of a new leaf is the opportunity we each have to grow
towards the light. All that has gone before, now transformed and offering
continuing source of nourishment to the growing tree.

Leaves transform waste gases, light and water into energy (sugars) and oxygen. The
tree (community) cannot live without the contribution of the leaves. We
cannot live without the trees. Metaphorically we are the leaves; we are new, we
grow, we are shed, we die. At this acknowledgment we move toward mastery of
individuation over individualism; the struggle with acceptance of the metaphor is
knowing you will fall off the tree.
During my research fellow oases participant Taryn told me about the amazing community of Damanhur (2012) in Italy, which she has visited. I was able to obtain a cd of their ‘Music of the Plants’; researchers have developed a device that can detect and record electromagnetic changes in the leaves. Developed in 1976, the sound is spectacular as are the temples they have built.

With some other oases students, I visited the Len Lye exhibition at ACMI in Federation Square in 2009. His manuscript, “Individual Happiness Now!” is an assertion of the joy of being alive, of qualia - the subjective quality of conscious experience (Moore 2010). It held immediate appeal. Lye purported that in presence, recognition of our own unique gifts and potential contribution and diligent work towards fulfillment of these latencies, individuals could achieve happiness, flowing towards a cohesive and evolving collective consciousness. This affirms my ontological orientation towards love, a satisfying answer to the fundamental question, ‘where do I come from?’ When I feel the thread of love I feel connected and purposeful, supported and nourished. It is my context as well as my motivation. I love to throw and catch love.

My journal describes a confronting exercise with Peter Cock during our ecology residential at Moora Moora. We were asked to articulate our honest impressions of each other as feedback. I was told I was a bullshit monitor, had a calm and appealing intonation and oozed a nurturing, motherly energy. I was also told (by Jeff) that I needed more becoming, to put myself out there more. I can see this in the light of the earlier comments about my yielding and peace. I had another healing session happened with my dear friend Julie. We went to school together in Melbourne and have reconnected here in South Gippsland. She lives several valleys away in Poowong East. This time it felt like a was having “a head attack”; three times at least there was intense pressure and the overwhelming message was to let my heart lead.

I have learnt that life need not be a battle and that you can make choices that serve or deny your development. You really have to choose to develop even if it be the tall order. I clarify my intention to be closer to my authentic self. I lead my darling children by example, being fulfilled not frustrated, content not cranky, serving and deserving not waiting or guilty. Turning over a new leaf, I started to work on my courage and to embrace movement, change and action.
Flowering

“In all begetting and bringing forth upon the beautiful there is a kind of making/creating or poiesis” (Wikipedia 2012). Poiesis is like flowering. There is the everyday the humdrum, and then there are peak moments when a spontaneous, brief, blessed gift arises.

Now I realise that I didn’t write my poetry, to the extent that I am not the doer. I didn’t write it because it wasn’t produced with a pen but with ‘self talk’ if in fact the one that drives me mad is me. It poured out of me, in unlikely moments and places, such as during driving (my ‘travel writing’ had my fellow participants aghast) or folding the washing. It was like vomit..”oh, here it comes”, and I would rush for a pen instead of a towel. Sometimes it would be a bit dribbly, and take a couple of goes to clear, in other instances it would all come in a rush and seem to need little cleaning up afterwards. Similar to a bodily function you can't control I was very self conscious about it, because it was so personal and so confronting. Now, stepping back, they are simple expressions of self, a ploughing of my present to see what might be sifted for sitting with. Describing the process, it doesn’t sound very glamorous (like birth) but the results (like baby) are well worth it.
Here’s one I ‘wrote’ whilst folding a particularly large pile of washing

I ease I breeze
I come to this:
gloriously simple
unbridled bliss

Feeling so light
So rare so hollow
Gone my yesterday
Of sorrow

Right now my soul
Soars and sings
Astounded what
This moment brings

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 13/10/08)

Rilke reminds us beautifully that “a work of art is good if it has sprung from necessity” (2011). This is a very valuable and insightful reassurance that external expectations are not what art is for. In empathy it may find its place in the wider world but we cannot control the interpretation of what we offer.

Flowers have a perfume and so much appeal for my senses. In assembling a perfume from natural extracts, the perfumer designs and blends a base note or notes, heart note and head note. Like the flower, the head note is fleeting but oh so fine, the heart note the pure centre of the scent and the base the stabiliser that lingers on skin and clothing. Deeply sensual, the gift of olfaction is perhaps the sense I most dearly cherish. Blackcurrant buds, Spanish cherry, rose geranium and Rosa centifolia or the Mai rose are the constituents of my current custom blend.
I told my friend Tim that I was, in my growing development, “...post vegetables!” My peony patch, a part of my project, has over a hundred plants. My goal has been observation, appreciation and celebration of beauty. I have grown them for my own self indulgent pleasure. This is a real step forward for me, away from pragmatism (growing vegetables) towards the salve of self love. I have not even picked any to bring inside. I have immersed myself in my patch, drunk in their amazing fleeting fragrance, photographed and filmed them to share and allowed them to bloom and fade in situ. They’ll be back next year.

I bought a pink book of Pablo Neruda’s poetry. It was covered in plastic but I was intrigued. On the bus, with it on my lap, I could feel the powerful emotions emanate before I even opened it. I called this “big love” for want of better words because it is a felt sense, difficult to articulate. This book, before I even opened it, conveyed a new kind of love I knew I had never actually known. It hinted at what was (perhaps, possibly) still to come.
XXVIII

Love, from seed to seed, from planet to planet
the wind with its net through the darkening nations,
war with its bloody shoes
or even the day, with a thorny night.

Wherever we went, islands or bridges or flags
there were the violins of the fleeting autumn, bullet-laced;
happiness echoing at the rim of the wineglass

Through all those republics the wind whipped-
its arrogant pavilions, its glacial hair;
it would return the flowers, later, to their work.

But no withering autumn ever touched us
In our stable place a love sprouted, grew
as rightfully empowered as the dew

(Neruda 1986)

Scratch
In the peony patch
Unfurling forms revealed
Favour the reddish fronds
Snap the Sow thistles
Buds glow with promise
On my knees I see
Ground’s gift to me
Gratitude Beauty Free

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 2009)

Peonies

This morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready
to break my heart
as the sun rises,
as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers
and they open —
pools of lace,
white and pink —  
and all day the black ants climb over them,  
boring their deep and mysterious holes  
into the curls,  
craving the sweet sap,  
taking it away  
to their dark, underground cities —  
and all day  
under the shifty wind,  
as in a dance to the great wedding,  
the flowers bend their bright bodies,  
and tip their fragrance to the air,  
and rise,  
their red stems holding  
all that dampness and recklessness  
gladly and lightly,  
and there it is again —  
beauty the brave, the exemplary,  
blazing open.  
Do you love this world?  
Do you cherish your humble and silky life?  
Do you adore the green grass, with its terror beneath?  
Do you also hurry, half-dressed and barefoot, into the garden,  
and softly,  
and exclaiming of their dearness,  
fill your arms with the white and pink flowers,  
with their honeyed heaviness, their lush trembling,  
their eagerness  
to be wild and perfect for a moment, before they are  
nothing, forever?  

(Oliver 1993)
Ripening

Fruition is the realisation, the enjoyment of the peak moment. Fruit is the glorious flesh of a vessel designed to protect and facilitate the growth and distribution of seed. Time in the sun, a good season and not picking prematurely permit full sweetness.

There have been many lessons for me in my ripening. I often choose the hard path. I have believed that if something is worthy it must be difficult, complicated, arduous, not easy to attain or obtain. It must be more valuable, or perhaps more pertinently, if I can get it I will be deemed worthy. Sage Cohen (2009) comments on her blog about picking the low hanging fruit. Sometimes what is ripe and ready and perfect is right in front of our face and all we have to do is to collect it and use it, share it. Simple.

There is so much surrender in ripening. We know, instinctively, that the next stage is senescence. Ripening is peak. In my ripening, I have understood my interdependence. When I wanted to give my kidney to transplant into my cousin, I was gently persuaded that the risk was unfair on my children.

Ripening is about self realisation, becoming inside your skin. It is an acceptance of where you are not where you were or wish to be. In recognition of this, I am forever unwrapping the eternal present; forgiving within not condemning without.
Ruminating

I could not resist this concept borrowed from the cows. The word derives from rumen, the digestive super-structure that makes bovines such beautiful transformers of grass to milk. The sophistication of a ruminant’s digestive system is superlative. The microbial load liberates nutrients and the cycle continues in the soil. An incredible and intricate ecosystem is the grazing animal and its grasslands when the cycles are honored and optimised. To 'chew things over' is to ruminating and if we could be as calm as cows many of our dis-eases would not arise.

Sonia Choquette (2007) has offered some insights continue to resonate with me. I reflect upon these often;
“See others through the eyes of spirit and never through the lens of ego
Respond creatively rather than react emotionally
Relinquish control and the need for outcomes (expectations)
Intentionally infuse others with the radiance of my open spirit
Use my life to embrace my lessons.”

“Personal meanings are what matter “(Moustakas 1990). During my numinous phase, on the giveaway table at the local library were an incredible series of books, seemingly synchronised with my development, including the poetry of Gerald Manly Hopkins. Each time I’d go, there were new titles for me to take. They seemed so suited to the stage I was at.

In asking the questions, the answers of which we seek, we frame a personal inquiry. This is most likely to lead us to the relevant and pithy learning we need. “Our most significant awarenesses are developed from our own internal searches and from our attunement and empathic understandings of others” (Moustakas 1990).

Lessons I learn
Ignite Smoulder then burn
Bright is the light of momentum
What has been
Not not seen
Residue release
Transformation Peace

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 10/9/2008)
Being lost or stuck is a part of the process so the stalling as well as the insights that come are a part of the process. Open ended-ness, ie. not preempting an outcome, seems imperative as is the ability to dwell in not knowing, allowing knowing to emerge in its own time and form. I ruminated about mindfulness - a much used term in the literature and wondered, ‘what about heartfeltness?’

Ruminating should be a reference to Rumi! Leading into my discussion of resistance, Rumi advises,

(excerpt from A necessary Autumn Inside Each)

Very little grows on jagged rock. Be ground. Be crumbled, so wildflowers will come up where you are. You’ve been stony for too many years. Try something different. Surrender

(Barks 2001)
Agrochemical (argh, what an aggressive word!) corporations have engineered some plants, such as ‘RoundUp Ready’ soybeans to be resistant to or tolerant of herbicides. Some superweeds are developing resistances themselves in situ which will ultimately induce a greater chemical load in cropping.

Resistance is an habitual pattern of human behaviour; an avoidance strategy that is not nearly as successful as it is common. Fear and pain are the most potent drivers of our resistant behaviour. Most of us avoid pain, give it a wide berth. This is obvious and seemingly self preserving. In the resistance is often more difficulty. “To resist what is...creates conflict, drama and new pain” (Tolle 2004). When we accept pain, when we acknowledge and admit that which we would seek to avoid, there can be learning, growth, progress.

I have also had to acknowledge that I have resisted naming, asking for and getting what I want in certain circumstances in my life. As well as avoiding things I didn’t want I have avoided things I did want. Crazy! It is a big step to take full responsibility for oneself, full-time; no excuses, no blame. Resistance doesn’t give up without a fight.

Too scared to choose  
Easier to lose  
Bruises to nurse  
Thwarters to curse

Personal stuff  
Churning, rough  
Doing it tough  
Calling its bluff

Surrendering now  
Focus above brow  
Remembering how  
To humble bow

(Marli Draper Personal Journal 2009)
My journal records, “...it is a prison of my own making; I have chosen a choiceless existence.” (Marli Draper, Personal Journal 2008)
O boy! My mother taught me “anything for peace” and I learnt well. I learnt to put myself last. In intuitive therapy I slowly began to realise choice is mine and to make and hold to conscious decisions. “I can go places that I take myself to, strong, peaceful places of my mind/body.” (Marli Draper, personal journal 2008)
I started to sing a soul song, to move towards my home of beauty.

Poetry of pain
Here you are again
Feelings take flight and find form

Come to me
but through me
Help me to hone your hologram

Density moving
Mood improving
Rolling the weight with my words

Letting you go
Learning to know
Resistance is painful
Let’s Dance!

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 4/8/08)

Resistance is a way of being and it is very closed. Moustakas (1990) refers to Otto Rank’s inference that denial and repression of the self cause neurosis. Resistance is often a reactionary response, ‘raging against something’. In this way, we are still caught. Trauma has so much to teach us but we anaesthetise it. When we accept what is, we can move through the moments much more steadily.

Getting really clear
Don’t want to be here
Don’t know where to be
Guess I’ll wait and see...

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 11/2/09)
Abscission

Plants have particular zones where they control the shedding of limbs. Phytochemicals perform antibiotic actions to ensure pathogens are denied entry as the spent plant parts are abscised (drop off). So plants are designed to let go of limbs as they grow, to enable them to maximise their growth efficiency. You can see, in a tree, the scars where limbs were shed. It is also useful to use these zones to ensure wound healing when a prune is deemed necessary, there are antibiotic compounds in the abscission zones to help healing.

Abscission is natural separation. Being open is being vulnerable; letting others into intimate aspects of your life, there is risk. Expressing aspects of self, be it through relationship, conversation, art, lets others into our view of the world. Whilst being open perhaps we need particular points or boundaries at which we can ‘seal off’ entry of unwanted energies.

In relationship we risk judgement or criticism, resistance or outright rejection and we sometimes modify ourselves continuously to soften the blows. In aiming to please or pacify another, we may lose ourselves in compromise and need to reassert
our ways of being. In my praxis I am working this tension; learning to let go whilst creating and maintaining personal boundaries.

Dormancy

Overwintering is another word for the dormancy, the quiet maintenance phase an organism enters to survive a bleak or threatening period. Deciduous trees, shrubs seeds exhibit dormancy strategies while they wait for more favorable phases. Winter is perfectly normal time to pause, we are reminded. Rest and recovery, building momentum with which to enter the next phase, takes place during dormant periods. There is lots of learning for me around waiting, rest, taking my time.

“It is not necessary to leave the house remain at your table and listen do not even listen, only wait do not even wait be wholly still and alive the world will present itself to you for its unmasking, it has no choice, in ecstasy it will writhe at your feet”

Franz Kafka 1918 (Pasley 1973)
It’s all alright
It’s all Ok
It’s part of life to feel this way

And when you grow
And when you change
It’s part of life to rearrange

The way you feel
The way you see
to match more fully
for you to be

Living, lightening
Shedding stuff
letting go and lifting up
giving of not giving up

Growing, glowing
Revealing showing
Loving knowing
Getting going

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 19/7/2008)
The Harvest

In nature a yield is produced, a bountiful surplus is achieved and may be taken, but the source must be replenished with rest, renewal and reciprocity. An earthworm excretes more calcium than it ingests, enriching the soil immeasurably. In observation, I have always been curious how one thing can become another. Goethe provides insights into physical transformations; Kervran (1980) into chemical transmutations, how one substance becomes another. He has been ridiculed for his work on biological transmutations but I find a preponderance of suggestion of this in the natural word even though scientific reductionism and its experiments have yet to support this.

Very early in my first oases journal of 2008 I mention my awareness and my yielding. This sticks out now, I have just learnt to stand and not to yield. “I yield to others, it doesn't matter, they can take nothing from me other than my gift of peace.” From where I am now I find this comment concerning. Clearly others can take more than my gift of peace, and some have. I have had to learn the hard way to discern and define my boundaries for my own sake. There is a perspective on this now which is much tighter. I am wary of the words ‘it doesn’t matter’. Most things matter, small things can become big. There is a grim or slim harvest unless the groundwork and preparation is done. You reap what you sow.
Unus Mundus (one world)

One

No less no more
no war
we are all eyes
one
no walls no door
no floor
all light under sun
No greed no need
no doubt
Feel it out
No fear
Be here
Stay clear
Love is all about

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 31/1/09)

We are together in our feeling of separation, aloneness. “The integral relationship between the organism and its environment...is also true of the human world...However self conscious and self-determining, the human being is not absolutely individual...at the biological level, there is no such thing as an individual centre of life...while plants and animals lead “whole” lives harmoniously, human beings set up discords...his self-consciousness sets up a dualism which is untrue to fact...he forgets that his interests are not private to himself and believes himself to be distinct...(then) he is always striving to get beyond his separateness (Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli in Moustakas 1956).

I can now identify with ever increasing clarity, the energy of the emotional reactions of myself and others. I can identify, in many instances, what has been triggered and I can breathe into and perhaps recall a similar response or situation. I can offer compassion or take appropriate action. This little poem came out of just the kind of experience I am alluding to; I felt wounded and ostracised and recalled an incident where I may have wounded or ostracised another. It works like a mantra for me in my ‘melting moments’.
Just a little shift
healing a rift
adrift in the sea of so

Ah
there you are
In me
And I in you
Phew!

(Marli Draper, Personal Journal 11/11/08)
Epilogue

Coming full circle I am returning to self. I respond to the clarion call Rilke raises.

God speaks to each of us as he makes us, then walks with us silently out of the night.

These are the words we dimly hear:

You, sent out beyond your recall,
go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me.

Flare up like flame
and make big shadows I can move in

Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don’t let yourself lose me.

Nearby is the country they call life.
You will know it by its seriousness.

Give me your hand.

(Rilke 2005)

Oases Aesthetic domain facilitator Alan Brown urged us “to boggle” and my eyes were on stalks. New ways of seeing and being have transformed my life. I have maybe eschewed mindfulness in favor of heartfeltness. I have used action and reflection, praxis, to explore and integrate my awareness. “With new sensitivities we explain the world in new ways. We elicit from the world new aspects. The power of sensitivities is the power of co-creation” (Skolimowki 1994). I have grown. I am healing. I am home.
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

(T.S. Eliot 1944 "Little Gidding" (the last of his Four Quartets)

Every time you feel lost or confused, think of the trees and how they grow. Remember that a tree with a great leafy crown and shallow roots will fall in the first gust of wind, and in a tree with abundant roots and a scanty crown the sap cannot flow freely. Roots and crown must grow in due proportion; you have to be part of things and above them; only thus can you offer shade and shelter, only thus can you put forth flowers and fruit in due season. And when you come to a meeting of many ways and do not know which to choose, do not choose at random, but pause and reflect. Breathe with the trusting, deep breaths you took when you first came into the world; let nothing distract you, but wait and go on waiting. Be still and listen to the silence in your heart. When it has spoken to you, rise up and follow it.

Susanna Tamaro “Follow Your Heart”
My struggle I now relinquish and I yield to flow with the nurture that the universe offers me and I can take my rightful place. I want to express all that I can share and hope my heart can show me the way. It is tough, not just for me, but we can stick together and kindness will guide us forward. I offer my prayers for all to love and be kind to one another, this is our simplest and greatest challenge and I would love to lead by example. In my small sphere, help me to embody kindness consistently. Thankyou. I love you. (Marli Draper, Personal Journal 31/8/2008).
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