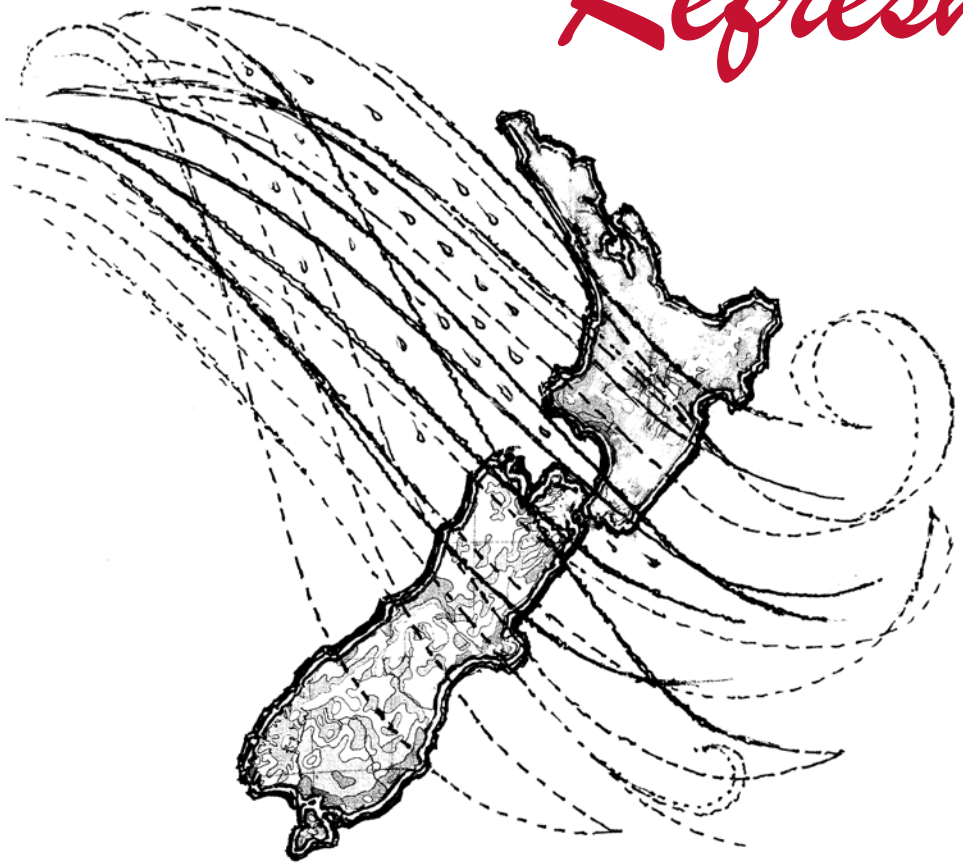


*Refresh*



## **Storytelling**

A Journal of Contemplative Spirituality

Winter 2010. Volume 10, Number 1

Published by:  
SPIRITUAL GROWTH MINISTRIES TRUST,  
55 Navigation Drive, Porirua, 5024, New Zealand.



Spiritual Growth Ministries is an incorporated trust registered with the Charities Commission on 17 June 2008 (cc 26037).

ISSN: 1176-3477

Spiritual Growth Ministries is a network of people from diverse Christian traditions and experience who find depth and meaning through the whole Christian heritage of contemplative spirituality. The Spiritual Growth Ministries Trust aims to enable people to develop spiritual resources for their life and work by deepening their relationship with God in Jesus Christ through spiritual direction, training, retreats and other experiences of prayer. Spiritual Growth Ministries is sponsored by the Presbyterian Church in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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### **SGM ADDRESSES**

Website: [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz)

#### **Administrator:**

Carole Hunt, 55 Navigation Drive, Porirua 5024. Ph: 04 234-1992.

Email: [sgm@clear.net.nz](mailto:sgm@clear.net.nz)

#### **The Convenor:**

Andrew Pritchard, 2/260 State Highway 1, Raumati South, Paraparaumu 5032.

Ph: 04 904-6764. Email: [alp\\_resources@paradise.net.nz](mailto:alp_resources@paradise.net.nz)

#### **Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme Co-ordinator:**

Barbara McMillan, 100 Captain Scott Rd, Glen Eden, Auckland 0603. New Zealand.

Phone/Fax (09) 817-7376. Email: [sgmtp@xtra.co.nz](mailto:sgmtp@xtra.co.nz)

#### **Desktop Publishing and Printing by:**

Advocate Print, Rotorua.

#### **Editor:**

Andrew Dunn, Box 300277, Albany 0752

Phone (09) 415 9686 Email: [dunnzalbany@xtra.co.nz](mailto:dunnzalbany@xtra.co.nz)

**COVER DESIGN AND DRAWINGS**

by Jo O'Hara

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## COMMENT

### Andrew Dunn

The storytelling area at our local library was full on Saturday morning with standing room only. Little kids, big kids, parents and grandparents, and the odd observer like me, were all engaged with the storyteller whose skills with story, music and singing about the long green, wrinkly, prickly caterpillar had us all attentive and involved. Her knitted caterpillar was long enough for a number of children to handle it at once, and they did – enthusiastically!

There was listening, participation, seeing, learning, touching and feeling, singing, laughter, joy and a wonderful sense of belonging to this community that had

formed around this one-hour event. I've sat in a village house in the Purari Delta in PNG where the same elements have occurred with the same quality of bonding. Storytelling is a universal human gift that does something profound.

Stories have the possibility of sparking the imagination, stimulating discovery and reflection and developing the use of our contemplative faculty of wonder and delight. How sad to read in the news that in a recent British survey of 4000 families only one in ten read stories to their children, often caused by the growing isolation within families and society by factors unknown before.

One aim of this issue of *Refresh* is to stimulate the love of storytelling so that this amazing human attribute can be refreshed amongst us. Another is to encourage storytelling and listening as

profound ways not only of imparting real things but of creating reality itself, in which grace and love and wholeness and Presence abound. It develops into holy ground where I AM is found.

The Hebrew Bible, our First Testament, the Old Testament, is just loaded with stories and sagas of salvation history. Some Psalms repeat again and again the high and low points of it (e.g. 105 and 136). This history is about God acting in the stories of people as faith is formed and tested as they became a light to the

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*The delicate power of metaphor, thoughtfully crafted, enriches any story, homily or conversation ...*

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nations. The New Testament is no less rich in the stories and ideas of God present among us. So stories are the stuff of faith too.

We also focus on metaphor. I'm always amazed at the

richness of our patch of creation and the way it yields examples, images, metaphors and illustrations for deepening understandings of grace. The delicate power of metaphor, thoughtfully crafted, enriches any story, homily or conversation in this retreat centre. The clarity and sharpness of simile and likeness delights the imagination as it conveys something fresh and attractive. The dawning truth of perceptive parables catches the mind and heart with insight and clarity. The growing awareness of a story's intent grips and holds us. The attractiveness of a good story well told finds a place in our memories when all the facts in the world are quickly forgotten. And so attentiveness, awareness, openness, receptiveness, listening, expectancy and hope are encouraged by the "thinness" of God's handiwork, with the physical and the spiritual so interwoven.

At Night Prayer one evening during a busy retreat at The Friary we listened to a portion of the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams. It was the part where the boy's little well-worn rabbit with its eyes falling out and bare patches where its hair was missing had been ignored by his nurse. When it was found again and he could hold it and cuddle it, he knew the love it offered. It had been "loved into real" and so had he. The folk on retreat were gripped by the power of the story and a silence fell in which Love came and loved us all into a little bit more real and we went to bed blessed and nourished.

This is my last issue of *Refresh*. I need more time for other writing I am doing (family stories) which must be completed in the near future. I also hope to gather together my various writings on contemplation and see what can be done with them. I perceive a gap in current and recent literature in the area of stimulating and sustaining contemplation itself, this amazing gift God has blessed all humans with since before birth. That has been my great discovery in the last 30 years and I've given myself to helping others to discover and explore it for themselves. I hope it has blessed you too.

Thanks to all who have crafted the material for this and earlier issues of *Refresh*. Thanks to our Editorial Group, Warren Deason, Margaret Dunn and Anna Johnstone, in the discussions about themes, content, photos, illustrations and layout, and to Anna and Kerry for their sharpness of eye in the proofing; to Jo O'Hara McLean of Christchurch for her amazing ability with artwork; to Carole Hunt for her typing skills; Noel Merrick and Cara Sheehan at Advocate Print in Rotorua; and the SGM Workgroup for their trust in giving me my head in crafting up each issue and finding the writers on the various themes. *Refresh* will continue with a new editor – see later advert in this issue.

Finally, how's this for an encouragement to tell stories?

"A good story (and storyteller) invites listeners into a process of change. ... Despite massive advances in information technology, there is no greater form of communication than a story. It's a universally shared and loved mode of communication. Storytelling is pervasive (we start learning to tell and listen to stories from birth) and it's something everyone knows how to do, but few are aware of its power.

"Purposeful storytelling that goes straight to the heart of an audience brings about much more effective change than any laborious elaboration of evidence and research. ... "Stories stick in the brain in a holistic way, much better than charts, numbers or concepts," says change management guru John Kotter.

**If you want to be a great storyteller, tell stories!"**

(Jill Kayser – *Candour*. May 2010. P.8. The Power of a Story)

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## STORYTELLING

*Carol L. Grant*

Everyone loves a story because stories are creative, imaginative and unique. They are treasures to be mined for wisdom, walked round and inspected and passed on to future generations. Some stories hold a warning. "Once upon a time there was a little girl who lived near a dark wood." A story may hold tears, humour, laughter or life experience. It might take the form of an epic tale, a legend, myth, personal narrative, parable, an historical or cultural adventure, anecdote, a dream, or be long or momentary.

A story may be a confession told haltingly and with reluctance, or it may pour out

filled with guilt, grief, and pain - like the 'secret' story of childhood abuse. The funeral eulogy holds the stories of a life cut short, or one that was lived to the full. Lies are stories too - with a boomerang ending. They come back to haunt the teller. Gossip, too, always starts with a story.

At each service of Holy Communion we retell the greatest story of all ... on the night before he died ... a precious story for us all who are followers of Jesus Christ.

When we tell a story we stand on holy ground. When we listen to a story we are standing on another's holy ground. As Christians we listen to stories of discovery as people share their faith journey with us.

Stories are everywhere. We are all story tellers. From the little jokes after church to the professional raconteur who gets paid for their stories. Each person

holds a reservoir of unique stories. My family have always regarded story telling as an art form. I learned, from an early age, that to be a good teller of stories one must be a good listener, for a story can only be offered and then received if the person is willing to listen.

I have always loved stories. Myths, legends, fairy tales, fishing stories, stories from my family's Scottish, Polish, Austrian and German backgrounds were in the air that I breathed. I was encouraged to delve into the dramatic stories of Moses and Miriam, Sarah and Abraham, Deborah and David. Deuteronomy reminds us over and over again to tell these stories to our children. I remember being entranced to discover that Jesus was a story teller, too.

All my favourite stories I shared with our children, and with my secondary school

art classes while they worked on their assignments. Students with behavioural difficulties would pause and reconsider their next move if I said, "Listen up everyone, would you like me to tell you a story?" Art teachers are known for their eccentricities! Story telling with a touch of humour could turn a cross face into one with a wry smile, or reduce a rowdy class to helpless mirth.

Storytelling is a precious gift from God in pastoral ministry. As a parish minister, I enjoy visiting people, and frequently I am aware that I am standing on holy ground as they share their lives and hearts and souls in conversation. It is an extraordinary privilege to listen to awe-inspiring stories of faith, stories of courage birthed in suffering, stories of kindness and compassion, and stories of hope gifted with extravagant love. I hear stories of hospitality, acceptance and generosity.

Stories, I have discovered, come wrapped with wonder, sparkling with delight, bathed in tears, spiced with laughter, and wrenched from the depths of an individual soul. As a parish minister, it is my privilege to bring the stories from scripture alive Sunday by Sunday. Interpreting the texts and weaving a theme relevant for today is one part of the preacher's craft. Symbols, images, the floral arrangements, banners, music and art work all help to enhance these stories.

Each season of life holds a wealth of stories. The stories from old soldiers sitting quietly on ANZAC day are still filled with vivid, painful memories; the stories of a difficult birth and the gift of new life when a baptism is being planned hold echoes of wonder; and stories told and re-interpreted when a family is

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with wonder, sparkling with  
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# TELL ME A STORY!

*Anne Hadfield*

planning a funeral for a loved one can be an opportunity for healing family relationships. Adults reaffirming their baptismal vows often take the opportunity to tell their special story of faith to the congregation - maybe for the first time.

In our parish we have five church mice who live under the two communion tables. They travel to far-off places with members of the church family and return with amazing tales of adventure and photos of the trip. These stories of discovery of other cultures and landscapes become the basis for critique of our own cultural heritage.

Congregations, too, hold within their life, stories of disciples, faithful service, dysfunctional relationships, bullying behaviour, belonging and transformation, miracles of healing, Spirit-filled anointing, moments of deep despair and celebration, of the courage of selfless ministry, of risk and holiness.

The maraes around Waikanae and Otaki, where I live, hold the stories of Te Rauparaha, a Maori rangatira and war leader of the Ngati Toa tribe. Not far away is Parihaka - now there is a story we should all know and tell on the 5th November!

We are all full of stories - wonderful, mysterious, gripping, and fascinating stories. Many stories are buried deep in our subconscious. The power of a story is immense. A storyteller should always craft the story carefully knowing exactly the words they will use to cast the mood, and then to end the tale.

As you listen, to stories from other travellers you meet on the way, treasure the gifts you are given and share a little of yourself every now and then. Your response honours their story, and it is your gift to them.

I love a good story. My mother kept us enthralled with stories like *Billy Goat Gruff*. Each of the three goats plus the troll had their own voice and the old recipe of the small outwitting the mighty was a hit every time. Later on I graduated to a comic of the story of Joseph which was equally captivating. Even later I found myself listening to stories at SGM retreats. I will never forget Selwyn Jones telling the hilarious story of receiving his religious name as he passed from postulant to novice within the Marist Order. According to Selwyn, he lusted after a holy name such as Francis or Benedict, so imagine his horror when he heard Stanislaus<sup>1</sup> called out. He indicated that his distress was so great that he became an Anglican but we all knew it was because he had fallen in love and the tale was really all about humility.

Stories are multi-layered. They are powerful conveyers of feelings and metaphor. They are about other people. They are also about us. As we identify with them they have the power to provoke, challenge, inspire and transform us. There are three types of story which are an essential part of the spiritual director's tool kit. Key is the story in the Biblical text. Our context also provides us with stories and our lives are rich with 'intext', the tales we hold within us.

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1 Stanislaus, St. (1030-79) Patron of Poland. Bp of Cracow from 1072. Stanislaus came into conflict with King Boleslav II, whom he repeatedly reproved for scandalous conduct. Eventually he excommunicated the King, and according to tradition Boleslav himself killed him while he was offering mass.

Livingstone, E.A. (ed) *A Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press. 1977. p 486.

## Stories from the Bible

The stories within the Bible include narratives and parables. Contemporary biblical scholarship has helped us to identify the lens through which the original text was written. For example, there are very few glimpses of the women who followed Jesus. We are challenged to supply the missing pieces with our imagination. Recently at a retreat I asked people to choose a character who would have been there in the village when the lost or prodigal son returned to his father and a party was thrown. The creative range of reactions allowed us to explore our own responses to hurt, forgiveness, belonging and coming home.

I had the privilege some years ago of studying third world mission at Birmingham University. I will never forget a fellow student, African, telling the story of Philip and the conversion of the Ethiopian from his African perspective<sup>2</sup>. It challenged all my concepts of mission to others and planted a lasting zeal for mission as mutuality with others.

Jesus was once asked by his disciples for the reason why he told so many stories. He replied: *To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven but to them it has not been given.* (Mt 13:13)

Revelation is always gift and the Scriptures are a goldfield waiting for us to take our pan and wash the silt until the gold is revealed. That is why following a lectionary for daily readings is such a good practice. One year we will only see silt in the bottom of the pan. Another year the same text will suddenly come alive

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2 Acts 8:26-40

with meaning. I have seen this process many times as I have invited a directee to reflect on the story of Jesus which attracts them the most. I have then asked them to retell that story to me and then tell me what in Jesus drew them most. This aspect has often been a clue to which face of Jesus that person is being called to manifest in their ministry. Personally, the most exciting stories are those in which Jesus encountered people and enabled transformation and growth.<sup>3</sup>

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To know something of the social and religious background of the biblical story is an important safeguard against unwise transfers of texts literally into the twenty-first century yet such is the power of the Word that the text can engage us in a very personal

way confirming the words of an American Indian chief:

*Now I don't know if it happened this way or not but I know the story is true.*<sup>4</sup>

## Stories from our context

The second aspect of story is context. We need stories for our times and in our contexts. Recently I went to see the film 'Invictus' with three coloured South African neighbours. It tells a powerful story of forgiveness and reconciliation under the leadership of Nelson Mandela and was even more relevant as we sat at a café afterwards and shared stories about the reaction to apartheid in our respective countries. At the last ACSD conference Monty Williams SJ shared valuable

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3 I read of this suggestion for reflection on ministry many years ago in an article by F Alphonso. Source unknown.

4 Quoted in Borg, Marcus. J. *The Heart of Christianity*. HarperCollins. San Francisco. p 51



insights about the use of movies in providing material for spiritual direction. The recent film, *Avatar*, had themes of vulnerability, the use of power and the supremacy of love. Its popularity in a strange way demonstrates the universal draw of humanity to the Transcendent. Sometimes I experience a directee starting a session by saying, "I went to this film the other day and I can't get it out of my mind." An hour unpacking metaphors rich with meaning follows.

Recently I took time out to follow a pattern for a ten day retreat from Monty's schema.<sup>5</sup> One of my most powerful reflections was when I visited the exhibition 'A Day in Pompeii' and viewed the casts of bodies buried in the ash while meditating on the impermanence of life. It might sound sombre but it was in actual fact liberating and illustrated how God was there speaking from an ancient context into mine. The themes are universal.

### Stories from our personal lives

Thirdly, God is speaking to us through the 'intext' or stories of our own personal lives. Dreams can contain important messages. I remember unpacking one in which there was a dark and threatening figure downstairs in the basement. As I worked with it I recognised it as a fear which I had not named who hid in the 'basement' of my life and insidiously exerted power over my life. Once I had told my dream story to my spiritual director I was able to gradually name the threat and ask for the spiritual resources to gain freedom.

Sometimes, too, useful information is uncovered in the circumstances of our daily lives.

Several decades ago, on returning from Birmingham without a job, I fell a metre down a slope in my garden and landed on my head. The metaphor was "My world is turned upside down." Telling the story of my mishap enabled me to name my 'inscape' of fears and process them. Stories are wonderful resources. For people in transition I have often used the story of the Brownie who clung to a prized blanket so hard that he never saw the Queen of the Woods go by<sup>6</sup>. A journey or the landscape can also become a symbol. One year at Teschmakers in Otago, the whole countryside was in the grip of drought and dryness began to emerge as

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*"You do not end this journey at Santiago. You will only start it then!"*

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the theme for the community on retreat. Several of my directees have told me the story of their pilgrimage over the Santiago de Compostela in Spain. One was told by an old Spanish priest, "You do not end this journey at Santiago. You will only start it then!"

We hear and see stories but we are also a continuing part of the story. During the prayer of Great Thanksgiving at Eucharist or Communion we remember the story of the people of faith climaxing in the story of Jesus. We are not just observers. We are also one of the disciples. We are writing our own Gospel or Good News story with our lives. This authorship is not ours to keep. It is ours to offer back to God. The story goes on.

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5 Williams, Monty S.J. *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy: Following the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. Novalis. Montreal. 2009.

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6 Underhill, Evelyn in Walker, David. *God is a Sea*. Society of St Paul, Homebush, N.S.W. 1977. p 77

# JESUS THE STORYTELLER

*John Franklin*

What do you remember when you are given verbal instructions? What do you remember from lectures or sermons? If you are anything like me, not a lot! But tell me a story – a story about what happened to you, the reconciliation story in today's news, the plot of a movie, or an imaginative fantasy - and my brain functions quite differently. Story creates a listening. It does something to me as I hear it. I remember it, my responses, and what happened for me in the telling. I hold it. I often want to tell it again.

In what we call chapter 20, John tells us that most of what Jesus said and did is not actually recorded. Like the rest of us, he talked everyday, he did things, he interacted, and we have no idea about most of it. There

were no video cams or tape recorders. But people remembered critical incidents and told the stories.

So what do we have? We have records of Jesus encountering people, and of how people encountered him. We have stories about what he said, and the sharp effect it had on people like disciples, Pharisees, a Samaritan woman, a man born blind. What he said always provoked a reaction. Then we have stories about his stories, because Jesus was a storyteller – and they were anything but bedtime stories!

Jesus was not a priest; he had nothing to do with the Temple system. He was not a prophet in the classical sense. He was not a teacher imparting information. He was a wisdom teacher telling stories to work transformation. His pithy sayings,

puzzles, and parables were totally engaging, and often subversive of the prevailing world-view. He had a way of speaking truth and setting people free.

There was always an audience wanting more. The crowds flocked to him. What he said was startlingly different from the predictable orthodoxy of the rabbis. It may not have been obvious to his hearers, but Jesus was out to rewire our consciousness; to get us out of ego consciousness and into kingdom consciousness. His stories were out to 'get us', to catch us out, and open us to a different way of seeing and being.

The stories were all in common language, common frames of reference – families, debts, food, losing things, wealth, and justice. Jesus spoke stories into the world that people knew, and they illumined realities they were hardly aware of.

Like the story of the young man who humiliates his father by wishing him dead, gets his hands on the inheritance, and then hives off to foreign parts to squander it in "dissolute living". Along with the elder brother, the village would have been outraged; "Our children wouldn't treat us like that!" Beyond the story, Jesus' hearers would have been outraged at the actions of this contemptuous youth. And we are to be outraged too.

What's wrong with the silly old man? Why didn't he assert his parental authority? And then why is he constantly sitting at the town gate when his other son is rightfully doing what is appropriate, and keeping what's left of the family business going? Then one day, the old fool is seen to raise his garments and run. No oriental gentleman ever runs! But even worse, that's his dissolute son he is seen to be embracing and covering with kisses!

Jesus is challenging our binary consciousness head on. Where is right and wrong? There is clearly a victim and a persecutor here, and justice needs to be done. But father throws a welcome home party, and makes his forgiving acceptance of his wayward son completely public. The villagers seem to get it because there is singing and dancing. But the brother doesn't. He sulks. He thinks it's not fair. And he offends his father. He fails in his filial duty by not acting as host to father's guests. The wealth of his 'goodness' is offended, and he remains stuck and distanced from life and joy. It easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for those with a wealth of 'goodness' to get it.

This story upends common sensibility. It challenges. And does Jesus explain it? He lets the story speak for itself; he lets it do its own work of transformation in the consciousness of the hearers.

Blessed are those with ears to hear. Blessed are those who can let themselves go into the freedom of forgiveness and generosity as portrayed by the father. Not blessed are those who still have to keep score.

Then there is that other great Jesus story. We have even named a helping agency after it - Good Samaritans - since the story is about kindness, helpfulness and care. Or is it? Oh how we tame and domesticate the wildness of Jesus! Jesus is again being subversive.

On the 27 km downhill journey to Jericho, a man is beaten up, robbed, stripped, and left for dead. As in a recent news story, people of his own kind pass by and do nothing. But someone else stops. He is the pariah, the no-good, the one without rights or honour in the world of Jesus'

hearers. The victim is a Jew. The rescuer is a Samaritan. And Jesus is at it again.

The audience would have been incensed. Jews are the chosen. Those other people are heretics beyond the pale of grace. But subversive as ever, Jesus is laying out the question: Is your definition of good and bad adequate before God? We are quick to judge, and be so self-meritorious. And Jesus is pillaring the neat categories created by our cultural and religious attitudes and discriminations.

The audience would have found it palatable to have had a noble Jew help a Samaritan. That puts them in a good light. But a Samaritan! And what is more, a Samaritan with compassion.

The Samaritan figure that Jesus draws is remarkable. Because the Jew was stripped, and voiceless, he would have had no idea of his ethnic identity. He just acts. And his taking him to the inn is what Kenneth Bailey likens to an Indian riding a wounded cowboy into Dodge City. But here, for those with ears to hear, is a picture of the action of God. In Hosea 6, God comes to us, binds us up, revives, and raises us up. Consistent with that, the Samaritan story is an image of One who was to be despised and rejected, but One who was to heal and restore, raise us up, and at great cost, bring us life.

Jesus told stories, and one of the functions of story is to mirror our own reality; to show us what we are. And we could say that when we don't get it, the problem is not the story; it could be our closed sensibility and inability to see. But if we can let the story ring us like a bell, it can do its work. If we can let the story work on us, rather than the reverse, we will have our binary thinking, and our ego-centred

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*Jesus told stories, and one of the functions of story is to mirror our own reality; to show us what we are.*

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world views destabilised, and be opened to kingdom realities. This is the genius of Jesus, the master of wisdom.

Jesus told stories that reflected his acute observation of human behaviour. He told stories of a radical and incalculable grace encountering human realities. He told stories of the goodness of God who will

come running to welcome us home; who will spare no cost to see us restored to life.

For God so loved the world that he became a story. He lived among us, full of grace and truth. The telling of that ever-unfolding story has innumerable voices. And it has no end.



**All Jesus did that day was tell stories - a long storytelling afternoon.**  
Matthew 13:35. *The Message*. Navpress. 2002.

# METAPHORS WE LIVE AND DIE BY

*Susan S. Phillips*

Having just visited the beautiful North and South Islands of New Zealand, the notion of island has been on my mind. “No man is an *i[s]land*,” John Donne declared from his island nation, yet islands engage man’s (and woman’s) imagination.<sup>1</sup> As I write I’m on Dunk Island in Australia’s Great Barrier Reef, wondering why being on an island—a small one like Dunk or a large one like New Zealand’s South Island—evokes such intimations of immortality and mortality. Paradise comes to mind, sometimes depicted as a veritable tropical island of renewed Edenic profusion and solitude, as do the remote and towering Olympus, and fantastical islands of myth and reality TV. Actual island nations offer concrete borders, defensibility, as well as potential for embargoes and stranding. These actual and ultimate understandings of islands inform our deep metaphorical resonance with island. They point to, but do not explain, our response to island as metaphor.

## **Metaphor as Embodied Knowledge**

The traditional understanding of metaphor is that it’s a figure of speech in which a concrete thing (for instance, island) is compared to another more abstract thing (for instance, man) without the use of explicit words of comparison. We see the use of metaphor in Scripture

in its attempts to cultivate our knowledge of God, the One in whom we live and move and have our being, but Who is beyond our grasp and ken. The Psalmist tells us, “The LORD is my shepherd.” The meaning of the more abstract concept—God—is enhanced by its connection to the more concrete—shepherd. This linguistic understanding of metaphor is helpful, but too shallow.

Since the 1980s much work has gone on in the field of linguistics to show that metaphor is conceptual, and not merely linguistic. Perhaps the first book to articulate this theory in a comprehensive way was *Metaphors We Live By* by Lakoff and Johnson. They wrote: “[M]etaphor

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*Since the 1980s much work has gone on in the field of linguistics to show that metaphor is conceptual, and not merely linguistic.*

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is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”<sup>2</sup> How we act

is affected by how we conceptualize things, even if that conceptualization is unconscious. More and more, the understanding is that metaphors are wired (to speak metaphorically) into us neurologically, into the fabric of our bodies. We hear the phrase “peace like a river,” and our bodies resonate with the words and images. The concept is energized by deep body knowledge that isn’t readily available to us in words.

Images reside in and affect us in ways similar to metaphors. Both find expression in poetry. The early 20th c. Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce wrote that poetry “must be called neither feeling, nor image, nor yet the sum of the two, but ‘contemplation of feeling’ or ‘lyrical

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<sup>1</sup> XVII. “Meditation” from “Devotions upon Emergent Occasions” in *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne*, ed. by Charles M. Coffin (New York: The Modern Library, 1994 [1624]), 441.

<sup>2</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3.

intuition, '... apprehending the pure throb of life in its ideality."<sup>3</sup> Donne's poetic affirmation that "no man is an island" is a metaphor evoking an image which moves the hearer to a contemplation of island feelings and their opposite, or to a lyrical intuition based on knowledge of the shape and watery context of islands.

Croce declared that poetry helps us apprehend the "pure throb of life," and here, in my mind, is the bridge to another art: that of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is an art of accompanying others as they attend to life in its depths; to the Holy; to the truest self; to the world, including the hearts of other people. We listen others into speech, enabling them to craft meaning-laden stories that capture the truths they've glimpsed. For those of us who follow Jesus Christ, we

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*Time and time again,  
the Living Word enabled  
people to speak words of  
life, words that helped  
them apprehend the "pure  
throb of life" ...*

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follow his example of evoking speech and truth from others by his attentive regard and listening care. "Woman, why are you weeping?" "What are you talking about as you walk along?" Time and time again, the Living Word enabled people to speak words of life, words that helped them apprehend the "pure throb of life" that lies just below the surface of consciousness.

### Vital and Fatal Metaphors

To ignore metaphorical knowledge is to venture into the uncharted waters and dangerous shoals of unconscious determination of our most significant understandings of ourselves, our world, and our God. George Eliot sounded this warning when she wrote "we all of us,

grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them."<sup>4</sup> Psychotherapy has long explored metaphors, "tapes," scripts, frames, cognitive beliefs, constraining narratives and the like, that direct our thoughts and actions, shaping our lives and relationships long beyond the time of their usefulness. Current neuropsychological research reveals how images lingering from traumatic experiences shape our physiological responses to events in the present. Mark Twain supposedly wrote that "history does not repeat itself, it rhymes." That poetical connection between the present and the past can be life-strangling. Bringing it into consciousness and the light of the present day can free a person from the potentially fatally entangling metaphor or image.

For instance, spiritual directees come seeking to know God better. Many do so with great trepidation because of early traumatic experiences with people who purported to act and speak on behalf of God. I've heard women tell me about panicking and even fainting in terror in certain worship situations. Often it turned out that something about the service or someone speaking in the service evoked a body memory of early abuse by a religious person. For one directee, the unspoken metaphor was "God is Pastor Jack." This middle-aged married woman, mother, and successful accountant had been sexually abused fifty years earlier by "Pastor Jack" (fictional name), and her faith in God had always been plagued

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3 Benedetto Croce, quoted in Hofstadter, Albert, and Richard Kuhns, eds. *Philosophies of Art and Beauty, Selected Readings In Aesthetics From Plato to Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 556.

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4 From *Middlemarch* and quoted by Bonnie Howe in *Because You Bear This Name: Conceptual Metaphor and the Moral Meaning of 1 Peter* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1

by the association of God with the abuser. The marvel is that she persisted in wanting to know God. Some glimmer of the God Who is love was a pilot light that shined in the darkness and was not overcome. She followed its light, but the darkness around it seemed lethal.

Bringing the buried metaphor “God is Pastor Jack” into the light revealed it for what it was: anachronistic, unhelpful, and untrue. She was no longer in danger from Pastor Jack. She investigated a bit and discovered no one else was in danger of him now either. He had hurt her, and her life had been marked by what he’d done. But her faith in a God Who is different from Pastor Jack had survived, fueled by hope, right anger, and the grace that reached her even in the enveloping darkness. Like a long-starved person, she seized with gusto the opportunity for discovering the true God. The life-giving metaphor for her became “God is friend.”

### No Metaphor Is an Island

Schoolchildren are taught not to mix metaphors in their writing. If you begin with the “God is my shepherd” metaphor, stick with it. Don’t suddenly be drawing on “God is king” imagery while in the middle of the pasture. The biblical authors seem not to have received this instruction. Metaphors collaborate and compound throughout Scripture. Jesus is the Way and the Light—contrasting metaphors, both conveying truth and navigational aid. As with all metaphors, each is a lens that allows a closer look at part of the picture while excluding what doesn’t fall under the scope of the lens.

Among other Scriptural metaphors, two that strike a universal, eternal chord in the human psyche are that of the garden

and the journey. In some cultures and times, garden imagery has been the predominant form in which people have understood their lives. They were planted and rooted, cultivated and pruned, and, by God’s grace, bore fruit and contributed to “the life of significant soil” in which their progeny grew.<sup>5</sup> Today in much of our globalized world, journey imagery trumps garden imagery. Few of us live close to the land. We seldom live out our lives in the place in which we were born. We view our lives as journeys as we traverse varied landscapes, see the world, and aim for a desired destination. Or, for many, the journey itself is the heart’s destination.

In listening to others as they voice their lives and prayers, it’s helpful to bear in mind the anthropological complexity of Psalm 1. The faithful person “shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he [or she] does shall prosper.”<sup>6</sup> The psalm ends with the assurance that “GOD charts the road you take.”<sup>7</sup> We are created for the garden and the road, and both metaphorical domains carry essential meaning. If the person we listen to focuses exclusively on journey imagery, as is common in our culture, it might help to listen for garden imagery and draw attention to it as it emerges.

In my book *Candlelight: Illuminating the Art of Spiritual Direction*, I tell stories from my work with nine directees over time.<sup>8</sup>

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*We are created for the garden and the road, and both metaphorical domains carry essential meaning.*

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5 T.S. Eliot, “Dry Salvages,” *The Four Quartets* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, [1943] 1971), 45.

6 Verse 3, *New King James Version*.

7 Verse 6, *The Message*.

8 (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2008).

Most speak in both garden and journey imagery. For instance, Carl was applying for university teaching jobs. At some point in the arduous process, he imagined he was stepping from stone to stone in a river, unable to see the riverbank ahead. As he worked with the image, he sensed God in the fog ahead, and that conveyed hope. Once he received a job offer at the place that seemed absolutely right for him, the imagery shifted. He climbed the riverbank and entered a garden. There he planted fruit trees. It struck me as a remarkably Psalm One-like experience of faithful living.

### **Metaphorical Narratives of Spiritual Significance**

Many understand the hermeneutical (meaning-making) and healing power of story-telling. Friends listen to our stories, and in so doing they help us understand ourselves and our lives a bit better, and they also help us recover from what's hurt us or impeded our growth. From their listening we glean courage and hope. So, too, professional listeners dedicate their lives to listening over the long term, helping people find freedom in their lives of work and love. Sometimes those who offer spiritual listening to others do so in settings that don't allow for the long term telling of autobiographical detail. A pastor may meet a parishioner only occasionally, or a chaplain may have just one conversation with a patient before the patient leaves the hospital. As a spiritual director, I have the opportunity to listen to people over many hours and years of relationship, but as a retreat leader and teacher, my acquaintance with people is often brief. Despite the brevity, however, there is the hope of depth. I've found in these situations where time is

short but hearts are open, the construction of metaphorical narratives (my term for this) enables hermeneutical and healing story-telling.

I sometimes invite groups of people to "draw the tree that you are." After they've drawn, I often will allow time for them to speak with others in small groups, introducing to another or others their tree. I also encourage them to offer to the whole group, once we've reassembled, anything they learned from the process. What has surfaced has been astounding. People move deeply into a contemplative and creative exploration of their feelings, intuitions, and embodied knowledge as they draw. As they introduce their tree to another person, more meaning is discovered as story is constructed. In addressing the full group, people often say, "I need to spend more time with

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*I sometimes invite groups ... to "draw the tree that you are" (and) ... allow time for them to speak with others in small groups, ... What has surfaced has been astounding.*

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my tree. It knows things it hasn't yet told me!" Or, "In hearing about the other's tree, I see mine in a different light. There are certain ways my tree is, and ways my tree isn't."

The exercise reveals unconscious spiritual metaphors about such things

as life, death, thriving, languishing, loss, gifts, seasons, community, Providence, generativity, and rootedness. It allows for the guarding of privacy in the context of complete honesty. Many times in retreat and classroom situations I've seen trees drawn with limbs hacked off or entire sides of the tree struck dead by lightning. Usually the person tells the story in terms of its emotional and spiritual truth without revealing the historical details. Tears come to the eyes of the story-teller and the listener, and there is understanding without explanation, and possibly healing without surgery.



In spiritual direction we have the time to follow the directee's metaphors. We begin by noticing the metaphor or image. So often people speak in these forms without noticing them. "I'm running on empty." Or, "I feel held." After noticing the image, we explore it. Where does it lead? What are the benefits and limitations of the metaphor? We wonder with the other about the metaphor. Does it convey a sense of grace, or the lack of that? How does it shed light on the spiritual realm, or does it conflict with other knowledge and convictions (for instance, the directee who knew in her heart God was different from Pastor Jack).

As trusted spiritual companions, we accompany and support the other as he or she metabolizes the metaphor, integrates it with more of self, allowing it to be transformative, or as the metaphor is discarded as no longer true or helpful. There will be emotional work in this process, and possibly some theological work as the spiritual knowledge is absorbed. Finally, when we listen to others express their spiritual lives, we become keepers of the knowledge. Metaphors can be elusive, ready-to-hand only in particular emotional and spiritual climates and terrains. Images that emerge on mountain tops may submerge in valleys. When we have been entrusted with another's metaphorical narrative of spiritual experience, we hold it in safekeeping for the other. There may come a time when the gift it offers may be needed by the other, yet the other can't find it. A gentle remembering of the image may be a lifeline for the other, a lifeline extended tentatively rather than flung at the other.

For me, island imagery has been a lifeline, and loved ones have held it for me in their hearts and reminded me of it from time to time. I've never lived on an island, but when on one I find time bends easily, and

the past and future seem close, just around the curve of the land, like the neighboring beach. Those I've loved who've died seem close, and my own future death not so far away. The present is just one point along the contour of a lifetime, and all is held by the ever-changing, constant, unknowable, and familiar ocean. I feel held, and that all is well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

## HERITAGE

Word by word  
line by line  
story by story  
my tangled tale is woven  
with multicoloured threads

My ancestors came from Scotland  
sailing to a new world  
they battled gorse and boulder  
to break in the land

My father, broad-shouldered and shy  
worked hard, built fences, drafted sheep  
the skirl of bagpipes in his blood

My mother, city girl at heart  
gave up her independence to  
marry a farmer  
and learn the ways of the countryside

Blessing flowed down from these people  
example integrity faith  
shaping my life before I was even born

Now I stand knee-deep in grace  
passing along blessing  
to children and grandchildren  
my tangled tale their rich heritage  
a never-ending story woven with dark  
and shimmering strands

*Barbara Sampson*



**Worship - where God's story and our stories meet.**  
The Church of the Good Shepherd, Lake Tekapo. A watercolour by Dave Baab.

# A STREAM FLOWING THROUGH THE CITY

*Lynne M. Baab*

The only sermon I remember from my childhood involved a dramatic action. The minister was talking about people living up to the purpose for which God created them. He took off the watch he was wearing and told us it was broken so it could no longer fulfill its purpose. Then he threw it into the congregation. I vividly remember that watch flying through the air.

The only sermon I remember from the decade of my twenties involved a powerful verbal metaphor. The sermon was an exposition of Psalm 46, and the part I remember focused on verses 4 and 5: "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God . . . God is in the midst of the city" (NRSV). That river, the preacher said, is simply the presence of God. Like the river flowing through the city, God's presence in the centre of our lives is the only certain source of joy and gladness. The preacher described that river in such a vivid way that I have never forgotten his main point.

The watch flying through the air, and the mental picture of a beautiful river bringing joy and gladness, have stuck with me for decades. Why?

The watch episode happened when I was 11 years old, right at adolescence. Perhaps I was thinking about my purpose and function as I was making the transition from childhood to youth, so the topic of the sermon may have been significant to me at that time. I heard the Psalm 46 sermon when I was 27 and pregnant with my first

child. Perhaps I was particularly hungry to hear about God as a river in my life as I was making another significant transition, this time the shift to being a mother. Perhaps I remember those sermons because they met me in a profound way and addressed my concerns.

But it is also possible that I remember those sermons because of the powerful visual components in both of them. With the first sermon, the visual component is clearly evident. A watch was flying through the air. But is it accurate to call the second sermon visual?

Both the broken watch and God's presence like a river are powerful metaphors, and metaphors bring visual content to our speaking and writing. In our time, visual forms of communication are proliferating and people are used to seeing photographs and graphics on the internet and

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*The only sermon I remember from the decade of my twenties involved a powerful verbal metaphor.*

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television, in magazines, newspapers, films and advertisements. Therefore, communicators need to give careful attention to the ways that words can also have visual punch. Metaphors and stories are the primary

forms of written and spoken speech that have an impact similar to photographs and graphics.

Photographs and graphics are engaging because they require interpretation by the viewer. What's going on in that photo? Is that frowning person in the photo sad, mad or merely irritated? Does the picture give me clues about what happened and why the person feels that way? What might happen next?

We seldom engage with those kinds of questions about a photo on a conscious level, but our brains go through a creative, evaluative process when we look at a photo. That process impresses the scene in

our minds. The same is true for metaphors and stories in spoken and written speech.

The word “metaphor” comes from Greek and means “transfer” or “transport.” I’ve heard that in Greece, trucks often have the word “metaphor” painted on their sides. When we use a metaphor, we transport meaning from one word or concept to another. The broken watch that could no longer fulfill its purpose represented the topic of the sermon: people need to be aware of their purpose so they can live it out. The watch was a form of transport, carrying that meaning to the people in the congregation. In that instance, the watch literally carried the meaning out into the congregation as it flew over our heads.

The river in Psalm 46 bringing joy as it streams through the centre of the city carries the meaning of God’s presence flowing through the centre of our lives. The Bible abounds with metaphors. God is our rock, our fortress, a sun and a shield. Jesus is the light of the world, the bread of life, the good shepherd, the gate for the sheep, the true vine, the Alpha and the Omega. The disciples are called to be fishers of people, Christians are God’s adopted children, and the church is the bride of Christ. Jesus’ parables are extended metaphors that teach a lesson.

So often in the modern period the beautiful metaphors of the Bible have been reduced to concepts. So often we take powerful metaphors about God and the church and try to explain them logically and analytically. The vigour of metaphors comes from the challenge to the brain that they present. When a metaphor is used, we have to do the creative mental work of making the comparison between the original concept and the object that carries that meaning. That mental work impresses the idea in our minds. Each of us may have a different perception of the relationship

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*The vigour of metaphors comes from the challenge to the brain that they present. When a metaphor is used, we have to do the creative mental work ...*

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between the original concept and the metaphor. Our understanding of the connection belongs to us, and we remember it. Concepts and analytical explanations are simply not memorable in the same way.

Sometime in the next few days, when you queue at the supermarket, lie in bed trying to fall asleep, or sit in your car in heavy traffic, spend some time meditating on the metaphors of faith that are meaningful to you. Ponder some of the vivid metaphors from the Bible, or dream up your own, and think about the meanings that are carried by those metaphors and why they matter to you.

For further reading:

*Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (University of Chicago Press, 1980).



## LUKE'S STORYTELLING

Luke opens his gospel with a long, formal sentence, like a huge stone entrance welcoming you impressively to a large building. Here, he is saying, is something solid, something you can trust. Writers in the first-century Mediterranean world quite often wrote opening sentences like this; readers would know they were beginning a serious, well-researched piece of work. This wasn't a fly-by-night or casual account. It would hold its head up in the world at large.

... Luke isn't asking us simply to take it on trust; he is appealing to a wide base of evidence. Several others have written about these events; he has these writings, some of which we may be able to trace, as sources. He has been in touch with eyewitnesses who have told him what they saw and heard. And, perhaps most important, he has listened to accredited teachers within local communities. ...

Imagine a village in ancient Palestine. They didn't have printed books or newspapers, television or radio. They had official storytellers. Some great event would happen: an earthquake, a battle, or the visit of an emperor. Within a day or two the story would be told all around the village, and would settle into a regular form. Everyone would know the story, but some of the better storytellers in the village would be recognized by the others as the right people to tell it.

And that's what they'd do. ... So when Luke went round the villages of Palestine and Syria in the second half of the first century, listening to the stories told by the accredited storytellers – 'the stewards of the word', as he calls them – he would

know he was in touch with solid, reliable evidence that went right back to the early events.

Tom Wright. *Luke for Everyone*. SPCK 2002. 1-2.

### GRACE ABOUNDING

It was Grace who lifted my eyes and  
Showed me love wide as the sky:  
Gave me the courage to hope, when  
I thought all hope was gone.

Grace,  
Who gave me a second chance  
- and another  
- and another  
When I thought I'd used up all my  
chances,  
Had given up on myself;  
Who tapped on the door of my soul and  
Quietly entered,  
Revealing the everyday blessings,  
Turning the ordinary into the  
Extraordinary.

It was Grace who met me,  
Where I was, as I was  
- and loved me anyway  
- loves me still.  
When I'd resigned myself to a  
Living death,  
Grace brought me to You and  
Gave me instead  
Resurrection.

*M. Jane Hansen*

# STORYTELLING AND SPIRITUALITY

*Trish McBride*

The master-storyteller Anthony de Mello once said that the shortest line between Truth and the human heart is a story. And so it is! And the human heart is the home of our spirit, and Jesus called himself 'the Truth'. Whatever feeds our spirit is spiritual, and the work of the Christ in our lives.

We still have in us the DNA of the myriad generations of human beings who learned who they were, what life was about, and the world around them solely through oral story tradition. Eventually came drawing, writing, books, radio, and television. And most recently we have blogs, Facebook etc. where anyone can share their stories around the world at the push of a button.

Story-telling is still a fundamental human activity that is taught to us when we are very young, with the time-honoured beginning 'Once upon a time...' It is still the case that just because something didn't actually happen, this doesn't mean it isn't True! We can still access the truths of what it means to be human through stories. They are still a deep way for us to connect with each other in the telling and the hearing.

Counselling and Spiritual Direction are two very sacred contexts for story-telling. People often are unaware that they have a personal story that is both unique, and intimately connected with a myriad of stories of others. Soul-mending and soul-nurturing happen through the medium of stories, as people learn to piece together their experiences to make a more coherent life meaning.

The professionals guide the process by focussing on feelings, by asking questions, by offering wider perspectives, until the stories are gently moulded into a new song. Narrative Therapy is a particularly useful counselling technique, which involves creating or recognising alternative stories to the ones that have predominated.

I've come to see the Bible as (amongst other things) a compendium of stories of the people who have experienced and responded to God over the millennia before Jesus, and the first few decades of this era. We find there the template stories of our own lives and know we are part of a living tradition. This perspective opens up new possibilities. And so writing or telling our own God-stories is continuing this tradition as well as bearing witness to a precious relationship. It is also a primary tool of evangelism, though in my experience, all the more effective for not having changing others as a motive.

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*Whatever feeds our spirit is spiritual, and the work of Christ in our lives.*

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Jesus was of course a consummate story teller - the parables can be read at so many different levels, from the literal, via the metaphorical, to the invitations to what Cynthia Bourgeault calls 'a new operating system' of transformed consciousness. And his story of crucifixion, burial and resurrection is played out repeatedly in each of our lives, until hopefully we come to expect and rely on the resurrection times even in the midst of chaos.

I found publishing my own faith story a powerful way to acknowledge God's varied presence love and leading in my life. And in workshops, I've facilitated others in likewise recording their God-stories, which has been a special privilege. A soul-work book I used some years

ago suggested writing the story of one's ordeals and struggles as a myth: 'Once there was a princess/prince who...' with elements of all the traditional stories of trials, losses, interventions and eventual heroic triumph. This was an astonishingly potent exercise!

I cherish some recent story experiences. One was putting two little granddaughters ages 4 and 7 to bed, and discovering that after prayers, their family tradition is for the children to tell the adult a story each! A delightful reversal that honours their creativity.

Recent re-readings of the little prayer-book I've had since I was six, and a series of books about the lives of saints (*Six O'Clock Saints* etc.) from the same era have provided a wonderful recognition that these childhood stories laid the foundations of my faith and theology. The prayer book has gospel stories and Jesus talking about them to the child, assuring her of his love and understanding. The saints were all interesting characters who had in common only that they wanted to love and serve God to the fullest. It was made clear that the Poor, Ill and Raggy were God's special friends and serving them was a special privilege, and that this was the same as doing things for Jesus.

Stories are always political. In Suva a couple of years ago, I was privileged to meet Sharon Baghwan Rolls, a lawyer, whose life task is the improvement of the lives of Pacifica women. A prime strategy has been taking a suit-case radio to outlying villages to encourage the ordinary women to tell and record their stories. With this comes political awareness and power to challenge the violence that had been accepted as 'normal' and 'culturally acceptable'.

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*Story, myth, metaphor and symbol touch us in our spirits, inspire us, connect us. They are the universal hallmarks of belonging to the human family.*

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And in the central Australian desert last year, I heard Aboriginal elders tell their traditional stories of the earth and their way of life which was sustainable for maybe 60,000 years. One elder is also an ordained Presbyterian minister, for

whom the story of Moses has particular power: a desert leader who led his people out of oppression to freedom. He integrates his traditional and his Christian stories with great comfort. They believe the earth is held in existence by the spiritual attention of the people. This is a message that is so timely!

Story, myth, metaphor and symbol touch us in our spirits, inspire us, connect us. They are the universal hallmarks of belonging to the human family.



# TELLING OUR STORIES TO EACH OTHER

*Margaret Gwynn*

About three years ago I suggested to five other women that we tell our life stories to each other taking as much time as we needed. We met for two hours every two weeks for just over a year.

At our first meeting we laid down some guidelines. There would be absolute confidentiality and acceptance. We might comment after each person's sharing, but only about our own response - what was triggered in us. We then shared what we knew about our parents.

At later meetings we told our stories in seven year bites, ages 0-7, 7-14 and so on until the oldest of us had finished. As we had grown up in different countries and were of different ages, it was fascinating to learn about similarities and differences as we listened to each person's first seven years, adolescence, work-choices and so on.

At the beginning of each session, we gathered round a butterfly cloth and stone circle of six women holding hands in a circle of friendship around a candle which remained alight while we met. I read a short sentence by David Whyte: "One of the greatest blocks I see to new possibilities is our inability to grant magnificence to our own lives - to tell our stories with the magnificence they deserve." That was our determination - to tell our stories with the magnificence they deserved. On the cloth was a clay stone incised with a spiral and shaded in tones from white to black. This was our talking stone. The first woman who chose to speak picked it up and held it until she had said all she wanted. Then she would lay it down for the next woman to pick up in her turn.

We found that three of us could comfortably tell our stories in one session, so it took two meetings for each seven-year section. It was really important for each of us to take the time we needed. We had all experienced group meetings where we were given ten minutes to introduce ourselves to others and felt this did not do justice to the richness of our lives. Here we were free to bring along photographs, school drawings, anything at all that filled out the detail of our lives over the years. Sometimes someone would create a collage of photographs to convey the flavour of her seven years. All of us began to write our stories in some form or another, with a desire to share it with other family members.

We laughed together and cried together. At the end of each meeting we stood holding hands in a circle and marvelled at the way each of us in our different ways had struggled and somehow survived tragedies, depression, illnesses, deaths. The resilience of the human spirit shone through. Truly our life stories are magnificent.

I make a distinction between true and real. I think that the story is true (speaking about his book *The Shack*), it's just not real. That's what a parable is. It takes things that we all know are real, and it takes life events that actually happen, and it weaves them into a fiction that allows truth to actually be embedded.

William P. Young - author of  
*The Shack*. An interview.



# REMEMBERING OUR OWN STORIES

*Andrew Dunn*

What powerful remembering faculties we have. They are able to recall vividly and accurately so much of the events and experiences of our pasts. To write them down or record them in some way can be a rich resource. Indeed 'remembering' is not simply recalling past events as in dipping into the distant past. It can also re-engage us in those events and stories and bring them vividly in the present. St Paul, when writing about the story of the Lord's Supper that he passed on to the churches he planted, uses Jesus' words "Do this to remember me" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). Paul's word for 'remember' isn't a word for the distant past. Rather, it carries the active meaning of making real again in the present what happened back then. *Anamnesis* means "to remember" as in bringing back into a whole the fragments of past memories, experiences and truths. Of course, that's the heart of the Eucharist, the celebration in joy of Jesus' reality and presence in the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine, eating and drinking in faith and so receiving him in all his fullness. His is a real presence indeed!

So I want to suggest that remembering our own stories is a re-membering, a gathering together of our fragmented past and making it lively and real again today. Richard L.Morgan's workbook *Remembering Your Story – Creating Your Own Spiritual Autobiography* (Upper Room Books 2002) has many excellent suggestions for doing this.

His seven "Foundation Principles Of Spiritual Biography" (p.17) are:

1. Every life is a unique, invaluable story.
2. God speaks to us in our stories.
3. Connecting our stories with God's Story is the work of the Spirit.
4. Painful memories can be healed through stories.
5. Remembering our stories creates community and the future.
6. Faith stories are the legacy we leave.
7. Stories create meaning ... at any age.

Our families, children and grandchildren who will read our stories, are not only connected to their past and historical roots in doing this, but also see fresh light shine on aspects they haven't heard or understood. They also point to a future growing out of their own stories, built upon the foundations we are laying.

Life is a sacred journey for Frederick Buechner, and its stories and memories

provide spacious material for discerning God's love and grace at work (*This Sacred Journey*. Harper. 1982).

Here are a few ideas that have proven fruitful for remembering and telling our own stories. All work well privately and some can be used in seminars and groups, on retreats and in spiritual direction and counselling:

- Draw and fill in a time-line (from conception or birth onward) with details of dates, events, learnings and discoveries. It can be expanded with drawings, colours depicting times and seasons, written text to explain the story.

- Another possibility is to do the same with our own spiritual biography, a Grace Time Line. A similar exercise is a timeline of our 'Sin and Salvation History'! Painful? Yes, but full of rich memories of repentances, forgiveness, healing and restoration – a profound experience indeed.
- Another rich vein to explore is to write, draw or paint your discoveries of yourself as a contemplative person and how contemplation has deepened relationship with God. Also trace what encourages that or works against it. I have found it important to discover my contemplative profile which enables me to hold the course and not get sidetracked into things that are unhelpful as a contemplative.
- One friend has hung historic family photos on her lounge wall as a gallery of her family stories. The personal stories associated with each photo make for fascinating sharing and storytelling.

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***Remembering our stories is enriching and blessing for ourselves, and it leaves something concrete for others to build upon.***

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Macrina Wiederkehr writes,

*Today many people are finding ways to remember. They are integrating into their lives lost and forgotten memories. They are carefully putting their souls and bodies back together again. They are re-membering. This is essential life-work: re-shaping, re-fashioning, re-calling. It is the work of an artist. We are all artists and creators of our own lives if we can but put ourselves into the heart of the Great Artist and 'remember'.*

*(Gold in your Memories – sacred moments, glimpses of God. Ave Maria Press. 1998. 11).*

Wiederkehr suggests building a retreat around remembering our stories and gives us a guide stretching over 40 days, working through an exercise a day (*Behold Your Life*. See booklist for details). For most of us that would be a serious discipline, so how about doing it over a week or two?

I'm compiling family histories using photographs, documents and stories and publishing them in A4 Perfect Bound format. I am calling them 'Photographic Essays'. The first tells the stories of my father and his roots back to Scotland and up to the time of his death. The second tells the stories of my mother and her families from as far back as records and photos go. It's amazing what a website like *Scotland's People* has available to cut and paste – birth records, baptismal records, marriages, deaths and census records all in the original hand writing of the recorders! The third volume will tell my wife's and my stories through to the present and is beginning to take shape. A few years ago I compiled and printed a book of photos and text for our grandchildren about our caravanning holiday – *On Holiday with Grandma and Grandad*. They loved it. The local stationery shop clipped it together at a reasonable price so we could make a copy for each family at no great cost.

Remembering our stories is enriching and blessing for ourselves, and it leaves something concrete for others to build upon. How might you use your collection of memories, photos and documents to do this?

# FRUGAL FILM-MAKING<sup>1</sup>, PARABLES, AN INSATIABLE MOON, AND STORY-TELLING

*Paul Fromont*

In the final couple of months of 2009, I had the privilege of spending three days on the Auckland film set of *The Insatiable Moon*, a micro-budget example of frugal film-making<sup>2</sup> which tells a unique and fictional<sup>3</sup> New Zealand story.

In what follows I'd like to reflect on storytelling by means of *The Insatiable Moon* and an understanding of movies as potential parables. I also want to reflect on some ways in which film importantly and needfully underlines the truth articulated

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Burstyn introduced me to this term in his little paper *The Frugal Filmmaker: Zen and the Art of Film Making – Tom Burstyn's 5-Step Program for Poverty Filmmaking*. Tom was the very gifted Director of *Photography for The Insatiable Moon* and he and his wife filmed and produced the wonderful documentary story of a NZ family called *This Way of Life* – see <http://thiswayoflifemovie.com/>. A subversive intent of “frugal film-making” is the recovery of well-made, character & story-driven films. Sir Peter Jackson acknowledged in an interview published January 2010 that “more attention” is being “spent on the technical aspects” of a film to the detriment of the story. “I think we’ve dropped the ball a little bit on stories for the sake of the amazing toys that we’ve played with.”

<sup>2</sup> Filming began on November 16th 2009 and wrapped on Friday 18th December 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Though fictional the story draws on Mike’s experiences, while the Pastor of Ponsonby Baptist church, of the *real* Arthur who lived on the streets on Ponsonby. A photograph of Arthur shows a remarkable likeness to a bearded Rawiri Paratene who plays Arthur in the screen adaptation.

by French pastor and theologian John Calvin (1509-1564) when he wrote, “Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God; without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self.”

I want us to appreciate that engaging with stories, through the medium of film, offers a significant means of nourishing and stimulating our growth in God; firstly through what we discover about ourselves; secondly by what we experience of God; and thirdly, by the ways in which we, as a consequence, respond to others and our world.

Before we continue, I would want to add that, taking the centrality of God-Becoming-Flesh & Blood (John 1:14) seriously, means that we would want to affirm the value and importance of images (Jesus as the *image* of the invisible God), and film in particular as a medium of *revelation*. “There is *more* than the material or visible.” And, additionally, it is “the camera’s gaze [that] *trains* our eye to see differently, so that eventually we can see the world...as a site of revelation.” We are trained in a “discipleship of the eye”.<sup>4</sup>

## The Insatiable Moon

“In a mad world, only the mad are sane.”<sup>5</sup>

*The Insatiable Moon* had its beginnings as an urban New Zealand story told by

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<sup>4</sup> I’m grateful to Jaime Smith, in particular, for making this point clear. For a more detailed summary, see his essay “Faith in the Flesh in *American Beauty*: Christian Reflections on Film” in his collection of essays published as *The Devil Reads Derrida* (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Mike Riddell told me that for many years, this quote, from the movie (chapter 7) *Ran* (1985) by renowned Japanese Film Director Akira Kurosawa, was the strapline for *The Insatiable Moon*. Interestingly, in *Ran*, Kurosawa’s re-telling (in a Japanese context) of *King Lear*. The insightful comment is made by the “fool”.

Screenwriter and New Zealand Producer, Mike Riddell.<sup>6</sup> It tells the story of Arthur, a complex character, psychiatric patient, and “miracle worker” who believes himself to be the “Second Son of God.” It is “a story of magic and meaning, of love and longing, of sanity and insanity, and of an impossible dream which might just be true.”<sup>7</sup>

Importantly too, it attempts to tell the truth about our world, not least in its brokenness. I think of it as a subversive *parable* of “strange neighbors and risky care”<sup>8</sup> (cf. Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 10:5-37, and Luke 14:7-14).

The significance of a number of important themes struck me in several very moving scenes (112 through 116) that I had the powerful experience of watching being acted and filmed. The scenes centre on a heated and animated meeting of Ponsonby residents debating the future of a local boarding house.

Arthur has entered the hall and is pacing, agitatedly at the front of the gathering. A fragile, delicate and evocative little bird’s nest and eggs lies on the floor in front of him as he addresses his audience:

“... *Who’s mad here? I’ll tell you what madness is! Buying things that dull the pain in your life. Sticking poison in your face to make you look young. Being*

<sup>6</sup> Mike’s novel *The Insatiable Moon* is set primarily in Ponsonby, a suburb close to the city centre of Auckland, New Zealand’s largest city. It was originally published in 1997.

<sup>7</sup> From pre-filming promotional material – source, Mike Riddell.

<sup>8</sup> To lift a description used by Biblical Scholar Sylvia Keesmaat in a completely different context.

*so smart you don’t need God anymore. Building boxes to hide yourself away in. Trusting in your wallet instead of your heart...”*<sup>9</sup>

As I was writing an early draft, while on holiday, I’d just finished a book about contentment.<sup>10</sup> In it, the authors quoted a proverb that went something along the lines that God wanted to hide wisdom so that none could indiscriminately find it, and so God ‘hid’ wisdom in innocent

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*“... On the outside a person may seem contented and free, but their inner landscape may be a secret prison.”*  
*John O’Donohue*

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children<sup>11</sup> and fools. I was struck by the thought that there’s something of the “fool” in Arthur, who thinks he’s “the second son of God”. Yet, in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, the so-called court “fool” is not as foolish as one

might believe. In fact, the fool is actually a central actor in the play because it is he who sees what’s *really* happening and it is “he [who] continually prods the king with the truth, trying to burst his bubble of unreality.”

Arthur will likely do something very similar to *The Insatiable Moon’s* eventual audience as he (and his fellow actors) help bring to the surface the untruths we tell ourselves, our projections and our inflations. They will expose illusion and invite the possibilities of a richer, more contented, and transformative way of living in our own skin and of being of service in God’s world.

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<sup>9</sup> One thought that came to mind was a sentence by the late John O’Donohue in a chapter titled: *Prisons We Choose to Live In*. He writes “...On the outside a person may seem contented and free, but their inner landscape may be a secret prison.” From his *Eternal Echoes* (1998).

<sup>10</sup> Contentment: *A Way to True Happiness* by Robert A Johnson & Jerry M. Ruhl (2000).

<sup>11</sup> And cartoonists like Australian Michael Leunig.

## Movies as Parables

“If I could have said it in words, I would have. Then I wouldn’t have needed to make the picture.”<sup>12</sup>

You may have noticed that I’ve used the term *parable* a couple of times to talk about *The Insatiable Moon*? Why “parable”?

Brad Young writes that “the reality of God is revealed in the *word-pictures* of a parable. Jesus and the rabbis of old taught about God by using concrete illustrations that *reach the heart* through the imagination...”<sup>13</sup> One of the ways I assess the value or otherwise of a film is to reflect on whether it moved me at an emotional level. Did it reach me at the level of heart?

For St. Augustine the affective centre of the human person is *the heart*.<sup>14</sup> The heart is the source of our emotions and our feelings, and it is primarily to the heart, through the imagination, that a good film seeks to engage and move us. It is in the heart that Spirit and Word are at work. It is through a fully engaged imagination that God is able to mould the clay of our hearts.

“If the root of art is storytelling, then the taproots are longings. Longings for such things as truth, beauty, romance, adventure. We long to find the true north that will guide us through this life and into the next...”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Akira Kurosawa.

<sup>13</sup> Think of the parable the prophet Nathan tells King David in 2 Samuel 12:1-15a, especially v. 5 (Notice its affect on David and his wholehearted response – “Then David’s anger was greatly kindled...” (v. 5)).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with James K A. Smith.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *Lessons from Reel Life: Movies, Meaning and Myth-Making* by Michael Frost & Robert Banks, p. iii.

## Reel Formation

When we watch a film attentively, we participate in a form of contemplation that allows us to experience the imagination fully engaged in creating. We are not accustomed to thinking about it this way, *but it is prayer*.<sup>16</sup>

In bringing this reflection to a close, I want to offer some suggestions as to practical ways that we can allow the story-telling medium of film to be a part of our formation:

- Ask questions of the story. For example, in *The Insatiable Moon* how might we recognise something of what it means to be authentically human? What is this story telling us about what it means to be genuine and caring communities, and what it might mean for communities, neighborhoods, and individuals within them, to extend compassion and risky care for the “other”, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized?
- The attentive viewer will hopefully not escape an awareness that “*our own world will always be there, lurking in the background*”<sup>17</sup> And so, we bring our own lives, experiences and cultural contexts to the story, listening and feeling for the ways that we might be invited to respond, to reconnect with God’s story, with our own stories, and to grow. This is one way we can make use of the gaps and “white spaces” that Mike Riddell mentions in his brief interview elsewhere in this issue.
- By paying attention to what’s happening to you as you enter into the

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<sup>16</sup> *Finding God in the Dark: Taking the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius to the Movies* (2004) by John Pungente SJ & Monty Williams SJ.

<sup>17</sup> Sylvia Keesmaat.

story and as you reflect on it at its end. Think of this suggestion as a cinematic variation on the practice of *Lectio Divina*. It is the practice of watching a film with God.<sup>18</sup>

1. Firstly, we ask for God's grace as we open ourselves to the story.
2. Secondly, we listen for the ways in which God might be speaking to us ("What moves you the most?" "Why?" "What feelings arise in you?"<sup>19</sup> "Where do they take you?" "How are your values and priorities affirmed or challenged?" "What new things are you discovering about yourself?" "What hopes and fears emerge?").
3. Thirdly, we receive what we discern as God's speaking to us ("What scenes, characters, images, conversations etc. had a particular resonance for us?" "Why is there a resonance?" "What invitation(s) do they extend to you?").
4. Fourthly, we pray our discerning.
5. Fifthly, we sit with what we have discerned as God's speaking to us. We listen for its invitations.
6. Sixthly, we enact God's speaking and *respond* to God's inviting ("In what ways do you feel invited to live, act, or respond differently?" "What in your contexts do you feel need transforming, and what

part can you play in that process?" "Where is God at work in your context?").

- I mentioned *discernment* in points 4 & 5 above. In Ignatian terms I have in mind learning to recognise and name what you experience; to be able to identify your feelings in terms of their being "consolations" and/or "desolations". Put simply, desolations have the effect of moving us away from God and others, while consolations help carry us closer to God and others. Journalling these states of consolation and desolation, including what aroused them and where those feelings are leading, allows you to better know yourself and to recognize God's voice and invitations to live your life more focused and animated by love for God, love for self, and love for others.
- Enrich your experience by becoming more media literate – learn the language of media and *how* to watch a film.<sup>20</sup>
- Talk with someone you trust (e.g. your spiritual director or a friend) about your experiences of watching particular films, and of their affects on you.

And lastly, one more practice that pulls everything together is journalling. As we engage films and the practices listed above, journalling will enable us to both take seriously our responses and to record them, our discernment of God's movements and invitations in our lives, and possible responses, and the *fruit* of those responses.

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<sup>18</sup> A play on the title of a book by David Foster OSB, *Reading With God: Lectio Divina* (2005).

<sup>19</sup> Here's a few that emerged for me as I watched the filming of scenes 112-116: fear, awe, stillness, excitement, conviction, guilt, and hope. Incidentally, as I watched the scene I couldn't but help think of Jesus' condemnation of the pharisees and scribes in Mark 12:38-40; Luke 11:37-54; and Matthew 23:1-39).

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<sup>20</sup> Pungente and Williams' book, mentioned above, is a valuable resource. I've drawn from page 23 to talk about discernment above, while pages 26-28 give a helpful overview of the key concepts of media literacy. I highly recommend it.

# JOY COWLEY – STORY TELLER

*An interview by Adrienne  
Thompson*

## THREE DOTS

*Jo Anastasidis*

Stories tell a tale  
winding through reality  
in truth and metaphor  
symbols of a journey.

Bewilderment understood  
sense out of pain and struggle  
hindsight only later  
clarity coming  
with vision of Holy Hands'  
guidance, restoration  
and growing of the soul.

Meaning found at story's completion  
yet the tale ends with  
three dots, as another begins  
over-lapping, extending  
ever onward into life ...

- AT. When did listening to stories first make an impression on you?
- JC. Listening to stories, I don't know, because we were told stories from a very young age. And they were Bible stories, because my mother had a fairly strict upbringing and a strict view of faith, and Bible stories were the only legitimate stories. So I knew the whole gamut of Bible stories well pre-school; they were very familiar to me. But there were other aunts and uncles who used to tell us stories – the uncles tended to talk about the things that interested them when they were young; those were the kind of real life stories that they passed on, whereas the aunts told us fairy stories and nursery rhymes. So story telling was a part of life and I picked up on that as the eldest of five children, and told stories to my younger sisters. So that went on until I was ready to leave High School.
- AT So when did you start writing them down?
- JC Oh, when I learnt to read, which was rather late actually. I was a late reader for several reasons. We moved around a lot – my parents were quite sick – so by the time I was seven I'd been to five schools and each was a little different; and it was war time, and I realised that elderly teachers had been called out of retirement because young women went on the land. And over-crowded classrooms. And there was a reading system that

didn't make sense to a visual learner, a phonic based reading system. So I missed out and I really thought that I could not read. I used to have the idea that I was a bad reader, and I accepted that until I was nearly nine and encountered a picture book.

Have you ever encountered Ping, the story of a duckling? That's the one! Published in 1934 and it's still going. And books were put on my desk. By this time we were in Otaki School. It was a little school in those days and it didn't have a library but the National Library Service van came round and they gave us bigger books - some children had *Treasure Island* and *Winnie the Pooh* and I got *The Story About Ping*, and I forgot that I couldn't read. That was when I discovered

that reading accessed story. It was a wonderful experience. And I had that exciting adventure in the safety of my own chair. And I didn't want it to finish so I went back

and started it again. And I remember being surprised that it was exactly the same the second reading. I had discovered the constancy of print. Oral story changes with every telling. So in a world that seemed to be fairly unpredictable, we shifted a lot, and values that moved a lot, too, amongst people and when nothing seemed to be predictable, that was a big discovery. This was something that was solid in the universe.

AT. Why, do you think, do stories work for us? Why do they grab us?

JC Stories - we are a story-making people. That's how we put together

our whole culture, through story. Her-story, his-story. We are story makers. We form society through story. And for me, I don't think there is any such thing, really, as fiction. Fiction is - the difference between non-fiction and fiction is the difference between plagiarism and research. You take from one source, it's plagiarism, you take from many sources, it's research. You take from many resources and make something new out of it. For me, fiction is a vehicle for truth which you can't always get in factual writing. So story will do that, and in a non-threatening way story will move you to another place. I have this theory that what we are driven by is a growth imperative in this sort of time and life school. We are

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*Stories - we are a story-making people. That's how we put together our whole culture, through story. Her-story, his-story. We are story makers.*

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always leaning forward to the next thing. I suppose you could call it pilgrimage, but it's a growth - a growth imperative that's in everybody. It's in this whole planet. And in the universe.

We live an expanding universe. And story does that for us. Story will take us over a threshold into a new place.

AT If that's so, what ingredients make the best stories?

JC Well, I suppose that depends on the individual. I have one son who doesn't relate to fiction at all but loves story. He likes the story shape. And he likes to read information that is well-presented. So, I think you can present information in story shape too. I've done a few non-fiction books, but they have the story shape, a well-rounded shape and a satisfying ending. So, that appeals to us. There is that beginning, middle



and end structure, that triangular structure that appeals, certainly in Western civilisation. It's interesting that the triangular structure goes like a wave in oral traditions, and that's because people used to tell stories at night. They'd sit around and the story would be finished and they wouldn't want to go to bed so the story teller would keep on going and the end of that story would become the beginning of a new story. That's the pattern of the oral tradition. What it becomes in the written tradition is a novel, and chapters.

But short stories tend to have that triangular shape and that is very satisfying for most people. There is a certain shape that appeals to us. I call it the golden mean of story telling. That beginning-middle-ending shape.

AT The other half of story telling is listening. Do you think we are still good listeners? How can we become good listeners - we're in such an age of multi-media and television?

JC As far as listening goes - what I see now is that the speed of the advancement of technology has made everything speed up. You know when I first wrote a novel it took three weeks for the manuscript to get to New York and be considered, and then three weeks later a notice to come back to me that it was accepted. Six weeks of an empty mailbox. Now I hear within one day. That kind of change is in a lot of areas. How that washes down to children is a desire for instant gratification. That apprenticeship process of learning is not popular

with young people. They want to do things now. Now. Now.

AT Have you found ways by which we can help people enter into that process and become people who like to listen, who want to listen?

JC Just by awareness. Quite often, I don't know how much awareness, I don't know how reflective most people are until they're about 30. Thirty seems to me a watershed time when we come to a maturity that we didn't have before. It's not 21. When we were young we used to say you came of age at 21, but it's at 30. And that's the age when people who have not gone through all the stages of growth most commonly become depressed and have a breakdown and it leads on to something else.

AT You've written a number of books of meditations and prayers. Could you tell me a bit about what gave rise to them?

JC Probably the prayer.

AT It came out of your own prayer?

JC Yes. This of course is reflection time too. I suppose it would be about 30 years ago that I developed a habit of morning prayer, about an hour each morning. In that quiet time nothing happens and everything happens. It puts the day into a wholeness, whereas if I - at times when I've been over in the States, and busy, and running from conferences to schools and I haven't had time for that, the days become fragmented. So that's quite important to me personally, but out of that will come reflections. I think that happens to anyone that will make that deep interior journey.

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*That apprenticeship process of learning is not popular with young people. They want to do things now. Now. Now.*

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Because writing and prayer are very alike, they're that same deep journey. And we're like little wells, we tap into that underground river that feeds us all. And so often stuff will come up that we didn't think of up here. And quite often that forms the basis for a reflection. Some people call them poems, I don't. I just call them a reflection, I don't see myself as a poet.

AT And they're not story in the same way.

JC No they're not. They're observations of some of the deeper processes of life. I think when I read the gospels I'm always very aware of Jesus as a teacher. And his teachings were not pious exhortations, but he was saying, "*This is how the universe works, this is how the life school works, this is it*". It's absolutely spot on, it's exact. It probably doesn't make sense to young people because the teachings of paradox - "take up your cross and follow me", and "he who loves his life will lose it" - are not meant for the young who are supposed to be developing a healthy ego. But as you get older, what those mean is about escaping from the small prison of self into this much, much bigger space.

AT You put a story into one of your books - the story of the gift of the wise men.

JC Yes - about understanding the growth, the beauty that comes out of loss. I remember once, about 20 years ago an elderly priest saying "Why does God allow evil in the world? We don't know, it's a mystery." And I thought, it's not a mystery, it's really simple, the darkness serves the light. In our lives, in every aspect,

the darkness serves the light. That's the Easter story. And for every one of us that's our own Easter story - the Jungian shadow.

AT Your stories have given me new ideas, in a shape or with a metaphor that illumines them.

JC It always has to be metaphor, doesn't it? There are other ways of knowing other than the brain, which we couldn't put into words, so you have to use the language of metaphor - poetry - symbolism. The moment you try to rationally explain mystery you dishonour it. You have to use metaphor!

AT Can you tell me about Terry's photos?

JC We do the photos together. Sometimes he will have a photograph he's just taken and I go, "There's an idea!" And sometimes it's the other idea, I've got a reflection and that moves him to find a photo. I can remember once we were on Paekakariki Beach - this was in *Aotearoa Psalms* - there were three shells and they were like cups of light, with the little bit of water sparkling in them. One shell was turned the other way. And that spoke to us. Another time we didn't actually get the photo because we were in a bus, but we both saw a reflection immediately. Outside a restaurant there was a board with a sign saying 'Be guided by your hunger'. We both saw it at the same time. It's never only one first or the other first, sometimes we see something together.

We've gone for black and white, because of the marriage of the black and white print with the black and

white photos. Recently we've done a book that's got Terry's coloured photos in it. And this is appropriate because it's called *Growing Strong*. It's a book of values for school children. It hasn't been printed yet. I did some cards for church schools and the book has the same values but it's for State schools as well. And Terry's taken wonderful photographs of New Zealand vegetation for every chapter of the book.

AT On your website you say, "There's who you are, and there's what you do, and writing is what you do". Your stories have affected my faith. Would you talk a bit about how your faith affects what you do as a writer and what you do as a writer affects your faith?

JC Um - yes that's a hard one. Because it's not exactly something I reflect on, I just do it. I can't separate the two. And I've long since given up a feeling of cringe about it. Because my faith is my faith. It's me, and part of me. I realise that some people have been church burnt in some way or another and are a bit anti, but that's ok, I don't mind that. I've had funny times, once in a school staff room, I sat next to a teacher who was sitting having a cup of tea. I used to always wear this cross on the outside of my clothes. So I sat down, she stood up and said in a very loud voice, "I can't stand Christians, they're so bloody judgmental". And walked away. And there was silence in the room and then everyone started talking and being very nice.

And apart from the irony of that I just thought, "Thank you, I needed

to hear that". Because that's really what gets up the noses of non-Christians, I think. We usually hear the things that we're meant to hear at a certain stage. Any kind of prejudice is lack of awareness. People aren't deliberately prejudiced, they're ignorant. Jesus' words from the cross "Forgive them, they don't know what they're doing" were exactly right. He wasn't being particularly generous - well he was, but he was speaking truth. They just didn't know.

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*It reminded me of an old, old saying I read once somewhere, "Each soul is God's favourite".*

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So - I must admit, when I was first asked to put the reflections, which had been appearing in a little Marist magazine, when someone wanted them put together

in a book, and Terry had been taking the photos and I'd been writing them - I didn't feel comfortable with that because these reflections seemed so personal and so private that it was a bit like dancing naked in the streets. And I didn't realise until I got feedback from people that we all have those feelings. They go so much deeper than the structural aspects of religion. It's not that they are different from the structural aspects, it's just that the structural aspects are the road which take us to the point of mystery. And when people were saying that "I felt this was written especially for me", I knew that we all had that private relationship with the One we didn't dare name - the only way we could think of is Love that's deep in here. That was quite a discovery. It reminded me of an old, old saying I read once somewhere, *Each soul is God's favourite*. But I can remember feeling very uncomfortable about the first book being published. I thought, "People will think I am mad".

About nine years ago Penguin asked me to write an autobiography. I felt



St Paul wrote, For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. NIV 1999.

Pastel drawings by Andrew Dunn.



claustrophobic as soon as they said it. No, I can't do that, it's too narrow. Then a while later they came back and said "What about a memoir?" I didn't say "Yes" or "No" at the time but I did think a memoir is much broader though I didn't know how to go about it. And then I read Annie Dillard again and I thought "I can do something that's anecdotal". Not as erudite as *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, but slices of life spread out like cake on a platter for people to nibble at whenever they choose. So that's what I've done. And I've finally got it done.

At the very end of it I've got quite a long chapter I call *The Religious Gene*. And I start off by recounting something that happened at a *Readers and Writers Week* in Auckland. I was asked to talk and I had one hour. They wanted me to talk on the influences that made me a writer. And near the end of the talk - it was packed with about 500 people - I said, "I'm coming now to the greatest influence in my life which is my faith. But I realise that some people are a bit allergic to talk of religion and I assure you I wouldn't want you to feel uncomfortable, so if you would like to leave now you're not going to miss anything". And two women got up and quietly, graciously left. But I didn't realise what that did to the rest of the group. They all felt free to talk about their spiritual experiences. So we had this wonderful conversation; it wasn't just me, it was everybody. We could have gone on for hours but they came and shooed us out for the next speaker. But it was the atmosphere in the room as people started unfolding their stories. Stories of things they couldn't explain rationally ... experiences ... And it was those two women leaving that had given them permission to do that.

So I recount that tale and then I say, "I'm doing the same thing here in this book. If you want to put it down at this point that's fine".

And of course the very last chapter is on aging, and the beauty of aging. There are certain discomforts as the old prison of the body breaks down but everything in the world becomes more beautiful. You don't really care what people think of you. And there is an understanding - you see goodness in everybody. You see the God light in everyone. It's a good time.

AT  
Thank you.

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## MIKE RIDDELL ON FILM AND STORY-TELLING

Paul Fromont interviews Mike Riddell, novelist, screenwriter, and New Zealand producer of the movie *The Insatiable Moon*.

**What is it about the medium of film that excites you about using it to tell stories?**

Although very specialised, film is at heart a story-telling medium. In its theatrical form in which an audience sits in darkness before a big screen. Film has enormous power to transport people into a different realm. For a couple of hours they live out a new experience in a medium, which is compelling and potentially life-changing. The power of the image is enormous, and so much can be conveyed without the use of words. Film is, as one of the visual arts, able to hook into the rich vein of symbolism and mythology, which runs through human history. Like many others, I have been moved by film in ways that have altered my perception of life...Movies are, literally, a dream factory. They allow the construction of an alternate reality into which the audience is invited.

**What facets of story-telling does film enable you bring to the fore that you weren't able to do through the original medium of a novel?**

Fiction is a completely different medium from that of screenwriting. In a novel you completely control that which you are creating, down to giving readers access to the thoughts passing through a character's head. In that sense you are more explicitly guiding reactions to your story. Filmmaking is different in a number of respects. It contains much more of what we might term *epistemic space* - in other words, gaps in which the audience is invited to bring their own experiences into the story. This is symbolised in a screenplay by all the white space on the page. The script of *The Insatiable Moon* consists of some 21000 words compared to the novel, which has around 72000 words. And with film, it's in that white space that the magic happens (or doesn't).

**Mike, I've talked a little about myth in my essay included in this issue of *Refresh*, specifically, in my allusion to *King Lear* and the importance of the so-called "fool", but I'm wondering: how do you see the relationship between "storytelling" and "myth"? Indeed, is there even a relationship...?**

*The Insatiable Moon* is a myth - hopefully an engaging one. There's an intimate link between storytelling and mythology. After all, in essence, myths are stories, which we tell ourselves to make sense of the existence we inhabit. I suspect it is not too outrageous to suggest that without myths humanity would not be able to sustain consciousness. This is not an argument for religion or superstition over against a more empirical and scientific approach to reality - in fact science itself is the contemporary myth, which allows the human race to face the future with some sense of cohesion. No myth is complete or absolute. All cultures develop a range of myths, which help to bind the

culture into a whole, and to mediate shared experience. There's an unfortunate double meaning of the word 'myth' - sometimes it is used to mean untrue. In fact all myths, and all stories, are true - in that they express some truth. The most important myths express great truths, which are incapable of being represented in any other form than that of stories, rituals or symbols.

It's interesting that Stephen Spielberg's production company is called *DreamWorks*. Film is a medium for shared dreaming. Joseph Campbell, whose original work was in comparative religions, was one of those

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*Film making ... contains much more of what we might term epistemic space - ... gaps in which the audience is invited to bring their own experiences into the story.*

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with great insight into the relationship between film and mythology. His friendship with George Lucas provided a cross-pollination of ideas, which is evident for all to see in the *Star Wars* films, which have such a strong mythic undercurrent. It is the participation in myth

which makes filmmaking such a powerful force, and why it is possible to come out of a film feeling that one's perception has been changed by the experience.

It's a poor screenwriter who doesn't become familiar with myth and symbolism, and understand how images, symbols and subtext interrelate to produce stirrings in the unconscious of the audience. What goes on below the surface is arguably the most important part of any film. *The Insatiable Moon* delves into the relationship between some ancient Western mythology (for example: the wounded redeemer, the wise fool) and Maori mythology (the creation myth, the prophet). Much of this is in the deep undercurrents, and many viewers would be completely unaware of it. Our task at the moment is to preserve the mythological stirrings of a very simple story.

# STORYING LIFE THROUGH NARRATIVE THERAPEUTIC CONVERSATION WITH GOD AND OTHERS

*Lex McMillan*

As a relationship therapist with an interest in theology, I very much enjoy talking about what it means to be human. And I have recently been inspired by considering humans as persons-in-relation in the light of Narrative Therapy and a social trinitarian understanding of God. In the last few years a profound cross-discipline shift in understanding has taken place away from the pervasive individualist Western ways of thinking about God, and humans. This widespread turn from individuality to relationality has produced the realisation that persons do not so much form relationships, but relationships form persons.

Unlike the inherent suspicion of difference that characterises the individualist view of the world, post-modern relationality produces instead a respectful curiosity of difference and otherness. Catherine Keller says, "The new comes from resisting separating ourselves and instead heeding the call to join fields of relationships," (Keller 1986, p.18). Nowhere has this separation been seen more dramatically in the West than between theology and psychology. Attempts to integrate theological and psychological understandings of people have most often resulted in violence to one or other perspective in the form of the assimilation or exclusion of difference, (Volf 1996).

Theologically, the West has largely taken its lead from Augustine who understood God's triunity as three modes of one being. As a result, unity and individualism have been emphasised. Consistent with this, human persons have been viewed as imaging God's three modes within three psychological states of memory, intellect and will. The Western individualistic view has been that God is imaged within individuals as function, rather than between persons relationally imaging the shared life of the three-Person God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For Western post-Augustinian theology and for psychology the emphasis has been on interiority rather than relationality.

However, the relational re-turn has now opened very creative space for dialogue between theology and psychology. Stanley Grenz suggests that within the quest for full understanding of persons there is benefit in considering both trinitarian theology and post-modern relational understandings.

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*The Western individualistic view has been that God is imaged in humanity structurally, rather than relationally ...*

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In true dialogue, rather than the all too common monologue, one need not threaten the other, (Grenz 2001). We might say that relational counselling psychologies provide detail about the way in which persons are formed relationally, and theology offers insight about how and with whom we might relate in order to live in accord with God's ongoing creative intent.

One of the most significant themes to emerge within this recent integrative dialogue is the central role of story in the relational formation of personal identity. Story has long been recognised as a way of representing a particular view of history. However, when considered in the light of a relational understanding of



persons, story must also be appreciated for its central role in forming the way people experience themselves and the world; people don't only construct stories, stories also construct people, (Grenz 2001 p. 328). When, for example, a community tells a story about their formation, they are doing more than reporting, they are participating in the narrative development of their identity. George Stoup observes that, "identity emerges in that a person, through the exercise of memory, elects certain events from one's past and uses them as a basis for interpreting the significance of one's life," (Stroup 1981 p. 101-11). We might say then, that the person arises as one connects through language with a narrative that gives shape to his or her personal identity and that narrative is the central way people develop shared meaning. Social constructionist Vivien Burr says, "If language is indeed the place where identities are built, maintained and challenged, then this also means that language is the crucible of change, both personal and social", (Burr 2003 p. 55). Therefore, we might say that narrative-personhood is a relational achievement, not a manifestation of an individual personality.

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*Narrative Therapy  
offers important insight  
into how to structure  
conversation to life-  
forming effect ...*

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When considered ethically, the identity-forming role of language raises questions about how we might participate in conversation in life-giving ways, avoid life-limiting ways of speaking, and how we might intentionally form communities that offer people the freedom of conversation with which to story their lives healthily. Alistair McFadyen focuses this critical need for an ethic saying, "If it is to be the case that our personal identities are moulded through our relationships then there must be some connection

between the quality of those relationships and that of our personhood." And so, "the ontological statement concerning the way our personal being is structured (through relation) must give way immediately to ethical and political questions concerning the 'right' forms of individuality and relation," (McFadyen 1990 p. 18). I propose that Narrative Therapy offers important insight into how to structure conversation to life-forming effect, and trinitarian theology may provide the guidance or ethic about where Narrative conversations might be aimed.

Narrative Therapy aims to provide conversational structures with which to co-research the effects and the social formation of the particular way a person's identity has been storied, and to make available alternative stories. (White and Epston 1990; Freedman and Combs 1996; Morgan 2003). The Narrative therapeutic process broadly follows three steps: first, the co-research of problems and their effects on a persons' sense of self; second, the co-authoring of a preferred identity story; and third, the re-telling of the new story amongst an appreciative audience who are able to offer community of support as the new identity story is conversationally grown. This fluid notion of relational identity, as opposed to viewing identity as structurally fixed within a person, opens the way for hope in situations where it seems unavailable. It also opens us to the possible post-modern dismay of recognising that all claims to truth appear temporary, provisional and only relevant in local settings.

As a way of addressing this ethical concern, I propose that we require a vision for life that is broader than any one person's life narrative. We require a life-centred meta

or transcending-narrative within which to story personal identity. Consistent with post-modernity's inherent interest in the 'other', Narrative Therapy already positions its work within a metaphor of respect. I suggest this can be extended theologically by recognising that the Holy Spirit invites and places humans 'in-Christ', an identity forming participation in trinitarian community. According to Grenz, "[God] incorporates [all people] in the Jesus story, the narrative of God acting in the crucified and resurrected Messiah, ... This is a participating in the narrative of Jesus, and a re-telling of one's narrative in the light of the plot of the Jesus Narrative," (Grenz 2001 p. 329). Imagine the potential of Narrative Therapeutic conversation to facilitate the forming of Christ-centred identity. This is an identity storied within loving encounter with others and the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit's life together.

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## **Luke's Prologue:**

So many others have tried their hand at putting together a story of the wonderful harvest of Scripture and history that took place among us, using reports handed down by the original eyewitnesses who served this Word with their very lives. Since I have investigated all the reports in close detail, starting from the story's beginning, I decided to write it all out for you, most honourable Theophilus, so you can know beyond the shadow of a doubt the reliability of what you were taught.

(Luke 1:1ff *The Message*. Navpress 2002)

## STORIES

### DUCKLING'S STORY

*Jo Anastasiadis*

Stories and images can create for me a sense of safety in describing aspects of my spiritual journey. They often enhance my understanding of my experience and God's relating to me through it. The following story began to emerge with a spiritual director who graciously allowed me to tell my story in this descriptive way, rather than detailing too much of the actual experience and content. Later, as I continued this journey, sat with, and wrote down this story, I saw far more truth about God's journeying with me, and my growth through this experience, than I might have otherwise ...

Duckling limped. Sometime ago the Keeper had rebroken the bone to mend it properly. Although the splint was now gone, Duckling still limped. Mother Duck called Duckling to a new journey. Duckling was unsure. Her leg might only slow her down or mean the journey might not even be completed. Still Mother Duck encouraged and Duckling chose to follow.

The journey included difficult paths, calling for trust and risk. One such path led Duckling along a road's verge, reminding her of her accident. Now, wandering too close to the edge, a car swerved, catching her in its draft, tumbling her, a terrified ball of fluff and feathers, quivering into the gutter. The cars sounded closer and Duckling had no idea which way safety was. She called for the Keeper, but He did not come. Duckling feared all safety was gone. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, she heard a distant quack. Cautiously she uncurled; finding herself unharmed even as her heart hammered. Duckling staggered to standing, reaching for safety.

But in attempting to climb the curb she ignored her wounded leg and fell, bruising herself. Choosing to accept her limitations, Duckling climbed more carefully.

She tottered towards safety, growing minutely in confidence. But then, a dark shadow overhead, and screeching in her ears, had Duckling scampering for cover as fast as her limited gait would allow. Huddled beneath brambles, scratched and exhausted, Duckling whimpered plaintively for help. She heard only the cacophony of screech, distant cars and fear beating within. From what seemed a great distance, Mother Duck called her to trust. Step by step Duckling ventured to follow the voice through the brush. Her siblings also quacked encouragement. Negotiating the brambles' ups and downs, she trod carefully through the branches. Learning to trust just one voice amidst cacophony's turmoil, to judge what's safe and what's not, and to trust her siblings. Finally Duckling emerged somewhat shaken, but stronger, to discover that the shadow was not what she thought, and the screeching, only her past speaking into the present.

Duckling also saw that the Keeper had been watching all this time. Protecting her from harm, but not rescuing. He knew she needed to learn to keep herself safe. Even though every fibre of His soul longed to pick Duckling up, nestle her and love her back into a safe place, He restrained Himself. Love restrained Him. He protected and waited for Duckling to find the way to safety. He watched and cared, albeit at a "restrained arm's length", aching with her, distant only in apparent action. And Duckling realised she had learned to accept herself, her limitations and her need for help from others that little bit more. She had cared for her woundedness, and found acceptance even in her brokenness. Both legs had grown that little bit stronger over the rough terrain. And Mother Duck nodded her approval as she turned

to continue the journey and Duckling, limping slightly less, fell in behind.

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## BEYOND THE STARE

*Lesley McCrostie*

Sitting in the Bangkok public hospital, I looked around at the sunken eyes, taut, yellow skin and skeletal frames of the abandoned bodies surrounding me. This impersonal ward had become a human waste heap, a dumping ground for these men between the ages of nineteen and forty who were dying of AIDS. I knew that by next week, many of these men would be gone, and there would be a whole new set of lonely faces.

Bick, the young man I was caring for, was incontinent, dehydrated and exhausted. His body had been battling symptoms for months, and he didn't have much fight left. We had rung his mother to tell her that Bick was dying, but she had told us that she was "tied up with business," meaning she was busy gambling and playing card games in her slum.

"I can't do this by myself", I thought as I washed Bick, straining to turn and lift him alone. Sandy, my team-mate, who usually visited the hospital with me, was back in Australia. I was exhausted physically, but also emotionally, as I looked around at the weeping sores and pleading eyes of so many who were suffering.

After washing and powdering Bick, I massaged and exercised the wasted muscles in his emaciated legs. "Thank you," he whispered, sitting up in his bed, which I had made with fresh sheets. His thin lips stretched into a wide smile and his big, dark eyes twinkled.

Bick knew that his death was imminent, but he had recently encountered Jesus. Though his body was wracked with pain,

I felt deep reassurance knowing that Bick saw himself as a child of God, and knew he was loved unconditionally.

I glanced up and saw a Thai woman staring at me. As the seconds passed, I felt as though I could read her thoughts: "*What is this foreigner doing here? Why is she washing and caring for this young Thai man? This can't be right - you just don't see foreigners here - not helping on the wards of one of our hospitals!*"

She leaned over the pale, listless body of a teenager, her face full of bewilderment and pain.

As our eyes met and locked, I knew that the boy was her son, and I thought of all the love with which she had nurtured him over the years, the dreams she had treasured for her little boy - all snatched away by an aching grief as she watched him slowly die.

Reaching over, I took her hand in mine as my eyes welled up with tears. Here was one woman whose love for her son outweighed the shame, gossip and fear of contagion that no doubt isolated her from her neighbours. But she had gained a special bond with her son that Bick's mother would never know about. Though we were strangers, and spoke each other's language imperfectly, I knew as we grasped hands that we understood one another and why we were here, sharing this road of suffering.

She released my grip and gently brushed her boy's hair, as I imagined she had done countless times when he was little. His eyes drifted open, and a smile broke across his pinched face, softening his sunken features. Like Bick, he too knew he was loved.

*The Sounds of Worlds Colliding*. Ed. Kristin Jack. Pub. Servants to Asia's Urban Poor. 2009 139ff. Used with permission.

## A CHINESE LEGEND

Once upon a time, in the heart of the Western Kingdom, lay a beautiful garden. And there in the cool of the day the Master of the Garden went to walk. Of all the denizens of the garden, the most beautiful and the most beloved was a gracious and noble Bamboo. Year after year, Bamboo grew yet more noble and gracious, conscious of her Master's love and watchful delight, but modest and gentle withal. And often when wind came to revel in the garden, Bamboo would cast aside her grave stateliness to dance and play right merrily, tossing and swaying and leaping and bowing in joyous abandon, leading the great dance of the Garden which most delighted the Master's heart.

Now upon a day, the Master himself drew near to contemplate his Bamboo with eyes of curious expectancy, and Bamboo, in a passion of adoration bowed her great head to the ground in loving greeting. The Master spoke, "Bamboo, Bamboo, I would use thee." Bamboo flung her head to the sky in utter delight, the day of days had come, the day for which she had been made, the day to which she had been growing hour by hour, the day in which she would find her completion and her destiny. Her voice came low. "Master, I am ready. Use me as Thou wilt."

"Bamboo," the Master's voice was grave - "I would fain take thee and cut thee down." A trembling of great horror shook Bamboo. "Cut ... me... down! Me ... whom Thou Master, hast made the most beautiful in all Thy garden! .... To cut me down. Ah, not that, not that. Use me for Thy joy, O Master, but do not cut me down."

"Beloved Bamboo" - the Master's voice grew graver still - "If I cut thee not down, I cannot use thee."

The garden grew still. Wind held his breath. Bamboo slowly bent her proud and glorious head. There came a whisper:

"Master, if thou canst not use me but that thou cut me down ... then... do Thy will and cut me."

"Bamboo, beloved Bamboo, I would ... cut thy leaves and branches from thee also."

"Master, Master, spare me. Cut me down and lay my beauty in the dust, but wouldst thou take from me my leaves and branches also?"

"Bamboo, alas, if I cut them not away, I cannot use thee."

The Sun hid his face. A listening butterfly glided fearfully away. And Bamboo shivered in terrible expectancy, whispering low.

"Master, cut away."

"Bamboo, Bamboo, I would yet... cleave thee in twain and cut out thine heart, for if I cut not so, I cannot use thee."

"Master, Master... then cut and cleave."

So did the Master of the garden take Bamboo and cut her down and hack off her branches and strip off her leaves and cleave her in twain and cut out her heart. And lifting her gently, carried her to where there was a spring of fresh, sparkling water in the midst of his dry fields. Then putting one end of the broken Bamboo in the spring and the other into the water channel in his field, the Master laid down gently his beloved Bamboo. And the spring sang "Welcome," and the clear sparkling waters raced joyously down the channel of Bamboo's torn body into the waiting fields. Then the rice was planted, and the days went by, and the shoots grew and the harvest came.

In that day, Bamboo, once glorious in her stately beauty, was yet more glorious in her brokenness and humility. For in her beauty, she was life abundant, but in her brokenness she became a channel of abundant life to her Master's world.

*(Source unknown)*

# PAPUA NEW GUINEA WOMEN SHARE THEIR STORIES

*Jan Lee*

I felt apprehension and positive anticipation. Janet, my Papua New Guinean namesake, who is a pastor, and I were waiting to welcome women leaders who were coming for a weekend retreat. In Papua New Guinea exact time doesn't matter. They would be walking quite long distances from their villages, carrying taro and cooking bananas so we would have food for our time together. A couple of the women had been to a teaching retreat on the mainland before. But this weekend would be different. We were going to have silent time . . . and open ourselves to what God might do.

These women are from the Waskia tribal group. There are about 30,000 Waskia people in all, and their homeland is the large volcanic Karkar Island off the north coast of Papua New Guinea. Back in the 1970s and 80s I had lived among the Waskia people as a Bible translator and literacy worker. That was when their language was first written down and the New Testament in their language translated. Now we are revising that and adding the Book of Psalms.

Our translation team, who are mainly men, had said, "We think women will express themselves more freely if they are with you on their own, without us. Women are receptive and will open themselves readily to new ways of praying. We think they should take priority, and we'll be of support in any way we can."

Some months earlier we'd had a team retreat and they had experienced being silent and listening for how God might speak to them, particularly through his written word and through creation. In the

culture traditionally women have had a lower place, not speaking up too much and putting others' desires and needs first. But change is afoot that opens up more equal sharing as sisters and brothers in Christ.

In the course of the retreat the women came to share of their lives very personally. We each drew a time-line and wrote on significant things that had happened in our lives. Then we had a 'silent' hour to share our journeys with God and to listen for what God might say. I signalled when time was up on the big slit-gong drum. Night falls suddenly in the tropics and I was aware that preparation for our evening meal hadn't started yet. "Would you like us to share our stories in pairs which would take less time, or would you like to hear everyone's story?" I asked. "Oh we all want to listen to everyone's story!" was the unanimous verdict. "For us, time doesn't matter at all, or when we eat," they said, "as long as you're OK. (Well there were a few ripe bananas for a snack!) We can talk through the night by the firelight."

Well, the sharing went on well into the night! And there were many shared tears and much shared laughter. These women had been through many times of suffering and they had persevered and looked to God and been strengthened. I felt like a babe in the faith by comparison. There were stories of many losses in their lives - deaths of babies and children, a drowning of a brother. One woman shared her story how her child's cerebral palsy had made him different from other children and made her sad. A couple of women told of how they had been subjected to physical and sexual violence, and how that had made them feel worthless. So many things women had kept to themselves, unshared, they now shared. There were the happy strands woven in their stories too, like a near-death experience that had strengthened faith, and one of a remarkable physical healing, and another of an important relationship

getting better. In their time of praying they'd had a fresh experience of God caring for them and putting new strength in their souls. And then as they listened to each story and prayed for each woman in turn, much love was shed abroad among them.

I had been apprehensive. How would these women from a different culture respond to my guidance about praying? And my speaking in Waskia is way below native-speaker level, so how would our communication be? But looking back I know I won a little victory over my fears that has widened my life and my world. I had had positive anticipation ...yes truly when we call to God, God will answer!

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## THE STUFF OF DREAMS

### A true story

*Joyce Budenberg*

She came to me first in a dream. My 'sister' the dream suggested. "*Interesting,*" I thought as I awoke. I don't have a sister. Two brothers, no sister, though I often wished for one. The image blurred over time as dreams do, except for the girl's lovely auburn hair and an idea of her face. And the feeling that it would be good to have a sister. Someone who'd understand me. These impressions lingered.

Much later, we as a family moved from a place deep in the heart of another continent back to Scotland where I was born and brought up, where everything was familiar although I had not lived there for more than ten years. Winter... we had not experienced winter in a long time. The bitter cold air, numb fingers, coats; our children didn't know what coats were. Snow on the hills, snow on the ground.

A very ordinary morning. I waved to my daughter outside the school gate.

Then I saw her! Just like that! The sister of my dream, with auburn hair and a face I remembered. My mouth fell open. I told myself it's rude to stare, but couldn't stop. And she was staring back. It was a cold day with frost on the ground yet I was hot and clammy, my heart pounding in my chest. I leaned on the wall for support.

In my dream I had seen only her face. Now, seeing all of her, I realised that she was a kind of mirror image of me, and I of her. We had the same disability, hers a problem with her right leg, mine with my left. This I knew somehow, although she was standing still. She recognised it of me too, although I was being held up by the wall.

Other parents moved on, having said goodbye to their children, but there we stayed and stared. Then we laughed. Laughed even before speaking. I felt that I knew her and she told me later she felt the same. "*This is the stuff of dreams.*" I said to myself. Yes, indeed! We said hello and decided to go somewhere to sit and talk. I was shaking, but not from the cold, not from the sore leg either. We went to her home, just around the corner.

That first morning we decided that we were meant to meet because of the shared experience of living with disability. I did not tell her of my dream then, thinking it would scare her off. She told me that she had been wishing for a long time to meet someone who could share and understand the vulnerabilities of her condition. This had been a long-held dream of mine too. We talked and laughed, shed some tears. Mostly we asked questions. We were both 32 years old and had been living more or less alone with the struggles of our disabilities due to our very premature birth, not daring to believe we could ever really be understood by anyone else.

What else did we discover on that morning? We were born in the same year, about two weeks apart. She had been raised in the town we were now in and I, in a village about forty miles south of there. We discovered our grandparents had lived in the same village in the 1960s when we were born. Again, quite a long way from the place where we met outside our children's school. I told her I was christened in the small church in my grandparents' village. She said she thought she may have been christened there too! It was a pretty little church, popular for weddings and christenings. She would try to find out more. Many common threads in our stories already. With more to come!

My mother spoke almost casually of these the things when I asked her. Perhaps not realising their import; possibly not wishing to evoke her own painful memories; almost certainly not knowing the stuff of my dreams. This is what she said: "Ah, I remember that little girl. I remember her well. Her name was Jennifer. She was christened on the same Sunday as you. It wasn't planned that way. I remember she had red hair. She was very small like you even though you were 6 months old by then. Did you know that you spent about five months together in the same room in the hospital after you were born? Where the premature babies were. She was beside you in the ward."

Did I know *what*?

Jennifer and I found out this life-changing news from our mothers on the same evening. The next day when we met at the school we were speechless, almost hyperventilating. I think we were in some kind of shock. A very happy kind of shock. After seeing our children into school as calmly as we could, we hugged each other with glee, jumping up and down. We went to Jennifer's home and compared our baptismal certificates, dug out for us by our

mothers. Sure enough: same place, same date, signed by the same parish minister.

We did not, could not, speak then about our first five months of shared life experience. We tried but there were no words that worked. They would come later.

Instead, on that morning when I could speak, I told Jennifer about my dream. After all the surprises we had had, it seemed perfectly straightforward. Inevitable even. Neither of us needed to comment. We spoke the same language, no words necessary.

There we sat in silence, stunned and amazed. Wondering about those five long months with much separation from our mothers and fathers, as was the rule at that time. How often had we cried together, needed our mothers together, been afraid together, felt alone together, been in pain together, been comforted together, gazed at each other, recognised each other... known each other?

Wondering....about miracles, God's care, and the stuff of dreams.

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## MOMENTS OF GOD

*Margaret Cunningham*

I have never been entirely comfortable with ascribing myself the title of Mystic or using the term mystical experience to explain the flashes of insight that strike in a split second. And technically that's what they have been for me, flashes of divine insight that burst into every part of my being; they exalt, teach, love, admonish, humble and reveal, all in the same moment of time.

Describing these moments as a 'mystical experience' almost has a ring of fantasy about it compared to the humbling, powerful and very real life-changing



impact each flash of insight has had on my life. 'Moment of God' is my term for the mystical experience.

My first recognized 'Moments' were encountered when reading a passage from the Bible or from articles recommended by my Spiritual Director. Common, well-used passages of scripture would suddenly flood my whole being with such understanding that concepts of God I had held for years would disintegrate in a fleeting second. I recall one such passage in John 10:30 "Jesus said, I and the Father are one." I must have read, seen or heard this verse many times and believed I fully understood what was necessary to know about it. Even now as I try to explain what happened I just can't wrap the experience into words, but in as much as it is possible, I met with God and for the first time in my life 1 plus 1 equaled 1 and not 2.

Over the years my 'Moments of God' have happened anywhere. I am fortunate to live close to Rotorua's Whakarewarewa Forest where I spend many hours jogging the leafy Redwood trails enjoying the solitude this magnificent environment offers. It is here I am often reminded of the awesomeness of our loving God. One particular day I was jogging through the tracks feeling rather wearied by life in general; it would be fair to say I was indulging in a massive 'woe is me' attitude, when I was literally stopped in my tracks by, "Love cannot come into you; it can only come out of you." I took a few more wobbly steps and, again, "The journey is about revelation - it is about what I reveal to you." These weren't spoken words in the verbal sense; their presence and meaning just welled within me. I am still blown away by the profundity of those Moments.

Moments of God are what I call my inside-out experiences - they are words from the heart and do not seem to be linked to any outside theory or set of facts. They do not

change or heal the circumstances of my day to day life on the outside. An incident that bugged me before I went for my jog was still there when I returned home; mystical experiences are not meant to be a fix-it for life's problems. Moments cannot be purchased, earned, attained, martyred or bargained for; neither can they be attributed to any particular religion or group. What I do know is that when I came out of the forest that day I understood a lot more about Love than when I went in. I had been turned completely inside out.

And I know my Moments will not be your Moments of God. What God shows me may well have been understood by you for years and have no impact or meaning for you at all; so I have learned to protect my moments. I remember mistakenly sharing my forest experience with someone close to me. I wanted so much for the person to experience this God as well. However, the blank look across their face showed, "Boorrrrr" in a very lit up light bulb kind of way. I have discovered speaking aloud or bringing the experience to the outside diminishes the holiness of that moment of God's time with me but I hope the changes in me from these experiences will be what will help others if need be.

I suspect we all experience Moments of God. However, from birth, we become bombarded with interpretations of life and with what life throws at us; fleeting Moments of God are discarded as inconsequential interruptions to our busy lives. It is no coincidence, I believe, that my first recognition of the 'mystical experience' coincided with the journey process I was undergoing at the time of letting God go - releasing the God of my design to be God.

Considering the wealth and luxury of words we have at our disposal, language becomes so limiting when attempting to explain Moments of God. We have

words to reason the experience as in 'union' or 'visit' and there are words to discuss the experience like 'enlightening' or 'revelation' but to capture the Moment in words, to make clear the impact of His Moment with us is virtually impossible – that language must surely belong to the language of the heavens.

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## DESERT ANIMALS

*Anna Johnstone*

*Jesus, alone except for desert animals, was subjected to Satan's temptations to sin. And afterwards the angels came and cared for him. (Mark 1:13)*

They're a strange lot, these humans. What makes them do it? What makes them think they can move into our territory and survive? Cheek really. Every man to his own place, I say, and his definitely wasn't here. Why, it was hard enough for us to live in this stark landscape, this huge desert earth, and we'd been born here.

We knew the secrets of the rocks. The ones which gave the hint of moisture to our parchedness. The ones we could lie under when the sky fire blazed and would have burnt us. We knew the crevices, tiny openings which admitted our slim shapes, leading us to shelter when the harsh winds screamed. And when the night light shone in coldness, we could crowd together, offering warmth and comfort. But not him. He had no-one, at least, no-one you'd want to get close to.

He'd come alone, bringing nothing with him. Passing through, we thought, as we watched from hidden places. He won't last. And we gave him just so long. But he stayed. And stayed. And stayed.

He surprised us, unlike any traveller we'd seen. He was in no hurry, seemed so calm. What can he be living on, we wondered.

We kept our distance, wary lest we should be on his menu, but as we saw he made no attempt to even look for food, we dared to come closer.

Eventually, we lost all fear of him, strangely sure we were absolutely safe. We played round him, but vanished as soon as the dark one drew close. We never saw him coming. He'd just suddenly be there, and we shivered, though the sky fire burnt brightly.

Conversations about bread and stones were strange to our hidden listening. The youngsters thought this was funny, but we older ones sensed it was definitely nothing to be laughed at. We were on the side of our new neighbour as he refused to even entertain the notion, though we knew he must be hungry.

Why did the dark one keep on and on, talking incessantly about jumping from high buildings and being saved by angels? Or bowing down and being rewarded with all the kingdoms of the world?

The calm one gave straight answers, talking often about God, and what God said about things. He was immovable, and we secretly cheered as he turned down offer after offer. We were always glad when the dark one vanished. We knew immediately when he'd gone, taking the heaviness with him.

We always rushed to our friend, and he seemed glad of our closeness, his outstretched hands ready to stroke, his voice soft as he repeated his answers, of how knowing and loving God was the only real thing in life. Longing was in his voice, and we sensed his pain and pressed nearer to him, trying to ease his loneliness.

Many long days, many long nights passed. The dark one urged him, pushed him, voice sometimes cajoling, often harshly threatening. But he could do nothing. His words were worthless promises, empty

threats and at last, knowing defeat, he left.

Without any warning, the place was full of beautiful light, and we saw our man caught up in it. Love was all round him as amazing creatures cared for him. We watched, instinctively knowing he would soon leave us.

We miss him now. Somehow this home of ours just doesn't feel the same.

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## **"YOU CAN HAVE MY ROOM!"**

### *Author and source unknown*

Whenever Christmas plays are talked about in a certain little town, someone is sure to mention the name of Wallace Purling...

Wally's performance in one annual production of the Nativity has almost become a legend. But the old-timers who were in the audience that night never tire of recalling exactly what happened.

Wally was nine that year and in Standard One- though he should have been in Standard Two. He was big and clumsy, slow in movement and mind, and had difficulty keeping up. Still, uncoordinated Wally was well liked by the other kids in his class, all of whom were smaller than he was.

Wally fancied the idea of being a shepherd with a flute in the Christmas play that year, but his teacher, Miss Lumbard, gave him a much more important role. After all, she figured, the Innkeeper didn't have too many lines - and Wally's size would make his refusal of a room to Joseph more forceful.

And so it was that the usual large audience gathered for the town's Christmas extravaganza of staves, cradles, beards,

crowns, haloes and a whole stageful of squeaky voices. No one on stage or off was more caught up in the magic of the night than Wallace Purling. He stood in the wings and watched the performance with such fascination that Miss Lumbard had to make sure he didn't wander on stage before his cue.

The time came when Joseph made his appearance, slowly and tenderly guiding Mary to the Inn. Joseph knocked hard on the wooden door set into the painted backdrop. Wally the Innkeeper was there, waiting.

"What do you want?" asked Wally energetically swinging the door open. "We're looking for somewhere to stay." "Well, look elsewhere." Wally stared straight ahead, and spoke up well. "The Inn is full." "Sir, we've asked everywhere and found nothing. We've come a long way and are very weary." "There's no room at this Inn for you." Wally looked properly stern. "Please, good Innkeeper. This is my wife, Mary. She's about to have a baby, and needs a place to rest. Surely you must have a small corner for her. She's so tired."

For the first time the Innkeeper relaxed his stiff pose and looked down at Mary. There followed a long pause, long enough to make the audience a bit tense with embarrassment. "No, go away," a prompter whispered from the wings. "No, go away!" Wally repeated automatically. "Go away!"

Joseph sadly placed his arm around Mary. She laid her head on his shoulder and the two of them started to move away. The Innkeeper didn't go back inside his Inn however. Wally just stood there in the doorway, watching the disappointed couple. His mouth was open, his brow creased with concern, his eyes filling unmistakably with tears.

“Don’t go Joseph,” Wally called out. “Bring Mary back.” And Wallace Purling’s face grew into a bright smile. “You can have MY room!”

Some people in town thought the play had been ruined. Yet there were others – many others – who agreed it was the most Christmas of all Christmas plays they’d ever seen.

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## GUTTED INTERIOR

*Hannah Rowan*

A woman sits in the gutted interior of an old house. Is it going to be restored, recreated, reconstructed? She picks up handfuls of ash and lets it run through her fingers.

The house may have been condemned. It has red tape around its exterior that says DANGER, KEEP OUT! Perhaps the rest of the house is going to be knocked over and the whole thing rebuilt. What happens to the foundations then? They are no good if the new house is a different shape.

It can be dark and gloomy in the old house. But if you shine a torch around, slowly, carefully, you may see a glint of precious metal. Maybe as many as three or four glimmers if you are focused and intentional.

These nuggets are grubby, they’ve been in the ash and debris for a few years now. These nuggets have occasionally come close to the surface in more recent times, but the movement of debris has covered them over again.

Had she been in the old house last week, the woman could have been hurt and potentially scarred by the heavy hailstorm.

Today however, it is different. A ray of sunlight is coming in through a dusty,

small, high window frame. A golden shimmer catches the woman’s eye. She gets up slowly. Cautiously, gently, lovingly she searches. She kneels back in the ash and scoops up her find.

The woman marvels at the precious nugget – its colour, shape, depth. And she remembers.

Despair, hope, relief. Getting it right *and* making mistakes.

The woman gently holds the piece and stands up. She pockets her treasure and resumes her search.

In a far corner she uncovers another small nugget. This one is a gift she was given some time ago. It is a jewellery box. The kind that plays music when you wind it up, and a ballerina dances inside. The lid is rusted and difficult to open. But with a tug the lid gives way and the music softly plays. The ballerina wobbles, but manages a few gentle turns.

The woman smiles as she carefully places the music box on the windowsill in the sunlight. Then she turns and continues searching.

It is dusty and dirty and the woman’s hands and face are almost black before she sees the silver sticking out of the dirt. She gasps as she picks it up. Her pen! The one with her name engraved on it, given to her by a close friend more than 20 years ago. It is a Parker, and though it hasn’t been used for ages, a refill will make it good for writing again.

The woman stands, dusts off her hands, and begins to sweep. She is enthusiastic and her sweeping becomes quite vigorous. The woman makes sure to include the architraves and the high corners where cobwebs can collect. She sweeps the ash and debris into large piles.

Using a brush and shovel the woman carefully picks up each pile of dirt and puts

it into a black rubbish bag. She tries to avoid getting her hands dirty again. When the job is done the woman gently but firmly ties up the bag, not wanting any soot to escape. She takes the bag and deposits it in the green wheelie bin outside.

Her job is done here for now.

In time, the woman hopes that those with an understanding of the house's history will work with her, to renovate her beloved house. But for now, she is content to reacquaint herself with her treasures, and simply, to wait.

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## **THE STORY OF LITTLE BIRD**

### **God speaks through Story and Art**

*Val Roberts*

Some years ago I wrote a story about a little bird in a cage who really wanted to be free to fly in the blue sky, and how a big bird had often come by her cage inviting her to fly with him. A struggle ensued for the little bird who took some time to realise that the cage door had been open all along. She would perch on the edge of the open door and look out longingly watching the big bird fly freely but it took her a very long time to have the courage to leave the safety of the cage, spread her wings and attempt to fly a short distance before tiring and returning to her cage. The big bird encouraged her to go further each time and promised that one day she wouldn't need to return to the cage. The little bird was me and the big bird was God inviting me to let go of some things in my life and to step out of my comfort zone.

At the time of writing the story I met an artist who was finding that God was directing her painting in amazing ways,

and that her work often seemed to have a message for others. I went to visit her and she showed me a painting that she was working on. It was the sea with two birds, a large male bird and a smaller female bird. It was the first time she had painted the sea and she had no idea what it might mean. Immediately I saw that it was my story! Some time later after the painting was finished she felt to give it to me as a gift. In the finished picture the distant hills and sky seemed to me to represent Heaven. The stormy waves spoke to me of the storms of life and the position of the birds was like a promise from God that He would ride the waves with me as I flew with Him. The koru were symbolic to me of the fact that I have made New Zealand my home after leaving Africa 20 years ago, and that we fostered two Maori girls.

Since then Jan has painted more pictures that have been inspired by the Holy Spirit and some have been for particular people with a message from God that only the person could interpret. Sometimes interpretations for pictures have come later from other sources. God can and does speak powerfully through art and story.

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## **MEDITATION STORIES**

*Vincent Maire*

The New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation website is using stories to introduce people to this form of contemplative prayer. On the page 'Why I Meditate' 19 people from around the country describe how they came to the tradition and why it is such an important part of their lives.

Common themes include the wilderness experience; seeking – sometimes for years; discovering meditation at a time of personal

crisis; the failure of more traditional forms of prayer to fulfil a deep yearning to enter into a relationship with God.

Common too are the feelings of joy, and even relief, at discovering meditation in the Christian tradition. 'Being' instead of 'doing', the joy of stillness and silence, the excitement of experiencing a relationship that is profound and often beyond words, and the importance of the weekly meditation group.

The website - [www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz](http://www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz) - is an ideal place to find out more about the Community and how to link with the more than 60 groups around the country.

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## **"I AM WHO I AM"** **A story of a retreat**

*Andrew Dunn*

'John' came to the Teschemakers retreat (mid 1980s) to make a final decision regarding faith or non-faith. In the team discernment of who should guide whom he was given to me. His scientific training and interest created a tension within and as we met for the first spiritual direction session he told me he had come to make one final attempt to see if there was a God. If not, he was leaving ministry and Christianity. As a pastor, a great deal was at stake.

In the first session we talked about how to proceed. He couldn't use words like God, Christ, Lord, resurrection, atonement and so on. Scripture was a dead book. All he could affirm was that something was behind creation and the universe. On an early seven day retreat team I felt I couldn't work in the language of a-theism, so I suggested a starting point might be the Exodus 3 story of Moses and

the burning bush and the idea that God was *I Am*, from the Hebrew word "to be". John felt comfortable with that and so we began. This proved to be fruitful common ground for both of us.

As each day of the retreat and the silence unfolded John spent time reading, meditating, and talking with me alongside the daily Communion, walks to the beach and writing his journal. Part-way through the retreat we began to explore what Jesus might have meant by associating himself with "I Am" in his saying in John's Gospel; for example. "I am the bread of life", "I am the way, the truth and the life", "Before Abraham was, I am."

Walks around the stark autumnal North Otago landscape on the sunny frosty mornings played a part in helping John to get in touch again with himself and the faith he had lost. And so the retreat moved on towards its concluding day.

After an early breakfast on the final morning the team gathered upstairs to pray and prepare for the closing service later in the morning. There was a hurried knock on the door and a voice calling, "Andrew come quickly. John is in trouble." As we ran down to the dining room I was told a little of what happened. An elderly sister had found John in the passage way trying to get to the dining room. He had gone blind and couldn't see. She took him by the arm and led him downstairs to the dining room where he collapsed across a table. When I arrived he was sobbing, "I'm blind, I can't see", and was obviously having difficulty breathing as well. "I'm dying, I'm dying" he sobbed.

I had never seen anything like it, but I had the sense to recognise that this was a crisis of some kind and to speak calmly with him and hold him while he lay across the table sobbing. Then an amazing thing happened.



**The story of the little bird**

Artist: Jan Abraham. See page 51

Ambrose, the retired Dominican priest who lived in the cottage named *Tranquillity*, came in for breakfast. He gathered up his cereals, toast and tea and as he walked past he noticed John lying there and stopped. He knew nothing of John's retreat and its content. He put down his food, placed a hand on John's shoulder and began to repeat out loud the "I am" sayings of Jesus! Calmly and authoritatively he recited each of them and then took his food and went to his table to eat.

Immediately John said, "I see a light. I see a light!" and this ball of light, as he described it later, came down the long dining room and touched him on his fingers as he lay there flooding him with light and warmth in that freezing cold room.

His sight began to recover, slowly, and his breathing settled down into a more normal rhythm. I began to sense that *I Am* was working something deep in this man – and not a little relief in me! This holy ground was scary.

Not knowing what to do next I thought I had to get John on his feet and walking again, and out in the sun to warm up and get some space to work with what was being embedded in him. It gave me something to do, too, so that my fear wasn't so overwhelming. So I hoisted him on to his feet, put his arm over my shoulders and we walked out into the sunshine and slowly made our way around the garden.

The team suggested he not come to the closing service but take time to work with what was happening. We decided to go for a walk down towards the beach. With jackets and hats to keep us warm and some chocolate in my pocket for a snack, we set off down the driveway and out on to the road, down across the bridge,

past the hayshed and up on to the long straight road through the farmland. And we talked about what was happening and what it might mean.

Ahead of us a farmer lit his paddock of stubble after harvest. The smoke rose in a column straight up in the calm air and, when it hit a layer of colder air, it spread out in a cruciform shape. "Look at that," cried John, "It's a cross!" And it was. And just for us, and especially for John on his road of discovery and meeting *I Am* for himself. Then he said, "Now I know his name. His name is Jesus!"

That's when I remembered the chocolate. I took it out, suggested we use it for our Eucharist, blessed it and gave thanks, broke it and shared it: "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this to remember me". For us both it was one of the most profound communions we had ever experienced.

For John it was a new conversion. He had met the Lord. *I Am* became personal to him and a new relationship began. He went home, accepted an invitation to a new church where he had five very fruitful years before retiring.

For me - well I took a long time to recover. Thankfully, I was staying an extra day at the retreat centre and a wise director friend was able to help me understand the depth at which God will work with people on retreat! It was many months before I could accept another invitation to join a team – *I Am* that close and personal was something else indeed, and seldom mentioned in books or training! And long-term the experience has sensitised me to what our work is all about and what to expect and seek to recognise. I've found that a contemplative attitude, heart and listening ability is God's gift for doing this discerning work well.



# MY SISTER

*Anna Johnstone*

She was my sister. Well, best friend, really, but so close, we could have been sisters. I'd always admired her, wanted to be like her. She was so unselfish, so giving, so loving. She'd been there for me, been heart-strength, heart-comfort when my dear man died.

Always ready to listen, always ready to help. Ears, hands, heart dedicated to the Master. Willing and glad to do all she could to help anyone, especially the poor.

Her skill with the needle meant she was quite famous, many of us thankful and proud to wear the beautiful garments she made.

She'd been well, then suddenly a fever sent her to bed, and she got steadily worse, weaker. We did all we could. Prepared the most tasty, nourishing meals to tempt her appetite, but she couldn't eat, couldn't raise the energy to swallow the smallest mouthful.

We prayed, oh, we prayed. Oh Master Jesus, save this dear one who's lived her life to bless others. Give her more time with us. Please spare her and us.

Day and night we sat by her, watched as her strength slipped away, till she was gone.

We wept, heart broken. We wept, hating to believe she'd be no longer a shining light in our group, in our town, in our small world.

Those of us closest to her washed her still body gently, reverently, our tears falling into the warm water we used, then dressed her in one of her own soft garments.

We'd heard that Peter, a disciple of our Master, was visiting nearby, in Joppa. Heard stories of healings he'd done in Jesus' name. Of a cripple now dancing, of those touched even by his shadow being made whole and well.

If only he could have been here while she was still with us, maybe he could have helped her. We wept even more, at the lost opportunity. But some thought it was worth asking him to come, though it seemed a waste of time, a foolish notion.

When Peter arrived we showed him some of the beautiful clothes she'd made, told him of her beautiful spirit, wept our grief at losing her.

He asked us to leave her bedside and we realised he wanted to be alone to express his own grief, to mourn the loss of one who'd lived to show the love of God.

She told us later of a voice, gentle yet strong, encouraging, commanding, calling her name from far away. As if waking slowly from a long dream, she heard it, opened her eyes and met eyes which shone with warmth and welcome.

She took the hand he offered her and stood.

Peter called us to come in, and surprised at the short time he'd grieved, we entered.

She stood beside him, our Tabitha. Stood by his side, alive, whole, her smile reflecting the amazement and joy on our faces. We cried out praises to God for this miracle, as we reached out to draw her into our arms of love.



EZEKIEL 37

**God's Spirit took me up and sat me down in the middle of an open plain strewn with bones. He led me around among them - a lot of bones. ... And God said, "Watch this: I am bringing the breath of life to you and you will come to life."**

Ezekiel 37. *The Message*. Navpress 2002.

# THE ROCK OR THE VIEW?

## A reflection on metaphorical imagery in prayer

*Kathy Hughes*

A few years ago I took part in a group imagery prayer where we imagined ourselves as a seed sown in the ground, sprouting and growing into a tree. My imagination had me emerging halfway up a scree slope, like those in Arthurs Pass, having to grow around a huge rock that sat above the roots of the alpine shrub I had grown into. My trunk had grown with a rather large kink. At this point the directive came - 'God will appear - notice in what form he appears and what he does'. To my surprise a giant turned up - a big, friendly giant like Roald Dahl's BFG. This BFG had a giant crowbar and made short work of levering the huge rock off my distorted trunk. The BFG and I watched, fascinated, as this rock bounced and crashed off down the scree. I felt much free-er.

This free-wheeling imagery came to mind recently while I attempted to sit with my fence-fretting tactics and the type of challenging, debating, questioning interactions I seem stimulated to engage in. My focus on rules that seem to me unnecessary, pedantic, overly complex or missing the essence of a point (ah... that feels better), seems like running down the scree slope to look at the rock and missing the big picture now in view. I concede that scree running is exhilarating (and not without risk) but focusing on the rock at the bottom of the slope is beginning to lose my fascination.

Rock - or deficit - focusing is such a common human endeavor, one of which I am becoming more and more aware is ever-present in my own thinking, affect

and style of interaction with myself and others. Whatever the event, my first pattern recognition function is judgment - good or bad? While a different way of looking, with the flavour of simply noticing and accepting what is, the way it is, without judgment of good or bad, begins to emerge with slower speed to eventually overlay the swift first impression with more kindness and compassion - for events I do not like - or with delight, enjoyment and satiation - for events I like. This process is like a slow and steady dawn rising. And with the dawn another rock rolls off down the slope.

With all this rock fall it seems as if I lose one rock only to replace it with another and another while the BFG patiently levers them away. There is a change occurring. I notice I'm recognising the deficit labels more quickly as time goes on and letting them go with gradually more ease - aided by perceptive commentators further along this journey. Incrementally my distorted perception, like my bent alpine shrub, is changing shape. My familiarity with bentness entices me to replace removed rocks with another so I can feel the familiar weight. All this while the BFG never once uses labels for my behaviour. He just happily stands by levering the self-placed rocks off me as I slowly straighten up.

I look forward to the day rocks can no longer balance on me because I am straight! Or more to the point - I leave them on the scree and enjoy the view. That may also be the day when the BFG and I find ourselves looking at each other silently saying in unison:

'I am that I am'.

In the meantime I glimpse eternity's wide open space through facing mirrors, watching myself in this slowing dance of rocks, crowbar and scree.

## BOOKS REVIEWS

### WE LIVE INSIDE THE STORY

McKeena, Megan.

Veritas, Dublin: 2009, 231pages.

*Reviewed by Andrew Pritchard*

Megan McKenna is a story-teller ... and author, theologian, spiritual director, retreat leader ... Her presentation at the Spiritual Director's International Conference in Dublin in October 2009 was one that particularly stood out for me.

In *We Live Inside a Story*, McKenna uses stories from many sources and cultures to reveal and reinforce deep personal and theological truths in ways that motivate and influence. Megan uses the image of nesting Russian Matryoshka dolls, to suggest that our own unique personal story -- the smallest doll -- is held within stories of family, community, nation ... working out through stories of theological import within our faith tradition, finally to the story of God who holds all in all. The closing paragraph of the introduction sets the scene *'There is only one story - how are you telling it? There is only one story - do you know where in the story you are? There is only one story - are you good at telling it? There is only one story and it is coming true. We live inside the story. We live inside God, the story is unfolding and what a story it is!'*

The first chapter 'Storytelling and Spirituality' is followed by nine chapters/ dolls:

Trinity; Creation Stories; Incarnation; The Paschal Mystery; The Spirit in the World; The Church in the World; The Spirit in Our Worlds; Small Communities, Friends and Family; Me, I, One Person Alone.

Each chapter ends with the invitation to go slow and reflect through Questions/ Activities/ Prayers. Each chapter includes traditional stories, from a variety of ages and cultures, as well as McKenna's own insights and wisdom.

Two phrases Megan used at the conference (and in the book) continue to reverberate for me: *'All stories are true and some of them actually happened'* and *'When I say "Once upon a time" ... it is happening to you.'* Something of the power of McKenna's communication in person and in text is contained in these sayings.

The listener/reader of story has an essential part to play, *'There are only two basic reactions to a story that is told and heard. The first is: I love that story. It is great! That is the way the world is. That is the way I want to live. That is my idea of living and of God! That is great news. That is the way the world is supposed to be. I want to tell that story, live that story and I love you and will follow you anywhere. ... The other reaction is just as stark and clear: I don't like that story. I don't even know why I don't like that story. I don't like what it says - about God, about you, about people, about me, about life. I don't like you either and I'm going to make sure that story doesn't come true.'* So, be warned, as you read, expect to be moved and challenged!

*We Live Inside a Story* is primarily a book to read and savour rather than to study. However, end notes to each chapter provide additional information and give full references to sources used and there is Bibliography structured according to the chapter that the books relate to.

*'May we all come true! The story begins when the teller stops talking.'*

# KITCHEN TABLE WISDOM

Stories That Heal

By Dr Rachel Naomi Remen

Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Limited  
1996. pp336

*Reviewed by Ron Larsen*

This American Jewish doctor has been writing for years, but I didn't know her name until I came across this paperback while cleaning up a church office. The volume was in mint condition, the flyleaf bore no signature, and no one knew where it had come from. I looked at two or three of the short chapters, was captivated, carried the book home, and have since read it through twice, making many underlinings in red.

Naomi Remen's parents were Socialists with little time for spiritual matters - "they rewarded me for having the right answers" - whereas her grandfather was a godly and spiritual rabbi who rewarded her for having the right questions. She herself, handicapped with poor health (Krohn's Disease), nevertheless had a distinguished earlier career as a doctor and then later as a lecturer at Stamford School of Medicine. But a long acquaintance with people facing imminent death through cancer or other illness taught her that medical school had given her only half of the story. True healing involved immeasurables which were not amenable to the clinical and objective stance so valued by her peer group.

Indeed, her theme in *Kitchen Table Wisdom* is the authority, power and healing potential of the story in each of our lives. She writes: "Despite the awesome powers of technology, many of us still do not live very well. We may need to listen to

each other's stories once again." And her stories are wide-ranging: a child's memory of beautiful birds on a deserted beach, a fashionable woman stumbling home through the ruins of an earthquake, a tormented woman's dream of a single, perfect rosebud at the very centre of interminable darkness.

Mention of God occurs sparingly, and almost incidentally most times, though imagery is drawn from Buddhist, Hindu, and Sufi sources as well as Judaic and Christian. Yet I had the feeling that if anyone wanted to write a book about God while avoiding the "religious" label, this book would be it. As Dr Remen comments in her preface, "Hidden in all stories is the One story. The more we listen, the clearer that Story becomes." I wondered if she was not intentionally leading her readers to the brink again and again as if to say: Observe this, and this, and that; now take the next step if you can; go on and meet the Lord!

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## EPIC: The Story God is telling and the role that is yours to play.

By John Eldredge

Nelson, USA, 2004.

*Reviewed by Joanne Garton*

"What if all the great stories that have ever moved you... were telling you something about the *true* Story into which you were born, the Epic into which you have been cast?" asks John Eldredge.

I love a good story, and Eldredge is a skillful story-teller. In this small book (less than A5 size and 104 pages) Eldredge uses *non-religious* language to take a fresh look at the Greatest Tale every told - God's

Story. Act One opens with the discovery that we are already part of the Story and the Author is utterly good and very relational. Betrayal and evil appear in Act Two as the Villain enters. In Act Three, the hero lays down his life for his beloved as "God takes on human flesh and enters our Story as one of us." Finally, in Act Four, we do really live "happily ever after" as Eldredge lifts the curtain on the "restoration of life as it was meant to be."

Scattered throughout this delightful book is a veritable feast of quotes as Eldredge draws wisdom from many writers; such as CS Lewis, George McDonald, Tolkien, Kierkegaard, Frederick Buechner, Yancey, Gerald May, Milton and Yeats. He throws in snippets from movies - *Narnia*, *Titanic*, *Braveheart* and *The Lord of the Rings*, to name a few. Best of all, scriptural passages sparkle through *Epic* as we read about the "Story woven into the fabric of our being."

I also highly recommend his *The Journey of Desire* (Nelson, USA 2000). In this longer and deeper book, Eldredge uncovers our longings, God's invitations, and tells the intriguing tale of a thirsty sea lion far from home - another great book to deepen awareness of self and God.

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## THE DANCE OF LIFE

**Spiritual Direction with Henri Nouwen**

**Edited by Michael Ford**

***Reviewed by Max Edwards***

It is likely most readers of "Refresh" will have had already some exposure to Henri Nouwen, not least because of his recurring focus on solitude, silence and learning to listen to God's voice. As one who has found much blessing, encouragement and challenge in Nouwen's writings, I was excited to come across this thoughtfully

conceived anthology of thematically arranged extracts from his works.

Henri Nouwen was a Dutch Catholic priest and academic who lived the latter part of his life as a pastor to people with an intellectual disability in a L'Arche community in Toronto, Canada. Reading his work, one cannot help but be struck by the honesty, depth and integrity of his personal journey, which at one point led him through the darkness of an emotional breakdown.

In his introductory chapter the editor, religious writer, BBC broadcaster and Nouwen enthusiast, Michael Ford, summarises his aims:

"This compilation of Nouwen's writings is intended to guide you through a range of emotional and spiritual issues which might come your way. . . . . There are readings to support you as you embark on or renew your spiritual journey, words to inspire you through darkness, loneliness and inner turmoil, reflections to guide you through periods of difficulty or disorientation, and meditations to help you reintegrate your life and journey towards death, remembering all the while that we always experience the eternal now. Always keep in mind too that spiritual journeys cannot be prescribed. We are all individuals and have to go at our own pace".

By way of providing a taste of Nouwen's style for those unfamiliar with him, this from *Turn My Mourning into Dancing*, quoted under the heading 'The Grace of Grief' (p. 118):

"For in our suffering, not apart from it, Jesus enters our sadness, takes us by the hand, pulls us gently up to stand, and invites us to dance. ... And as we dance, we realise that we don't have to stay on the little spot of our grief, but can step

beyond it. ... We pull others along with us and invite them into the larger dance. We learn to make room for others – and the Gracious Other in our midst. And when we become present to God and God’s people, we find our lives richer. We come to know all the world is our dance floor. Our step grows lighter because God has called out others to dance as well.”

For those who enjoy this book and develop an appetite to journey further with Henri Nouwen, there is plenty from which to choose. To my mind a good insight into the range and depth of his writing might be gained through *The Way of the Heart*, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, *The Inner Voice of Love*, and *The Genesee Diary*. Your friends will no doubt have other suggestions!

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## THE PSALM WALK

*Anna Johnstone*

Published as an e-Book of 80 reflections and images and available through Epworth Bookroom’s or Pleroma Book’s websites: [www.epworthbooks.org.nz](http://www.epworthbooks.org.nz) or [www.christiansupplies.co.nz](http://www.christiansupplies.co.nz) \$25.

*Reviewed by Warren Deason*

Those of you who have copies of Anna’s three previous books, *The God Walk*, *The Cross Walk*, and *The Freedom Walk*, will immediately notice that this book is published only in digital format as an E-book. But don’t let this new venture into the world of IT publishing put you off. The quality of the content and format is undiminished. In fact I think the quality of the images and presentation have been raised a considerable number of notches; there are some absolutely stunning visuals! As before they offer a wonderful complement to the written reflections. In fact they could stand alone as a focus for meditation.

This time around Anna offers her reflections upon, and conversations with, a selection of psalms. The Psalms have always been at the heart of both Jewish and Christian community prayer. Walter Brueggemann sees them as the voice of our common humanity, speaking about life as it really is, our “solidarity in this anguished, joyous, human pilgrimage.”

Because the psalms are the thoughts and emotions of everyman and woman, Anna is able to contemporise their emotional content in the midst of her own life, even in the seemingly mundane: whether it be her son’s graphic art business, a breakdown on the Auckland harbour bridge, James Bond’s remarkable escapes and escapades, or the annual chore of the tax return!

Indeed that’s how it should be, because if God cannot engage us in the midst of the so-called ordinary, where will he engage us?

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## THIN PLACES – A MEMOIR

Mary De Muth. Zondervan. pp 219.

*Reviewed by Audrey Burt*

I found this book a deeply moving, soul-stirring story. Mary, as a 42 year old mother of three children, goes back into her own childhood and drags out painful stories that have shaped the person she has become. In her transparent honesty she looks back and sees the hand of God in those painful times.

Why does she entitle the book *Thin Places*? It is defined by Celts as a place where heaven and the physical world meet, a thin membrane between the two worlds. “Thin places are snatches of holy ground, tucked into the corners of the world,

where we might just catch a glimpse of eternity. They are the “Aha” moments, beautiful realisations, when the Son of God bursts through the hazy fog of our monotony and shines on us afresh.”

Mary relives those stories from the perspective of a wife and mother. A whole series of issues are uncovered which she has to work through. God meets her through various events and insights which become the thin places illuminating her situation with heavenly light. Her stories touch me deeply. I found she opened my heart to understand and re-connect me with some of my own stories.

This book is not just an autobiography of a woman who has battled through a painful childhood. With almost ruthless honesty she exposes her battles to meet one by one areas of darkness and deficiency in her life. In so doing she forces the reader to confront issues in their own lives that may have lain dormant for many years.

It is a book to help and encourage those who journey, by someone who has, herself, travelled a hard up-hill road – a journey that is still continuing. It needs to be read more than once.

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## **REACHING OUT IN A NETWORKED WORLD**

**Expressing Your Congregation’s Heart and Soul**

**Lynne M. Baab. The Alban Institute. 2008. pp190**

*Reviewed by Digby Wilkinson*

The title is quite deceptive. Perhaps that was the cunning ploy of the author; after all, “Reaching Out” and “Networking” mean very different things to different people. In this case Lynne Baab is dealing

specifically with communicating the message of church through internet technology.

I’m not sure to whom this book is written. Anyone with a good working knowledge of computers, the internet, blogs, email, online social networks and web development will read the index and see it as somewhat underwhelming. Conversely, those who describe themselves as “analogue” in a digital age will find it overwhelming. So is it worth reading? Yes, but not alone.

From the telegraph to the information superhighway we are all aware that methods of communicating and networking are constantly changing. Lynne Baab reminds us that communication development is merely the end result of our ongoing need to commune. In the same way and throughout history, any organisation with a message they believe needs to be heard, has used every means available to get that message across. The church is no different. The real issue we face is that global methods of connecting have become local methods. What used to be the domain of big enterprise is now part of common life. But how do we keep up or catch up?

Unfortunately the book doesn’t answer those questions. What it does is provide a positive perspective on our current environment with chapter-by-chapter helps on a congregation’s best use of email, blogs, desktop publishing (tips to avoid tackiness), and websites in order to be seen and understood. Each chapter has good questions for reflection and the appendices offer some simple plans to get a congregation thinking. I’d recommend it for church leadership groups wanting find their way in the digital era.



## FILM REVIEW

### BOY – a film by Taika Waititi

*Reviewed by Warren Deason*

A bittersweet coming of age story set in the 1980s, beautifully realised, that will have you both smiling, especially in the early scenes, and shedding some tears.

Drawing from his own childhood experiences of life on the remote East Coast of the North Island, director and writer Taika Waititi, who also stars, tells the story of Boy, an 11 year old, cherishing romantic notions of an absent father who is, in his mind, a combination of Michael Jackson and Rambo. The sad reality, however, is that his father, Alamein, named by a father who called all his sons after Maori Battalion battle sites, is less mature than his own sons. When he suddenly re-enters Boy's life after serving a jail term for robbery, the excitement

of having a father back eventually turns to disillusionment as he discovers his own father's very flawed and infantile humanity.

James Rolleston and Te Aho Aho Ekeone-Whitu as the two young leads, Boy and Rocky, are wonderfully cast – six-year-old Rocky rarely speaks, but he doesn't have to to connect you to his deep sadness and guilt at feeling he is the cause of his mother's premature death in childbirth.

Taika Waititi's natural comic abilities, he and Jermaine Clement (*Flight of the Concorde*) once were members of the same comedy troupe, are evident in his portrayal of Boy's father - in fact he comes close sometimes to a Billy T. James caricature. Oh yes, watch out for the late Billy T. on a TV running in the background in one scene.

One of the best films to come out of NZ in recent years? Absolutely. Don't miss it. It's billed as a comedy in some places, maybe, but only if you recognise the pathos too.

Storytelling has always been a prime vehicle for communicating spirituality. Some of the greatest Jewish teachers were expert storytellers. ... Holy stories are the light of the world. When we understand that, when both tellers and listeners know they are engaged in sacred activity, we will hold stories and storytelling more dear. The teller will tell with the tongue of faith, the listeners will hear with ears of faith, and the circle of holiness will be closed.

Yitzhak Buxbaum. *Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism*.

Jason Aronson Inc. xv

## SGM NEWS

When I wrote the News page for the Summer edition it felt like winter - if I had been writing this a fortnight ago, early in May, I could have said it feels like summer! But not now - the seasons are changing, or have changed.

I'm reminded of the song *The Times They Are a'Changing!* It is with both great gratitude and real sadness that I share the news that after more than ten years Andrew Dunn is taking a well deserved retirement from his role as Editor of Refresh. This edition of Refresh is his last.

Refresh owes its birth and development to Andrew's vision, creativity and hard work. Of course this is far from Andrew and Margaret's only contribution to SGM - between them they have fulfilled almost every role and contributed in every possible way to help make SGM what it is today! I'm sure that as you read this you will be joining me in saying your thank-you to Andrew, and to Margaret, for the work they have done and for the people they continue to be. *Andrew, may the energy you need for other writing projects be yours in abundance and may the time freed up as you don't face editing the future editions be a blessing to you and to Margaret!*

While a season, or perhaps an era, is changing we await the new one with expectation and joy. We will let Refresh lie fallow for a year to give adequate time to find the next editor and for that person and the editorial group to craft the first new edition. We would like to hear from people who feel that they may be that next editor. Details of how to express your interest are on the next page and also on our website [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz)

In March around 80 people from throughout the North Island enjoyed a rich day of reflection with Dr Susan Phillips in Auckland. The workshop combined input and creative reflection on two core biblical metaphors - rootedness and journeying. Audio files of the four sessions are available for downloading at [www.sgm.org.nz](http://www.sgm.org.nz)

Applications for the 2011/12 Spiritual Director Formation Programme have started to come in. Please encourage people you feel may be suitable to apply. Further information is available from Barbara McMillan or from Carole Hunt.

A significant project is underway to provide database and other systems for more efficient administration of the Formation Programme and enhanced updating and delivery of programme materials.

A great range of quiet days, retreats and workshops are taking place around the country. The demand for Weeks of Guided Prayer increase from year to year with requests coming in from new regions and Parishes. Quiet days and retreats focusing on silent meditation - Centering Prayer, Christian Meditation, and other forms also well received.

With deep gratitude for your interest and participation in this ministry,

Blessings

Andrew Pritchard

June 2010

## Expressions of Interest

This year Andrew Dunn, the foundation editor of SGM's Refresh: A Journal of Contemplative Spirituality, completes 10 years as editor. This has been a voluntary position fulfilled with dedication and passion. The Winter 2010 edition will be his last.

After that edition we will let Refresh lie fallow for twelve months.

**Expressions of interest are sought for a new editor for Refresh, with the next edition being the Summer 2011/12 issue to be published in November/December 2011.**

The editor reports to SGM Workgroup and is supported by an editorial group. Ideal attributes of the editor include:

- writing and editing experience
- passion for and experience in Contemplative Christian Spirituality
- able to network across broad theological and denominational streams
- familiar with and supportive of the work and ministry of SGM

We will value a conversation with anyone excited by this opportunity.

Please contact:

The Administrator  
Carole Hunt  
55 Navigation Drive  
Whitby  
Porirua 5024

Phone: 04-2341992  
Email: [sgm@clear.net.nz](mailto:sgm@clear.net.nz)

... with your name and contact details.

### **Timescale Envisaged:**

- April - August 2010 - publicity and calling for expressions of interest
- August 2010 - contacting interested people to confirm/update interest prior to ...
- September 2010 - discussion and discernment at SGM Workgroup Meeting
- Continuing discussion with interested people and Workgroup representative(s) leading to decision.
- March 2011 - new editor meets with Workgroup to consolidate plan for 1st new edition to be published in Nov/Dec 2011.

## BOOKS

Frederick Buechner. *The Sacred Journey*. Harper & Row 1982. pp112. Telling the story of his life.

Yitzhak Buxbaum. *Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism*. Jason Aronson, Inc. NY. 1994. pp255

Ellen Greene. *Storytelling - Art and Technique*. 3rd Edition. R.R. Bowker. Includes a Foreword by Augusta Baker, storyteller par excellence.

Rob Harley. *The Power Of The Story - touching the lives of listeners*. End Results Pub. Ltd. Auckland. 2001. pp169

Kristin Jack Ed. *The Sound of Worlds Colliding*. Stories of radical discipleship from Servants to Asia's Urban Poor. Hawaii Printing House, Phnom Penh. Cambodia. 2009. pp219. Available from Servants Mission, PO Box 60-066, Titirangi, Auckland, 1230. NZ.

Helen McKay & Berice Dudley. *About Storytelling - A Practical Guide*. Hale & Iremonger. Sydney. 1996

Susan S. Phillips. *Candlelight: Illuminating the Art of Spiritual Direction*. A Spiritual Directors International book. 2008. Includes the stories of 9 men and women whose stories illustrate how the journey of Christian discipleship is helped by spiritual direction. US\$26.00

Peter Rollins. *How (Not) to Speak of God*. Paraclete Press 2009. pp152. An emerging church piece of creative theology.

Colin Thompson. Various children's books, good stories and excellent full-page illustrations. Try *The Violin Man*. Hachett Children's Book. Australia. 2003. In local Libraries. [www.colinthompson.com](http://www.colinthompson.com)

Walter Wangerin. *Ragman And Other Cries*

*of Faith*. Harper & Row. 1984. pp149

Macrina Wiederkehr. *Gold in your Memories - sacred moments, glimpses of God*. Ave Maria Press. 1998. pp165.

Macrina Wiederkehr. *Behold Your Life - A 40 day pilgrimage through your memories*. Ave Maria Press. 2000. pp122.

Margery Williams. *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Running Press, Philadelphia. 1981

Douglas Wood. Various children's books of very apt and growthful stories. Try *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth* and *What Grandmas Can't Do*, and *What Grandpas Can't Do*. Various publishers. In local Libraries.

Anthony De Mello. *Awareness*. A spirituality conference in his own words. Ed. J. Francis Stroud. Fount. 1990. pp 184. One of many books of significant De Mello stories.

## FILMS

*Babette's Feast*. A measured, powerful study of life, faith and relationships via the metaphors of food, abstinence and feasting. Based on an Isak Dinensen story.

*The Legend of Bagger Vance* - a great story in its own right but the DVD has an excellent presentation by Robert Redford on metaphor, myth, legend, spirituality and storytelling using film.

*Boy*. A New Zealand film by Taika Waititi. 2010

*The Insatiable Moon*. Scripted and Directed by Mike Riddell. Due out late 2010.

## WEBSITES

There are endless storytelling and storytellers' websites. Follow these names for some New Zealand sites:

New Zealand Storytellers Guild. Joy Cowley. Margaret Mahy. Lynley Dodd and many others.

[www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz](http://www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz) NZ Community of Christian Meditation details and stories.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Jan Abraham is an artist who lives in Palmerston North. She began painting while recuperating from a car accident. Never having painted before, God has been her teacher.

Jo Anastasiadis is a Wellington Spiritual Director who enjoys being outdoors, walking on the beach, retreats, and utilising creativity in her relationship with God.

Dave Baab is a retired dental gum surgeon from Seattle now living in Dunedin. He has drawn all his life and has been working in watercolour for 10 years. He works with international and post graduate students through the Tertiary Students Christian Fellowship at Otago University.

Lynne M. Baab is a Presbyterian minister and lecturer in pastoral theology at the University of Otago and author of numerous books. For her books, articles and details see [www.lynnebaab.com](http://www.lynnebaab.com).

Joyce Budenberg is a Hamilton-based spiritual director, counsellor, wife and mother of three daughters. Joyce also teaches Spiritual Formation at Eastwest College of Intercultural Studies in Hamilton.

Warren Deason is pastor of Albany Presbyterian Church, is a member of the SGM Workgroup and Refresh Editorial Group.

Andrew Dunn lives in the bush at Oasis Retreat Centre, Albany, and enjoys creating bush tracks, places for meditation and telling stories.

Max Edwards is a retired electrical engineer and lives in Wollongong, Australia.

John Franklin has a full time ministry in spiritual direction, professional supervision, coaching, MBTI, workshops and retreats. His web site is [www.lifematters.net.nz](http://www.lifematters.net.nz)

Paul Fromont lives in Cambridge (NZ) but wanders via the spiritual disciplines of blogging: <http://prodigal.typepad.com>

Joanne Garton is a spiritual director who lives and works in South Auckland.

Carol Grant is minister of the Otaki Waikanae Presbyterian parish on the Kapiti Coast, and a spiritual director, professional supervisor, and mentor of those journeying in faith. She enjoys serving in the wider community as Police Chaplain and a JP for New Zealand.

Margaret Gwynn offers circle dancing, Tai Chi and reflective days around a labyrinth in Hawkes Bay. She is also a keen and involved member of the Green Party.

Anne Hadfield has been a teacher, co-director of a church department, local minister at Crossways, Wellington, mother, grandmother and partner and friend. She helped found SGM, has served on the ACS D Executive and works in spiritual direction, supervision and life coaching in *SOULSCAPE*.

Jane Hansen and husband live at the foot of the Kaimais near Wairere Falls, Waikato, where the beauty of the place draws pilgrims from around the world.

Kathy Hughes lives in Christchurch, is a spiritual director, a trainee counsellor and writer.

Anna Johnstone is a writer/photographer who is looking forward to a Pilgrimage this year and to her next book, *The Jesus Walk*. See [www.johnstone2.co.nz](http://www.johnstone2.co.nz) for her books and eBooks.

Ron Larsen is a retired Baptist pastor and a spiritual director living in Avondale, Auckland.

Jan Lee is a counsellor and tutor and she is also working alongside the Waskia people in Papua New Guinea to complete the new Bible in their language.

Vincent Maire is a trustee of the NZ Community for Christian Meditation and also serves as the organisation's webmaster. He lives on the Hibiscus Coast where he works as fundraising manager at the local hospice.

Trish McBride is a Wellington spiritual director, chaplain and counsellor, writer and quilter, and grandmother of 16. She has contributed chapters for two recent Catholic Institute of Theology books, and is passionate about personal stories being heard and acknowledged.

Lesley McCrostie lives in Alexandra, Central Otago, after many years in mission overseas and with Servants to Asia's Urban Poor in Bangkok, Thailand.

Lex McMillan lives with Barbara and two of their four daughters in West Auckland. He works as a senior lecturer in counselling at Laidlaw College and as a relationship therapist.

Jo O'Hara is a Christchurch sculptor who also draws and paints and has been providing artwork for *Refresh* since 2005.

Susan Phillips is a sociologist and spiritual director, and teaches at New College Berkeley, Regent College, Canada, Fuller Theological Seminary and San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Andrew Pritchard, Convenor of SGM and Assistant Coordinator of the S.D. Formation Programme, is self employed in spiritual direction, supervision and adult education. Leisure pursuits include golf, reading and working with wood. Andrew is an associate of Southern Star Abbey, the Cistercian Monastery at Kopua.

Val Roberts lives on the Kapiti Coast and is currently in her second year of the SGM Spiritual Direction Formation Programme. She loves art, writing, crafts and working with people.

Hannah Rowan lives in beautiful Horowhenua and is enjoying being part of the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme.

Barbara Sampson of Christchurch has a pastoral role with Salvation Army officers throughout NZ. She is a spiritual director and enjoys working with words.

Adrienne Thompson lives in Wellington. She is a spiritual director and occasional writer and is connected to Central Baptist Church and to Stillwaters, an inner city Christian Community.

Digby Wilkinson is senior pastor at Central Baptist Church, Palmerston North.

## **Radio New Zealand Story-time**

Every Saturday and Sunday  
between 6.09am and 7.00am  
on the National Programme

**The thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him.**

**Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.'**

**Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'**

**Nathan said to David, "You are the man! ..."**

2 Samuel 11: 27b - 12:7.

NRSV XL Bible. HarperCollins. 2007.

**Jesus told another story.  
“God’s kingdom is like a pine nut that a farmer  
plants. It is quite small as seeds go, but in the  
course of years it grows into a huge pine tree,  
and eagles build nests in it.”**

**Another story. “God’s kingdom is like yeast  
that a woman works into the dough for dozens  
of loaves of barley bread – and waits while the  
dough rises.”**

**All Jesus did that day was tell stories – a long  
storytelling afternoon.**

**His storytelling fulfilled the prophecy:**

**I will open my mouth and tell stories;  
I will bring out into the open  
things hidden since the world’s first day.**

**Mathew 13:31-35. *The Message*. Navpress. 2002**