



Living in the Balance

February 2013

Sarah and Bob and Rex and I met in 2007 as accidental tourists sightseeing in Scotland. But on a rainy afternoon coming back from St. Andrews, Sarah and I had a conversation about our spiritual journeys which would begin our pilgrimage as Celtic *anam cara*—soul friends—to each other.

Sarah had symptoms for months. She received a diagnosis in 2009 for an illness which has no treatment and no cure, just a slow, debilitating decline with a horrific ending.

A year or so after the diagnosis, Sarah and I talked about her dream. “I am sucked through a portal...a well...and land on the ground raising my head and looking around. There is a vast landscape...sort of prairie-like...with a few trees in the distance. I’m a Nebraska girl. I know about prairies. I feel so hopeful in this dream. I believe it is the ground I have been plowing in dealing with my illness.”

Rather than let the disease take her on its terms, Sarah decided to write a different ending for her life.

More than a year ago, Sarah contacted Dignitas in Zurich and completed all the processes they require for assisted death or, as she preferred to call her chosen time of death, “self deliverance.” “Dignitas has been a Godsend,” Sarah said to me, “and the staff there has been so compassionate. The process was stringent, but now that I have met the requirements the timing is up to me. Bob has been a rock. And I am so thankful that my family has supported me in my choice. My only anger is that I have to go to Switzerland to do this. To die with dignity.” Sarah began a path few consider let alone take.

In October 2012 while visiting her and Bob in their Virginia home, Sarah told me she was going to Zurich in April. We talked about her plans for her Celebration of Life service. “I want you to share my spiritual story, but I say ‘Keep it short.’ Those things can go on for--ev--er.” Sarah allotted me five minutes to cover her spiritual journey. I laughed. “I promise I won’t babble or have an altar call,” I said.

A week or so after our October visit, she surprised me with a call, “I need to go sooner, not later. I just know I cannot wait until April. Things are getting much, much harder now for me. I’m going between Thanksgiving and Christmas.” While I completely supported her Dignitas decisions, I was not prepared to hear this. I felt the grief of too soon goodbyes.

In the weeks ahead, I sought solace in writing. In my kitchen. In the woods.

Our once monthly conversations became weekly. I heard her candor. Her concerns. Her ever present humor. Her deeply centered resolve. Her wisdom. Her daring. Her courage. I was witness. Awed.

As Advent arrived, she told me about sharing a wonderful Thanksgiving with her family, putting up her Christmas tree and finishing a collection of family recipes. Then she said, “I’ve been spending more and more time in solitude. I’m getting ready to return to the womb of God through the portal. Just like in the dream.”

Sarah and I knew the day of her death. This knowledge comforted her. I stared at my husband, the faces of my friends, the red night sky, the sliver of new moon, and tried to imagine that these were my last looks. Just the thought cracked me wide open. Sarah embraced this knowing as grace and gift.

With their adult son and daughter accompanying them, Sarah and Bob left for Zurich on the evening of December 11. I watched the flight schedules and the weather. They arrived in a light snow. Two days later I received an email. They had met with the doctor, a pediatrician who works with Dignitas after the experience of his own mother’s death. All was in place. Sarah felt a deep peace.

On December 18, Sarah’s journey came full circle. With her family surrounding her, she self delivered. Her soul slipped through the Holy Portal from which she had come. Returning to the Sacred Source. Released. Quietly. Peacefully. And with dignity.

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Calendar considerations.....

Natural Spirituality Regional Gathering

February 8 –10 (or Saturday only)

Camp Mikell near Toccoa, Georgia

For more information <http://www.naturalspiritualityregionalgathering.com>

Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop

February 8 – 9

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Monroe, NC

Led by The Reverend Tom Ward

<http://www.spechurch.org>

Gathering of Faiths 2013

Sunday, February 17, 1:00 to 5:30 p.m.

Offered by Interfaith Partners of South Carolina

Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, Columbia, SC

www.gatheringoffaiths.com

Engaging Faith – Brene Brown and Yvette Flunder

Offered by Nexus and held at Furman University

Friday evening, February 22 and Saturday, February 23

CEU's available for this event

www.engagingfaith.org

The Psychospiritual Dilemma of our Time

Friday evening, February 22 and Saturday, February 23. CEU's available

Jungian analyst, James Hollis

Jung Society of Atlanta

www.jungatlanta.com

The Heart at Work, The Heart at Home – A Circle of Trust Retreat

February 27 – March 1 at Myrtle Beach

Offered by Dr. Sally Hare and Dr. Cynthia Heelan

http://www.stilllearning.org/EVENTS/Mar-Feb2013_Register_1-5.pdf

The Bowen Conference at Kanuga

“Encore! Getting Rewired for Your Next Act”

Jeri Sedlar and Rick Miners

February 25 – 27, 2013

For more information www.kanuga.org

Mindfulness Classes

Ongoing and underway now in Seneca, SC

Offered by Eunice Lehmacher contact elehmacher@gmail.com

The Sophia Institute in Charleston, South Carolina

The Pilgrim Way: Setting the Direction for a Future Life, March 8 and 9, 2013

Seven Thousand Ways to Listen, May 17, 2013

<http://www.thesophiainstitute.org>





Calendar considerations.....

Southern Dharma Retreats, Hot Springs, North Carolina

Peeling the Proverbial Onion (Zen), March 7 – 10

Eternal Spring: Finding Freshness in Each Moment (Zen), March 22 – 26

In Nature Our True Nature (Buddhism), April 3 – 7

For more information contact Carol Meyer at southerndharma@earthlink.net

Caring for God's Creation

Dr. James Hansen will be featured at the conference via SKYPE.

April 4 – 7, 2013

Lake Junaluska Conference Center

For more information www.lakejunaluska.com/caring

Mountain Top Lectures

Bishop John Spong

May 3 and 4, 2013

Amicalola Falls Lodge, Dawsonville, Georgia

<http://mountaintoplectures.org>

Transforming Trauma: Contemplative Approaches to Spiritual Healing

Friday, April 12, 9:30 – 12:30 p.m.

Led by James Finley at St. Michael Archangel Catholic Church, Cary, NC

Through the Narrow Gate

A silent retreat led by James Finley who will let the mystic teachings from Christianity, Buddhism and other traditions be the guides.

Friday, April 12 at 5:00 p.m. until Sunday, April 14 at noon.

St. Francis Springs Prayer Center, Stoneville, NC.

<http://jamesfinleynorthcarolina.org>

Summer Dream and Spirituality

Offered by the Haden Institute at Kanuga Conference Center, Hendersonville, NC

May 26 – 31, 2013

For more information: <http://www.hadeninstitute.com/summer-dream-conference>

Anderson School of Theology for Laypersons

Rev. Michael Dowd, October 13, 2013

Dr. Walter Brueggemann, February 16, 2014

Dr. John Philip Newell, November 9, 2014

For more information <http://astlonline.org>

Iona Pilgrimage with Jungian analyst Jerry Wright

September 20 through October 1, 2013

For more information contact Jerry at jwright@morrisbb.net





About Spiritual Direction —

- Offers a space and time for you to explore, reflect upon, and deepen your relationship with God.
- Provides a haven from the daily busyness of the outer world and opens a time to be still and to reflect on your inner journey.
- Is a companioning relationship grounded in dialogue and discernment.
- Explores ways you may integrate spirituality into your daily life.
- Is not limited to any one spiritual practice or tradition.
- May involve one or two meetings or multiple meetings over time.

You may wish to consider spiritual companioning if you are —

- Longing for a deeper relationship with the Divine
- Looking for a place to dialogue about spiritual questions
- Seeking ways to connect with the Spirit in a more intentional way
- Discerning ways to live in a more integrated and whole way
- Standing at a crossroads in your life
- Exploring new or fresh ways to be in relationship with God

For more information about Spiritual Direction, please feel free to contact me by phone
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All of the photos in this month's journal are my work. Sarah and Bob with us in Yellowstone. The other photos were taken off old Highway 25 in Northern Greenville County and in Flat Rock, NC.