

The Hidden Girl

The Journey of a Soul

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Introduction

The drawings and the tapestries in the book are not illustrations in the conventional sense. They came unexpectedly, from deep within me, to help me heal. Many came with poems. The text was written much later. It introduces the images, though it is not an explanatory text, but a story which concluded my healing and which I was only able to write two decades later. The narrative text can be read on its own without the images, which can be looked at separately.

I believe that to write a coherent narrative is very necessary, not only for Holocaust survivors, but also for anyone who has suffered trauma. It is a very important but a hugely difficult thing to do. I would like to show with my book that, nevertheless, it is possible.

For this reason, the drawings and tapestries are not interspersed in the narrative. They themselves constituted a process. First came the drawings, then the more consciously shaped tapestries, and only much later the story. This way of depicting and describing the healing process, the journey of the soul, also honours the time line.

It was difficult to decide whether to use a drawing or a tapestry because the drawings were frenzied feelings which needed fast expression. On the other hand the tapestries were slow in the making, they were a conscious working through those feelings with understanding and acceptance. The choice also depended on the context in which an image appeared, because the rawness of the drawings express better the depth of feeling which so unexpectedly surfaced from deep within.

However, all the images, the fifty-two drawings and the nineteen tapestries, appear as appendices at the end of the book.

1

The Operation

I was told one glorious Spring day that there was suspicion of cancer in me of a fast growing and lethal kind. I had to decide whether or not to have the major operation recommended by my consultant.

When I first heard the pronouncement of my medical adviser, I was shocked and shaken to the very roots of my being. I did not believe her. The whole situation resembled a bizarre if not mad dream. When slowly I began to comprehend the horrible reality of this medical statement there was one singular feeling which emerged with no uncertain clarity. An operation for me was unthinkable. I had to persuade the world around me of this indubitable fact and find alternatives for surgery.

I soon found out that the world and I were in fierce opposition. I could not take on board the medical view which warned me with increasing urgency of the risk I was taking. I unwaveringly stood my ground and opposed the operation. But my conviction that I did not have cancer was brushed aside as unworthy of serious attention.

For quite awhile I pitted my intuitive knowing against the medical world's accumulated and sensation-based expertise. It seemed vitally important to listen to my inner voice assuring me that there was no alien body invading my body. On the contrary it was the opposing outer opinion that felt like the invading and deadly force.

My mother's legacy lay heavily on me as well. It was her fateful belief that one goes to hospital once only and then only to die. She fulfilled her dark prophecy when at around my age she went to hospital for the first time and died after an operation for cancer.

I had never been to hospital. The very word ‘operation’ filled me with terror and was unimaginable. The anaesthetic held a particular dread. I, who liked to be in control, knew that this ‘I’ would have to be suspended now, would to all intents and purposes in fact cease to exist and ‘it’ would be placed inert into unknown hands.

I could not submit to this.

But as the days and weeks passed, and disagreeable tests followed, doubts started to slip through the closed doors of my resolve. What if I was wrong after all? Suppose I did have the type of cancer predicted by the tests and scans and biopsies, and that I would die without surgery? I still had tasks to complete essential to the fulfilment of my life. I had not yet made my mark.

I was not ready to die.

The real battle now began in earnest. No longer fought between me and the outer world but within my inner world. And it raged over a dangerously long four months. The object fought over was survival. To have the operation or to go on refusing it. These choices were weighed with obsessional care in my mind’s relentless scales to no avail.

Time became suspended. Nothing moved. The scales remained in balance.

In the outer world time passed regularly and it grew impatient with me. Both medical and family pressure intensified, pressurising me to accept that invasive surgery was the only option. I felt threatened and manipulated. The world viewed me as obdurate and irresponsible.

It was at this point, when the tension between me and the world became untenable, that something unexpected occurred which tipped the balance and unlocked the stalemate.

A myth entered my life rather abruptly with an unceremonious bang through my letterbox.

It was a Jungian sample journal from the USA. The article which caught my attention was called “Uncursing the Dark”. It had a reference in it to the myth

of Innana. I realised that this myth is described in *Descent to the Goddess* by Sylvia Brinton Perera.

In this Sumerian myth, Innana the Goddess of Heaven and Earth descends to the Underworld. There she is confronted by Innana's sister, Ereshkigal, ruler of the Great Below. It is a story of Descent, of Death and Rebirth, the encounter of Light with Dark. Reading it was a revelation and a recognition. I realised that I must, willingly consent to the operation. I had to learn that when Ereshkigal calls no one is exempt. She demanded that I submit to be cut open, that I trust her and her dark realm.

I felt I was at the start of a hero's, or rather a heroine's, journey. It meant that unlike the hero, who has to slay the dragon, I would have to lay myself in its sharp-toothed mouth, endure, and hope to come out shattered, with parts of my body torn away, but to emerge, like Innana, stronger, more complete. This required an active willingness to be open, to receive and to be operated upon.

About the same time that Innana appeared on my doorstep I also had a dream. An old woman appeared and said with gentle authority and great simplicity: "*Have the operation, you will feel better for it.*"

Both the dream and the appearance of the myth, so appropriate to my crisis, had an awesome effect.

I decided to obey the call of Ereshkigal and to follow the advice of the wise old woman. This was now my considered decision, born out of intense inner struggle and of synchronistic events rather than an acquiescence born out of fear and compliance.

I consented to surgery, and had the operation in the Autumn. I did lose vital parts of my body, but I did not die, and was told that I did not have cancer. (The Bed of Pain, see following page.)

It was uncanny, how at one level the operation repeated the wartime trauma of intrusion, terror, loss and grief. In both cases events were life threatening, unreasonable and abrupt. They were incomprehensible, beyond



The Bed of Pain (Drawing no.2)

The Bee

I saw a bee on the pavement,
amongst fallen leaves
and hurried footsteps.
Painfully, the honey-striped body dragged
along the black stone,
like an old memory dropped
callously out of mind.
Tender wings broken, lonesome it crawled
in the dust and the dark.
And my heart ached
as I wondered,
did it remember still,
the buzz and the whirl,
the sweet-smelling hive,
and the glorious flight
in never-ending
Summer-blue skies?

belief and beyond control. In both events the pain and suffering I had to endure were due to no lack or fault of mine. There was nothing so wrong in me then that I needed to be hidden or annihilated and there was nothing as diseased in me now that it needed to be cut out and destroyed although both times the authorities declared it so.

On the third day after the operation I felt very low. A few days later a close friend came to visit. She placed a box of crayons and a wad of paper on my bedside table and proposed that I draw how I felt. That was a strange suggestion. I could not draw. My hands behaved like a three year old's. I could only manage stick figures with large heads and no perspective. That same night however, I woke at 3.30 a.m. and began to draw.

Of all that was to follow in years to come this was perhaps the most significant moment of all. If I had not netted those fleeting thoughts and painful sensations, they would have dropped back into the unconscious and then nothing would have followed. But somehow I did.

It was as if the incision made in my body simultaneously also opened up parts of my psyche which were previously inaccessible to me. It made me realise that body and soul are one, and at the deepest level of the psyche they are indivisible.

Jung said "transformation is not just an airy fantasy but is a process that reaches down into the somatic sphere or even arises from it."

My process of becoming aware of my Holocaust experience began with the operation, through the body, allowing it literally to be cut open.

The images came unbidden at odd times and poured through me uncontrolled by conscious intent or design. They seemed strange and mostly incomprehensible outpourings. At the time of drawing I was unaware that they were unconscious expressions of my Holocaust experiences. I did not realise that the spirit within me was an energy, creating healing images to make order out of chaos. Nevertheless the act of drawing felt immensely healing.



First Steps (Drawing no.1)

It seemed as if my creativity, like bits of my body, were now rolling out of me, bumping along narrow hospital corridors, down the lifts, disappearing into the streets. I felt simultaneously empty, and in that hollow place in my middle, also full with a leaden heaviness. I feared that I would never be whole again. Yet this initial drawing indicated that despite the suffering and loss, the possibility of new beginnings was there as well.