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Dear brave souls ... do not lose heart

Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés | May. 5, 2008 El Rio Debajo del Rio

??In any dark time, there is a tendency to veer toward fainting over how much is wrong or unmended in the world ... in our personal world as well. Do not focus on that. Do not make yourself ill with overwhelm. There is a tendency to fall into being weakened by perseverating on what is outside your reach, by what cannot yet be. Do not focus there. That is spending the wind without raising the sails.

? ... Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach.?

--cpe

Dear Brave Souls: When I began driving a pickup truck, having spent a jillion years with old cars that kept breaking down ... and with most cars whizzing by without looking ... I vowed that I would if I could, stop to help anyone I saw broken down at the side of the road ...

So, I carried small bottles of water, holy cards of the Blessed Mother with a prayer for strength written on the back, a tire iron, jumper cables, a tire inflator, a cell phone, a roll of quarters, some protein bars, some baby food, hand wipes, toilet paper, a minimalist first aid kit, and other oddities.

I?ve found on the road, it?s just like in life, you have to thread your way through all kinds of obstacles in order to act, create, help. Not all circumstances allow straight passage. Sometimes reach is not broad enough to solve everything all at once. Sometimes equipment needed is not on board. Sometimes those broken down, didn?t want help, or there was a language barrier. But many times the wind flows through and around, the wind finds its way through.

Chinook Winds of the Holy Spirit

This week was like that. No straight passages. Everything detours. Chinook winds are starting to come down out of the Rockies, winds so strong they can blow people over. This week I was driving on an eight-lane divided highway in those winds, butt to belly with other cars during rush hour.

I?d just been to the grocery store; a little bag of frozen food, some fresh cantaloupe, some coffee was wobbling along in the shotgun seat beside me.

Suddenly I saw flashing red and blue lights. I saw two highly unusual women standing in the median; their dresses and mantles flying in the wind. The younger one was rushing toward the officer?s car, a look of utter dismay on her face. As the policeman rose up out of his cruiser, I saw the young woman do something not often done ... she tried to take both his hands in hers; the look on her face was as one crucified.

I saw that he pushed her hands away and stood behind the open squad car door, so she could no longer reach him.

Traffic was moving; cars behind me were honking, ?Honk, hurry up. Honk, get going you.? I whooshed by the second woman in the median, an older woman, all her clothes roiling, but her body and her face, patient somehow, not impassive, but solid. My first uncensored thought was, **?My God, there are two Blessed Mothers standing alone on the median in the middle of the highway.?**

But, I drove on. My rational mind said, ?Well, the police are there. Whatever it is, will be taken care of.? I drove into the wind, which was bucking store signs, blowing dirt into the windshield, throwing anything loose around in the air.

Her face, though. The youngest woman. Her hands. The officer rejected her pleading hands. She was only reaching out for the reassuring touch that says, Help has arrived.

?No, I cant go back,? I thought. ?I have frozen food that will go bad. I can?t turn around. I?m stuck in the middle of the pack with trucks and 18 wheelers and SUV?s on every side. The police are there. The women will be alright.?

Yet, the *la angela* on my shoulder whispered, ?But the women in the median are from another land. They might have trouble speaking the language. The officer seemed so cold.?

I turned back. By bullnosing my way across traffic, with an ?I?ve got 800 horses under this hood and I?m a-coming through,? attitude, I managed to u-turn my 4x4 with its cruddy turn ratio, all the way across the median.

I found the little group in a parking lot just off the road. The officer was in his car writing, one leg out the door. The young woman and the older woman were standing beside their car which had a bashed rear fender. Another car with a young man sitting in the driver?s seat was off to the side.

I stood at the perimeter of the scene and addressed the officer over the wind. ?Officer, I saw the women on the median and thought they might be in distress. Is it alright with you if I just make sure they?re all right??

The officer looked at me like I was from the iguana tribe. ?Do you know,? I asked, ?are the women alright??

?How would I know?? he snapped, and went back to his writing.

You know how you blink when you just heard something unexpected that you think you must have misheard the first time?

I was thinking to myself, ?Goodness, I am so sorry to bother you officer. I?ll just ah, yes, just um, walk over here, and uh, see to the ladies ... the iguana will now just slink over here out of your way, officer.?

To be fair, the officer was writing a ticket to the man in the other car, who seemed passive enough, but I?d no idea what occurred before I arrived, if anything.

The blessed mothers of the roadway

I could tell the two ladies were like we old-fashioned Latinas -- hand shaking in greeting is considered something men do, not women. So I said quietly that I?d seen them on the road and just wanted to make sure they were alright and did they need anything, water, a bite to eat to tide them over? (There are so many people on the road who have diabetes).

The women were very proper. ?Thank you, thank you,? they said. That formal kind of ?thank you? that says ?We are afraid of everyone.?

?Well, may God Bless you both,? I said. And suddenly sunshine and angels dropped from the heavens and they both almost shouted, ?God bless you also, woman. God bless you woman!? We?d found a common language.

Then the eldest woman noticed the Sacred Heart pinned to my dress, the one crocheted in red all around the edges by my grandmother a million years ago. ?Oh Mrs. Jesus!? she said, ?Mrs. Jesus, God bless you!?

And we ?Jesus God Blessed? each other for a good whole minute before the poor officer, annoyed for reasons we will never know, came over and pronounced that he was done. Everyone could leave now. The crazy iguana and the inexplicable God-blessing women in dresses and mantles were free to go now.

The wind was blowing our clothes every which way, and the older woman suddenly asked, ?Priest? You?? I knew we had somehow been suddenly transported body and soul back to their home country, maybe Haiti, maybe Ethiopia, maybe Mali, maybe Santo Domingo. I do not know and I did not ask. The answer to her question? I touched her arm lightly and thanked her for her blessing.

And then it was done, I was back in my truck driving into the dusk, and my little bag, OK, the frozen food, well, I just cooked it all up that night, no harm done. And the aggravated officer, we won?t know, but you never can tell ...

Not that day, but maybe some other day, someone will hold out their hands because they are afraid and are in a strange land, with strange laws, and the officer will take those hands just for a moment and say, ?Let?s see what happened here. I?m here to help.? Maybe he will. Perhaps he has a tiny picture of ?how to,? now. Maybe not. But, maybe yes.

Letters from the ark

I?ve many episodes like these on the road, some crazy and some crazy-making; some sweet and some hard, some dangerous. But most every one has a similar episode wherein some small thing was exchanged, sometimes in all directions ... and most everyone was in some way given something unusual or good to think about, remember, or was made the better, or strengthened in some tiny or bold way, or laughed through the tension with a stranger. Something dawns on a person, either right now, or later, or maybe many years from now. We never know. None of us do.

Yet, it?s episodes like these, with such sweet human beings as well as some rough and tough characters, that have pushed me over the years to write down some ?letters to the world,? or what I came to call ?letters from the ark,? letters from my own tiny ark upon open waters, often in a storm, certainly in a night-sea journey ... just sending out the dove over and over.

The letters are sent out to sustain those who see the greater world and the personal world but without wearing the usual anesthetizing blinders. They go to those who see all suffering, and thus can use small reminders that they and their souls are still fully capable and not alone, those who are carrying precious goods in thought and action.

The letters are sent out just to remind people that the outcome in the moment may not be the most of what to aim for, but rather something else, something far more mysterious that comes on wings or wind.

Here is one of the ?letters from the ark? for you now ...

Do not lose heart, we were made for these times

Mis estimados:

Do not lose heart. We were made for these times.

I have heard from so many recently who are deeply and properly bewildered. They are concerned about the state of affairs in our world right now. It is true, one has to have strong cojones and ovarios to withstand much of what passes for ?good? in our culture today. Abject disregard of what the soul finds most precious and irreplaceable and the corruption of principled ideals have become, in some large societal arenas, ?the new normal,? the grotesquerie of the week.

It is hard to say which one of the current egregious matters has rocked people?s worlds and beliefs more. Ours is a time of almost daily jaw-dropping astonishment and often righteous rage over the latest degradations of what matters most to civilized, visionary people.

You are right in your assessments. The luster and hubris some have aspired to while endorsing acts so heinous against children, elders, everyday people, the poor, the unguarded, the helpless, is breathtaking. Yet, I urge you, ask you, gentle you, to please not spend your spirit dry by bewailing these difficult times. Especially do not lose hope. Most particularly because, the fact is -- we were made for these times.

Yes. For years, we have been learning, practicing, been in training for and just waiting to meet on this exact plain of engagement. I cannot tell you often enough that we are definitely the leaders we have been waiting for, and that we have been raised, since childhood, for this time precisely.

I grew up on the Great Lakes and recognize a seaworthy vessel when I see one. Regarding awakened souls, there have never been more able crafts in the waters than there are right now across the world. And they are fully provisioned and able to signal one another as never before in the history of humankind.

I would like to take your hands for a moment and assure you that you are built well for these times. Despite your stints of doubt, your frustrations in righting all that needs change right now, or even feeling you have lost the map entirely, you are not without resource, you are not alone. Look out over the prow; there are millions of boats of righteous souls on the waters with you. In your deepest bones, you have always known this is so.

Even though your veneers may shiver from every wave in this stormy roil, I assure you that the long timbers composing your prow and rudder come from a greater forest. That long-grained lumber is known to withstand storms, to hold together, to hold its own, and to advance, regardless.

We have been in training for a dark time such as this, since the day we assented to come to Earth. For many decades, worldwide, souls just like us have been felled and left for dead in so many ways over and over -- brought down by naiveté, by lack of love, by suddenly realizing one deadly thing or another, by not realizing something else soon enough, by being ambushed and assaulted by various cultural and personal shocks in the extreme.

We all have a heritage and history of being gutted, and yet remember this especially: we have also, of necessity, perfected the knack of resurrection.

Over and over again we have been the living proof that that which has been exiled, lost, or foundered -- can be restored to life again. This is as true and sturdy a prognosis for the destroyed worlds around us as it was for our own once mortally wounded selves.

Though we are not invulnerable, our risibility supports us to laugh in the face of cynics who say ?fat chance,? and ?management before mercy,? and other evidences of complete absence of soul sense. This, and our having been ?to hell and back? on at least one momentous occasion, makes us seasoned vessels for certain. Even if you do not feel that you are, you are.

Even if your puny little ego wants to contest the enormity of your soul, that smaller self can never for long subordinate the larger Self. In matters of death and rebirth, you have surpassed the benchmarks many times. Believe the evidence of any one of your past testings and trials. Here it is: Are you still standing? The answer is, Yes! (And no adverbs like ?barely? are allowed here). If you are still standing, ragged flags or no, you are able. Thus, you have passed the bar. And even raised it. You are seaworthy.

In any dark time, there is a tendency to veer toward fainting over how much is wrong or unmended in the world. Do not focus on that. Do not make yourself ill with overwhelm. There is a tendency too to fall into being weakened by perseverating on what is outside your reach, by what cannot yet be. Do not focus there. That is spending the wind without raising the sails.

We are needed, that is all we can know. And though we meet resistance, we more so will meet great souls who will hail us, love us and guide us, and we will know them when they appear. Didn?t you say you were a believer? Didn?t you say you pledged to listen to a voice greater? Didn?t you ask for grace? Don?t you remember that to be in grace means to submit to the Voice greater? You have all the resources you need to ride any wave, to surface from any trough.

In the language of aviators and sailors, ours is to sail forward now, all balls out. Understand the paradox: If you study the physics of a waterspout, you will see that the outer vortex whirls far more quickly than the inner one. To calm the storm means to quiet the outer layer, to cause it, by whatever countervailing means, to swirl much less, to more evenly match the velocity of the inner, far less volatile core -- till whatever has been lifted into such a vicious funnel falls back to Earth, lays down, is peaceable again.

One of the most important steps you can take to help calm the storm is to not allow yourself to be taken in a flurry of overwrought emotion or despair -- thereby accidentally contributing to the swale and the swirl. Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach.

Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good. What is needed for dramatic change is an accumulation of acts -- adding, adding to, adding more, continuing. We know that it does not take ?everyone on Earth? to bring justice and peace, but only a small, determined group who will not give up during the first, second, or hundredth gale.

One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. A soul on deck shines like gold in dark times.

The light of the soul throws sparks, can send up flares, builds signal fires, causes proper matters to catch fire. To display the lantern of the soul in shadowy times like these -- to be fierce and to show mercy toward others, both -- are acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. If you would help to calm the tumult, this is one of the strongest things you can do.

There will always be times in the midst of ?success right around the corner, but as yet still unseen? when you feel discouraged. I too have felt despair many times in my life, but I do not keep a chair for it; I will not

entertain it. It is not allowed to eat from my plate.

The reason is this: In my bones I know, as do you, that there can be no despair when you remember why you came to Earth, who you serve, and who sent you here. The good words we say and the good deeds we do are not ours: They are the words and deeds of the One who brought us here.

In that spirit, I hope you will write this on your wall: When a great ship is in harbor and moored, it is safe, there can be no doubt. But ? that is not what great ships are built for.

This comes with much love and prayer that you remember who you came from, and why you came to this beautiful, needful Earth.

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