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Subject: "One hand tied behind your back?" (Winter 2013-2014)
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Winter 2013-2014 Newsletter:
"One hand tied behind your back?"

Greetings...



One of my favorite places to look for unassuming bits of wisdom...is in the daily comics. My essay in this newsletter uses a Sunday edition of "Arlo And Janis"

as the starting point for my reflections. My usual features are also here: "3 Good Poems," "Resources For A Richer Life" (including one of my favorite movies of 2013), and "Quotes For Inspiration And Action."

If you know of someone who might benefit from working with the kind of psychotherapist who publishes *this* kind of newsletter, please forward this to them, and let them know I'm glad to help if I can.

As always, I hope you'll find something here that feels like just the right thing at just the right time, something that touches you, opens you, challenges you, or comforts you...or perhaps even does all of those at the same time.

~Dan



In this edition:

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Reflections: "One hand tied behind your back?"

A few years ago, the Sunday edition of the daily comic strip "Arlo and Janis" showed the title characters, husband and wife, taking a walk on a beautiful day. In the strip, Janis points up to a cloud and says "It looks like a big ball of cotton." She points to another and says "And that one looks just like a pile of raw wool." She points to a third and says "That one looks like a glob of whipped cream." In the final panel, Arlo says "You've always been a very literal person." (click [here](#) to see the comic).

There's nothing wrong with being literal. That part of life needs attention as much as any other. But when people start to feel stuck, it's often because they are paying attention to their lives *only* at the literal level; they miss, or dismiss, the value of metaphors and symbols, and the kind of information, inspiration, and guidance they can bring...and that is like going through life with one hand tied behind your back.

I remember the day one of my regular clients arrived 20 minutes late for her session. "I got a speeding ticket on the way here," she explained. I asked her "What do you think that means?" She looked at me like I was a little dense and barked "It means I was doing 75 in a 60 zone on I-5!"

I took a deep breath...and then gently

wondered out loud if it might mean more than that, if her "speeding" on the highway might be a metaphor for the way she was moving through her life-always "doing 75," racing by people and circumstances, rarely slowing down enough for her life or her feelings to catch up with her.

At first she reacted, pushed back, dismissed the idea of the ticket as a symbol. Then, gradually, she began to calm down, to settle into her chair, to let in the possibility that this annoying event might carry with it...a message. She noted that the speeding ticket was going to cost her more than \$100 (she was already struggling financially, so \$100 was a lot of money for her)...and then began to reflect on the "cost" of speeding through her life. In a few minutes, she was in tears, grieving the losses of having moved so fast for so long.

In the weeks and months that followed, she started making an effort to slow down, literally and metaphorically. Over time, she felt less stressed, less anxious, more at peace. A whole new world of options opened up for her, and she began to embrace her life, to relish it, in ways she had never done before.

Metaphor, symbol, analogy, imagery--these are essential aspects of the language of the psyche, the language of the soul. They help us to engage the deeper, unconscious dimensions of being human. Jung once wrote that "until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life, and you will call it fate." Until you cry your tears, they'll show up as speeding tickets. Or, as one of my all-time favorite bumper stickers puts it: "The fates lead those who will...those who won't, they *drag*."

One way to make the unconscious conscious, to invite fate to lead you rather than being dragged around by it, to develop a conscious relationship with metaphor and symbol...is by paying attention to your dreams.

Several years ago I was working with a man who, after of some initial skepticism, was paying attention to his dreams for the first time in his life. One session he brought in a long, complex dream where he was driving all over town, repeatedly getting lost, or going in circles and winding up back at the same place.

At one point I commented on a seemingly small, insignificant detail: that he was driving around in what the dream called a "rental" truck. We spent a few minutes exploring this: in waking life he owned his own car (in fact, it was fully paid for)...but we came to see the symbolic importance of this image: his "truck," his way of moving through life, of trying to get where he was going...*was not his own*.

Image led to insight and then to action: eventually he quit his job in the family business and started a career he felt passionate about...He made some changes in the way he dressed, in his mannerisms, in his speech, moving through life with a new "persona," with a new style that better suited him....A few years later, he left me a voice mail with the news that he'd even bought a new truck, "one that's really *me*"...And so, in a lovely way, the symbolic had come full circle, morphing back into something more authentically literal.

Paying attention not only to the literal, but also to metaphors and symbols...is like untying the hand that's tied behind your back. It adds another dimension to life: it can help release you from feeling stuck, anxious, depressed, frustrated...by creating new ways of looking at the world, new ways of thinking, new avenues of choice, new ways of acting.

Sometimes, in our quest to untie that other hand, action can be the starting point rather than the end result. I sometimes suggest to clients who feel "tied" that they

take some symbolic action, and then pay attention to how they're different afterward. Feel "in the dark"? Light a candle. Can't see where your life is heading? Wash the front window of your car, inside and out. Feeling shame about your "dirty laundry," about something you've struggled with but been afraid to talk about? Try doing a load of actual laundry, and then wearing something from that load as you share the secret with a friend, your spouse, or your therapist.

As with most things in life, when it comes to the symbols and metaphors, we can begin at either end: by learning to see, or by learning to act.

In that vein, "**Janis**" may deserve a little more credit than I gave her at first glance. She was, after all, looking up...taking in a broader horizon...and that's a start. And though her cloud metaphors were a bit...literal...she was at least trying. Like anything else worthwhile, this takes a little practice. So use both hands. Look up, look in, look deeply. You'll be amazed at what you begin to see, and how things begin to change...for the better.

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Quotes for inspiration and action...

"Any sorrow can be born if it can be made into a story, or if a story can be told about it."

(Isak Dinesen)

"Even in the most peaceful surroundings, the angry heart finds quarrel. Even in the most quarrelsome surroundings, the grateful heart finds peace."

(Doe Zantamata)

"When we stand beneath the night sky, we stand beneath the history of the whole of

creation. It is a miracle that so much of it is perceptible."

(Richard Grossinger)

"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate."

(C.G. Jung)

"At a [poetry] reading, following one of his deft, quiet offerings, a listener helplessly spoke aloud, 'I could have written that.' And William Stafford, looking kindly at the speaker, replied 'But you didn't.' A beat of silence. 'But you could write your own.' You could write your own. What a democratic idea."

*(Kim Stafford)**

**writing about her father William Stafford, in the preface to Ask Me: 100 Essential Poems, published this year to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Stafford's birth)*

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Resources For A Richer Life

More than just "self-help," Resources For A Richer Life is meant to bring you music, movies, books, articles, web sites, events, videos, and more that will touch the depths of your soul and awaken the most alive parts of you.

(movie/DVD): "**The Way Way Back.**" One of my favorite movies of 2013, this story is at once modest, real, funny, poignant, sad, and ultimately uplifting and hopeful, a coming-of-age story in which even one or two of the grownups...grow up. The screenplay is by Oscar-winning writers Nat Faxon and Jim Rash, who also direct for the first time. The stellar cast includes Steve Carell, Toni Collette, Allison Janney, Maya Rudolph, and especially noteworthy

performances by Sam Rockwell and newcomer Liam James. Read [this review](#), and watch [the trailer](#). Want a movie night at home that will leave you feeling hopeful about overcoming life's challenges? Rent "The Way Way Back."

(music): "[Every Little Bit Of It](#)" (Carrie Newcomer). The first release from Newcomer's forthcoming CD "A Permeable Life," this song features the gentle, lyrical wisdom, the understated musicianship, and the quietly passionate vocals that are typical of her entire body of work.

(interview): [Frank Langella](#), interviewed by Charlie Rose. I stumbled into the middle of this TV interview one afternoon when I was sick in bed, and was so intrigued that when I saw it scheduled to be rerun a few days later, I watched it in its entirety. What begins as a conversation about Langella's recent portrayal of Shakespeare's "King Lear" on the stage in New York, seamlessly evolves into a series of gentle and wise observations by the soft spoken, 76 year old...about paring down and letting go, about risk and failure, about the value of "immediacy," and the mystery of succeeding without knowing why or how. This interview gives the viewer what Langella says he wants to give those who come to see his plays: "I want them to leave every night somehow changed, affected."

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3 Good Poems

Congratulations to Elizabeth Austen for being named the 2014-2016 Washington State Poet Laureate!

To visit Austen's web page, click [here](#). For more on the Washington State Poet Laureate program, click [here](#).

Click on the titles below to read the poems online. You can also access them by going

to the "**Writings**" page of my web site, finding the link for my "e-newsletters," and then clicking on the link for the Late Winter 2013-2014 edition.

1. "**Security**" (William Stafford)
2. "**From Out The Cave**" (Joyce Sutphen)
3. "**the drum**" (nikki giovanni)

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Jungian Psychotherapy for Individuals & Couples.

"The greatest and most important problems in life can never be solved, only outgrown."
~C.G. Jung

I offer Jungian-oriented psychotherapy for individuals and couples. Whether you come to me with a problem or simply the sense that it's time for a change, I help you look at how that starting point is calling you to grow, and how you can respond to that call with creativity, vitality, and hope.

To learn more, visit my web site by clicking **here**.

To schedule an appointment, or if you have questions, call me at (206) 523-1340.



Upcoming Lectures & Workshops.

I have a number of new lectures and workshops coming up in 2014; watch future emails from me for details.

If you would like me to come speak to your group, please call me at (206) 523-1340, or **email** me.

On my web site, you can view a list of

other **organizations** that have invited me to speak.

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That's it for this edition of my newsletter. As always, I welcome your comments and suggestions. You can call me at (206) 523-1340, or **email** me.

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