

I think of my adult life experience as the assembly of stone soup—it's still going on and I can't tell you what it will ultimately taste like. As people and experiences come forward to contribute to this evolving stew, it can be flavored strongly by whatever is thrown into it that day, but over time the whole thing takes on a simmering blend which tastes ever more delicious, yet continues to call for that, hmmm, something more.

Like cream, an overall thickener in this pot is that of feeling essentially unprepared while forging ahead. I used to enjoy the TV show *Mission Impossible*, recognizing that the difference between the IM Team and me is that they knew what they were doing. Not knowing has been my armament and my Achilles heel—*Why Not?* has moved me forward while simultaneously causing me to stub my toe. Trial by ever hotter fires, a process which began when I went off to prep school to discover the gap between what I could produce and what was expected, continued, with the burners turned up when I got married at the end of my sophomore year at college and became a father some months later.

Over the last quarter century, I've found my stew filled with many unexpected contributions from the universe: three kids; relationships which have begun and ended; a voluntary termination of a tenured University position; several shots at small computer companies, all of which went belly up; a move to an island off the coast of Washington, a couple of years as a contractor building my own place; and many rich and special friends.

When a 15 year marriage ended years ago, it seemed the cauldron of my stew was set in a blast furnace: I moved away from the university town I had become so familiar with, gave up my teaching job, became a single parent, took on a new profession, and stumbled across men like Robert Bly and Joseph Campbell. Whatever might have been stable in my life shattered. Winging it, my general approach to entering whatever forest was before me, became ever more clearly my dance, and I'm still not entirely comfortable with it, even if I recognize its spiritual groundedness.

Perhaps the principle which has guided me most often in this dance has been that of following the energy. Campbell talks of following one's bliss, which I've had years of difficulty with since I haven't figured out what my bliss is (I should think following it would be easy); but following the energy is my translation of his idea. It's the notion of picking up on an intuitive flash, on something which could be called centripetal—a pulling together, a connection—perhaps a love—for something (music, ideas, nature) or someone. These ideas are not something I learned to understand, recognize, acknowledge or honor in any of my formal education, yet they seem to more accurately characterize the fundamental nature of my movement, the ordered direction of my own energies, however subtle and ephemeral their wisps and whispers.

As an example, I was flip flopping about whether to take a job several years ago, which, if accepted, would remove me to a tiny speck of an equatorial island thousands of miles from nowhere for a year. A chance encounter with a remote acquaintance on a beautiful sunny day in Seattle's Pike Place Market provided an opportunity to throw the decision in the air for his comment. (After all, if I couldn't decide, why not let some

virtual stranger offer an opinion?) His immediate, overwhelming enthusiastic energy, reminding me of the last lines of Ulysses, carried the day — "OK, OK, I'll do it", I said. It was as if he released me with his enthusiasm from my left brain blues—I couldn't say no to the presentation of and then identification with that energy. The experience following that decision was one of the richest, most confusing and most enjoyable few years of my life.

In college I had an experience similar to that with a piano teacher I deeply admired—I was at the same time encouraged by the abundance of energy, curiosity and talent surrounding me, and discouraged by the gap between where I was and where I could see I wanted to be. I felt a definite, if unspoken, presumption about the legacy of a New England college education: that once one graduates, one's path through life will unfold in some ever clearer (and successful) adventure—performance for others would evolve into self-guided purpose. Unfold, yes; successful, in many ways, yes; clear, not at all. My illusory desire for clarity has been confronting my reality for years—on this topic my brain is a war zone. My mental medics take the form of the Buddhist Bodhisattva: one who joyfully participates in the sufferings of the world. The key word is joyfully—I hope I'm awake enough to throw some in someone else's soup today.