

The DMZ between brutal honesty and acceptable social convention, for me, is huge. Sitting in my wicker rocker under the lazy ceiling fans, sipping a long iced tea, looking out over the hills toward the war zone, I must have told myself I felt safe from hand-to-hand combat with the dragons out there in the jungle of my mind. Another voice wouldn't let me pretend to escape, or even enjoy the retreat. I now realize I've been asleep, or at least afraid, too long, and finally I'm admitting it. When the deep rumbles of faroff explosions in a marriage awoke me to its weaknesses, sadnesses, disappointments and angers, I asked myself what I gave away.

I gave away some aspect of self-respect, some tentacle of tenderness, of innocence, of hope, of a childlike expectation that I might be taken care of, or that my barely-conscious needs would be understood and met, accepted and cherished, nurtured and strengthened. I gave away the responsibility to recognize and express my needs, to find ways to satisfy them, to refuse to tolerate an emptiness or an ignorance or repression of my longings—my quiet, barely perceptible wants, hopes, wishes, dreams, fantasies. By giving this away I allowed myself to become passive, withdrawing, angry, disappointed, lonely, confused, and thus spiral away from my own center. I allowed myself to be up against the wall, to be flooded, to back off. I presumed that someone else would take care of me, that 'work' and 'relationship' were mutually exclusive concepts, i.e., that a relationship evolved spontaneously (more or less) and that my position as partner automatically placed me on the inside. I assumed I didn't have to work to stay there. I gave away my power to say "no, this is not enough, this is not working, this doesn't feel right, this doesn't move me, this offends me, this repels me, this separates me". I gave away some power to say "we can resolve this, we can find alternatives, we can zig if zagging doesn't do it." I gave away respect for the tiny voice that said this relationship doesn't kick me into overdrive. I gave away standing up for that voice, protecting that voice, honoring that voice, using the energy of that voice as the hand on the tiller of my ship.

There was less connection-energy in me than there ought to have been; the coal was glowing but the fire was small. I gave away the responsibility to nurture, and/or demand that we both nurture, that coal, gently adding fuel, building up the fire, bringing it to a rolling, solid, strong, dependable, difficult-to-querch, radiant energy. I abandoned my responsibility to myself and to the relationship.

Having stomped into the zone and pinned the dragon of blindness and denial, the question's inverse was freed: what didn't I give away?

Oh my.

My heart. A letting go into it, a giving it all, a free-fall into some interior. I didn't move inside; I wasn't pulled, or compelled from within, to move across some perceptible line into a form of abandonment, of complete engagement.

Next time, when I feel the shivers from shots beginning again deep in those jungles, I won't wait 'til the bullets are hitting the porch timbers. My scouts are awake now, at least

to the sounds I ignored for so long. Wait and see is a losing strategy—this heart will never again be imprisoned.