

The Serendipitous Nature of Being

by Sheila Luecht

Today at lunch, my husband who comes home daily from our little business to share this respite decided we could go out. "Where would you like to go?" I am certain he could have guessed because I usually like the same place. It is a nice cozy breakfast place with good food and welcoming staff. It is one of the places we frequent after a doctor's appointment, or to meet friends at, a place our son in law, a renaissance kind of man, including chef skills, also enjoys going to. I like to go there because I can sit across from my husband in a booth or at a table, lock eyes with him, and have his undivided attention. It was like a date. I called it our Afternoon Delight, and my husband once informed me "that is not what I think it means", and I said, it is when you are over sixty. We had our usual waiter at that time of day, one who can almost guess correctly what we will order. Today he was fairly spot on and so things were quickly being put in motion. I was glad as I had taken my usual medication and would need to eat in a timely manner.

So as we sat and went over a few things, like bill payments, what happened that morning at the shop, and various small things. I told him that I did have a story to tell. To do the proper set up for the story, it was taking me some time, but each bit was important to the outcome, and while he likened me to Higgens on the old Magnum P.I. series, I just laughed at his slowly closing eyes and folded arm, caught in a half curl as he faked dozing off. He really does have a sense of humor, lucky for him, so do I.

Sometime ago, probably somewhere between 15 and twenty years ago I was in downtown Chicago for a small conference at the Spertus College of Judaica. It was well before their new building in

2007 and new name, Spertus Institute of Jewish Learning and Leadership. It was probably regarding something in the non profit field, back then and until 2016 you could achieve a masters degree in non profit management. They have since done away with that program, but I was active in non profit management at the time and that is how I ended up there for a conference. I recall the entryway, the room of the conference, the little gift shop area and a small room aside. The small room aside was showcasing a traveling holocaust exhibit. There were three items which stood out to me. A small ring with a little stone in it. It was something that a woman had survived the ordeal of the camps still clinging to and that in itself was a miracle, as those things were confiscated. I don't remember the entire story, but the value of that ring was always emotional not terribly material, so it mattered because it was a link to her life and past. The next object I believe I recall was a small goose feather stuffed pillow. It had been carried by a child the entire journey though the dark corridors of the holocaust and was in the end the only thing left of the child's family and was made by their mother, or grandmother, and with feathers plucked from geese on their farm. It was a thing of immense value and emotional significance. As time went on it somehow survived all the layers of hiding and persecution to be sitting in a glass case in Chicago. Much later I was watching a documentary and this pillow was mentioned. I was dumbstruck that of all the people in all the world this pillow had been tossed into my path of understanding.

The last item in this traveling exhibit I recall was a little shirt. It was small but not too small and seemed to have some cross stitch details on it. It was an item that a hidden child had been given by her grandmother, made by her, before she was able to put her granddaughter into hiding. She was instructed not to let go of it because it would connect her to her family. The grandmother felt that if needed it would help identify her to relatives because, if she forgot who she was. She was a small child I believe around 4 or something. This is how I remember it anyway. The story behind the

glass claimed that when the child was liberated at the end of the war, she could still fit into this little top which was originally a dress, but somehow could still fit.

You must understand that my mind fills in all sorts of little blanks as I see what transpired in my mind, but what I am telling you next is how my life path always seems to operate.

Many years later in about 2010 I began writing on a platform called Open Salon. In the mix of all the writers there, of those who we were contemporaries, was the daughter of the little girl with the embroidered dress. I did not know it then. She was the wife of one of the prolific writers there, a big personality, who was also an artist and it was really through him on Facebook that we became connected. I am not sure she was a writer on Open Salon. There were many of us. When that platform ceased to exist some of us gathered over on Facebook and attempted to organize a group. We were successful and within that group some friended each other and hence out of many connections even more were made.

The fiery relationships of people who are creative sometimes explodes without warning. In my case I am a long time researcher of the holocaust and through time and experiences connected to the history of places like Dachau and Mauthausen, and also lost and unique stories of people who survived, how their lives continued and who they became.

There are those whose lives become too complex to entertain the thought of any kind of after life, or messages from loved ones who have passed. I am living proof that such things do exist, but I am not forced by my nature to convince anyone that such things exist. Each person must seek their own comfort of connections. Those who have lost people sometimes find these revelations or connections uncomfortable or not real to them, others crave them, seek them or

merely find acceptance of them as part of their natural order of existence.

I am also an empath and a medium. I am also a painter. One day I was drawn to a picture on this loose, Open Salon connection's facebook page. It was a picture of a man picking apples in an orchard. I kept the picture in my mind for some reason and one day, many months later started to paint a profile picture of the man. It was a weird progression of many layers of paint underneath of vibrant purple and red, which I toned down considerably over months. I kept it aside for many weeks at a time. It finally started to gain some ground and again, I let it rest. Then one day I began it again. I started giving it more color and got stuck on the color blue and kept imagining water. It turns out the day I began in earnest to paint him again, was the day he passed. This picture was of the husband of the little girl with the embroidered shirt. He was also hidden and he was also a survivor.

In all the times he has sat on the easel I felt that some questions were being answered. I was tip toeing around wondering how to take this massive head in the middle of a canvas and ground it to it's earthly surroundings. Then I suddenly became aware of what to add and do over a few days. I shared the stripped piece on facebook and his daughter seemed comforted by it in a small way and offered insight. As this progressed I began the circle of self doubt that most creative people experience. This man had this daughter and she married this artist person, this creative person and his children with her were creative too, artists too. Would these people appreciate this naive work? Could they connect on some level? Then I recalled a woman some 31 years ago who loved her father so much that in her seventies she showed me a photo picture of him in his garden, and I painted a picture of him for her. Long after she went blind that picture hung in her room at an assisted living apartment on the west coast and that painting on her death was so cherished that she gifted it to one of her nieces. This niece called my husband after the

will was read to pass this message on to me. It hangs proudly in her home. Decades later the impact of that art was still being felt and kept honor placed in the family. This woman was very famous, interacted with important wealthy people, had original art of many kinds but somehow that painting I did on chance, and gave her, made her life very happy, it gave her a kind of lasting hug. So I am not doubting that this work might be able to do the same for this woman who mourns the loss of her father now.

If you do not think connections in this matter, or are superfluous, then the mystery of the universe, and it's lasting messages, escape you. When I first saw that little dress behind the glass in Chicago, I would not have understood how decades later, after that little girl grew and met that little boy who was also a Holocaust survivor could enter my life in such a profoundly meaningful way. If I can provide this painting to this daughter, perhaps I can make her feel pain less and joy more. The threads of life continue.

That woman in Wisconsin who got the painting of her father from me shared the photo in black and white. I painted it in pastels the colors of his garden that he found himself at home in.

If it is possible to pass on feelings in paint, on canvas, and be influenced by people who are being represented, then as an artist, we have accomplished much.

Soon we paid our bill and my husband went back to work after dropping me home. I thought the time went by too fast, but then, a good story takes time.

