

09/05/04

Julie-

Finally now is the time that I can respond to your marvelous letter. Left me feeling buoyant. Encouraged? So much of what you said I needed to hear. I am very impressed with your discipline to meditate. I really struggle with the meditation portion of yoga class. I am improving, I think. I don't fall asleep anymore. Can you believe it? Sitting like that? And still I could fall asleep. My brain does not understand that kind of slowness. Though I long to comprehend it.

It has been wickedly hot this weekend; so hot that it has been difficult to think (a good thing?) let alone desire to write. But here I am in my basement studio, the sun is long gone and it is easy to forget the earlier heat. I took a nap this afternoon and when I woke up, I read this very interesting essay by Tom Robbins. I want to send you this one passage because I find it very relevant (maybe not in the most direct way) to what you emailed me. I was inspired after reading this passage and felt an intuitive sense of resolve:

'The fact that playfulness---a kind of *divine* playfulness intended to lighten man's existential burden and promote what Joseph Campbell called "the rapture of being alive"---lies near to the core of Zen, Taoist, Sufi and Tantric teachings is lost on most Westerners: working stiffs and intellectuals alike. Even scholars who acknowledge the playful undertone in those disciplines treat it with condescension and disrespect, never mind that it's a worldview arrived at after millennia of exhaustive study, deep meditation, unflinching observation and intense debate...Like that old fusty patriarch in the Bible, when they become a man (or woman), they "put away childish things," which is to say they seal off with the hard gray wax of fear and pomposity that aspect of their being that once was attuned to wonder.'

I remember that a Bulgarian friend of mine used to tell other people that I was like a five year old: everything was interesting to me. I took this as the highest of compliments.

What is different about being five and adult, is exactly that need to understand, fully comprehend. To be grounded, stable. Well, you would know from Cedar; I am sure that he has a background sense of stability from you and Andy so that he has the freedom to play and imagine. Somehow, though, as adults, this stability, we need to have it ourselves, create it for ourselves, or at least give the respectable appearance that we are stable. It is so hard to push that external ego to the side, the voice that says, show others what you have got. That is really not what is important to me, but somehow it seems to be the most important component of the adult game.

You are not the first to tell me about the relationship you see between what I am doing and Zen practices. Even still, I have not been able to grasp the connection myself--or at least, I have not dedicated a sufficient amount of effort to exploring the relationships there. I remember trying to study some zen and taoist teachings while writing my thesis and I felt like I got no where fast. I couldn't understand what I was reading and I could not rest with this lack of knowing. Especially when I was supposed to act like an authority on something (or at least give an authoritative analysis of something). I do think it would be useful for me to read one of the books you have recommended and

see where it gets me. Although maybe I would be hoping that the writing would make me feel less lost, more certain. I struggle with giving myself this permission to be confused, especially when it is most risky, ie, that in about a month, I will be participating in a public presentation of this whole project (the transcultural mapping project).

What is most reassuring is that you understand my dilemma---I suppose that I have always assumed that feeling untethered has also been accompanied by a sense of aloneness, alienation ('everyone else knows and I don't kind' of thing). Not the case, eh? Or maybe it is rare that we admit to this unknowingness and if we can be brave enough to do so, deeper connections are born. Just a thought.

In my haste with sending my previous email I neglected to attach the photo of Julie (and the coincidence of her and your name has not escaped me...). So this time I will be sure to remember. And I will also send you a better image of my map. Maybe you couldn't make out my writing? Also, how were the sound files? This is all an experiment...

Julie is a born story teller. Something about her manner---she tells all stories with the same tone of almost wink-wink seriousness; all with sincerity and respect, really. Nothing is too far-fetched or implausible for her. My favorite story is the one about this little fellow named Marmalen. Now marmalen is a harbinger of disaster so, as Julie explained to me, it is always best to pay him heed. He is a like a little baby and will come to fishermen usually on their hooks or lines as they are drawn up from the water. He is usually very cold and wants you to give him your warmest clothing. Sometimes marmalen asks you to take him home so that he can be warmed by the fire and drink some hot milk. If you ignore him, you face certain but unknown danger. If you take care of him, he will warn you of future disaster, though he will do this in a somewhat cryptic way. Of course, me being me, I asked Julie if anyone really believes in all of this.

And she replied with first, "yes..." and her way of pronouncing "ah yes" just draws you into the story even more. She told me two stories that she had heard (and I can't remember the source of the stories. Perhaps her father, a fisherman, told her about these instances.) I will tell you my favorite of the two. Apparently this took place fifty years ago or so. On a different island, there was a man awaiting trial for some horrible crime. He was still a free man and went out fishing with two other guys. The day was brilliant and the catch was bountiful. Then the fellow awaiting trial caught marmalen; he wrapped his sweater around marmalen and threw him back into the water. The other guys said, hey what are you doing?!? It's your only sweater. The criminal said, Well, I'm going to jail soon so I won't need it. Marmalen came back up and told him, "Hey, you have to turn around and go home straight away." He told the others and they said No way! The fishing is too good. So he conceded. Then he caught marmalen again, and again was given the same warning. Same thing happened: no one would listen to this warning. A third time he caught marmalen and then he really was adamant about returning to shore. Marmalen said It's now or never! The fellow awaiting trial must have said something really convincing (or inspired fear in the other two because he was a dangerous man) and they turned back to shore. As they started rowing a huge storm blew up and they nearly didn't make it back to shore in time. All the other people out fishing that day died.

There was something very special about Julie and I wasn't the only one to sense this. One day when I was walking home I ran into Julie. She was waiting for her sister and mom to pick her up to go to the movies.

It was great to meet some of her family. Her sister was so sweet; she said to me "Oh, so you are California! It is nice to meet you." Then we all laughed and Julie said, "No her name is Sue...She is **from** California!" Anyway, I told her mom that Julie is such a fantastic story teller. And she told me that Julie has been telling stories since she was little, that she has a special talent. Her mom too had this special something about her too; I felt like I had known them for a very long time. It was strange too, because when Kristin met Julie at our going-away supper, she later told me that she had thought that Julie was an older spinster type woman. I don't know what gave her that impression. I suppose it is unusual for someone in her early twenties to have the wisdom of a good storyteller.

I have been emailing to Julie but as yet have not heard back from her. It is a shame because I would like to stay in touch with her. Maybe with school starting up again she will have better internet access.

Well, I should stop for now. I hope that we can chat on the phone before too long. This week coming up is quite a hectic one, but maybe next week? I am usually home in the mornings until 11am.

Take good care.

My love,
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