NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Getting Real: The Hidden Room in a Man's Heart - For Father's Day 2008

Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés | Jun. 10, 2008 El Rio Debajo del Rio

El Rio Debajo El Rio: The river beneath the river, by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Vol. 1, No. 14 June 10, 2008 **Signup for Weekly E-mail** [1]

THE LEAF SCAR

The leaf forms
slowly unfolds
feeding off the sugar it makes,
cooking in the kiln of the sun,
sending this sun-sugar through
the tiny venous system of its body.
The life of the leaf burgeons, lilts,
colors it green, red, yellow, then brown.
...The leaf falls,
leaving a scar on the branch,
etching the wood, so you can see
something has broken away.

End of life? No.
By this means, another band of branch is grown.
In the next season comes a bud,
then a leaf, then another scar.
And thusly another band of branch grows
and is connected to the last one.
So goes the tree of living wood,
growing upward, outward, full and whole.
Over and over.
The tree expands.
Scar by scar.

Amen.

It is soon Father's Day and if one could tell the caretaking temperament of a woman by what's inside the black hole of Calcutta, I mean her purse, then perhaps a man's desire to fix all things that come before his sight and his hearing can be understood by the small carpentry and repair shop he carries around in his heart....

The tiny repair shop of the heart
Some say that fathers have no time for their families nowadays that so much is left undone, unsaid. But, I'd say, even in the midst of struggle, even in the midst of trying to catch favor or the fetching of one more aegis for himself, there is in every man, a small room, where he is wizard of the universe and where he hopes he has the

means and time to build and mend and fix most anything that might come before him, including himself.

That is the father's truest heart...

... a tiny corner workspace inside his heart wherein his soul keeps all manner of hand tools, psychic ones, which he plans to use, and does use to shape, to fasten, to plane and level, to tender, to repair, to splash with new color, to make as new all things within his reach... the persons dear to him, the creation of ideas, dreams and actions ... and also turning the mallet and chisels to the better shaping of his own ragged parts.

All this is in a man.

How ancient is the theme of the father who fixes people and things? Very old. The keeper of the hand tools, the noble cabinet maker, the woodworker, the carpenter, is an ancient leitmotif in tales since time out of mind. And, the subtext, most often, is about learning to "be real," to be faithful to the true self and all its gifts.

Geppetto, the father woodworker

The Italian Carlo Collodi, the creator of the story Pinocchio, was in his time--the early 1800s-- bound for the seminary and the priesthood. But his mischievous demeanor pre-empted that. He had to struggle to find the right fit for his own life. So, instead he became a preacher in a different way; he became a writer, and handed out his soulful stories like seeds.

Collodi's story of Pinocchio is one wherein, by the shaping of the pattern for the wood and by the harsher shapings via difficult life experiences, a piece of pinewood becomes a truly animated child, a ser humano, a true human being. In analytical psychology, this could be seen as representing the woodenness of the ego being overwhelmed by the true and fluid heart of the soul; the real magneto of a male's nature.

Pinocchio and his maker lost their leaves too, so to speak, and were scarred, but also grew as time and again they were challenged to relinquish ignorance and acting as though various important things are trivial.

Pinocchio suffered from having his legs burned away. Legs, in archetypal symbolism, point toward the ability to move in thought and action from one place to another with a plan, with determination... but also, legs can symbolize standing for something useful and important. New legs, new stances, new viewpoints to stand on and for... had to be carved for Pinocchio and fastened to him integrally again.

So too, many a man, many a father as he grows older, has his 'legs knocked out from under him,' and thereby willfully changes from naïve child into wiser man.

Pinocchio's maker, Geppetto, would often scold the puppet-learning-to-be-fully-human. But he also grew from scarrings, for his boy-son, his heart of hearts Pinocchio, was wont to wander off and nearly be killed time after time. Especially when the charcoal burners in the forest burned Pinocchio's legs, Geppetto found his heart torn apart.

It could be said that for the old man, as for any man, any father who helplessly loves the precious innocence in another--whether child or adult-and himself as well... that Angelus Silesius's prayer about loving and being loved beyond the merely human plane is a fit: that God may rise up in my soul and shatter me. In other words, that Love be allowed to open a man fully. All the way. Nothing withheld. Even if at first it feels like being ripped open and scarred.

In no way trite, and in every way arresting, one more scar means one more bract of branch grows outward.

Yusef, the father carpenter

And in an uncanny similar vein, there is another famous woodworker story, far more ancient: Yusef the Galilean shaper, the fixer, the maker who stood over and cared for the bashert, the destined love of his life, Mir-yam, and the child born God of Love. Yusef, himself, was from a line of kings (Davidian), yet he was dedicated not to palaces and pomp, but to working the woodenness of things into living arcs and joinery, into earthy and helpful, purposeful things for others.

Knowing Yusef's story-his standing up against the stoning of his Mir-yam and taking head-on the shrill opprobrium of the other men who were mad to kill her-can you imagine the men bellowing at Yusef? He didn't put up with 'appearances.' He insisted on the realness of the soul. Leaves falling everywhere.

Yusef, having to flee as a refugee with a brand new infant and weakened wife in the middle of the night, arriving as immigrants without papers in Egypt. More leaves lost. Scarring erupting at every turn.

Later, Yusef losing track of the beloved child in the Temple. My God, can there be anything worse than seeing your child one moment and having them appear to vanish the next? There just isn't. In all those heart-stopping moments, we know Yusef grew into a giant force, scar by scar by scar. When the force of the soul breaks through, the real self is constellated.

The old carpenter and the young carpenter

And too, there are tales of a carpenter who did not do so well at first... one 'semi-chestnut story' told in our family is about the old carpenter who had a son who was also a carpenter.

The old man and the young man worked together and turned out three masterful houses. But then, the son said he was tired and just wanted to take a year or two off, just to relax and play.

The grizzled old father begged, "Please, just one more house?
You'll be glad you set your tools to it, I promise you."

So, the son grudgingly agreed and set to work, but with only half a heart. This time his father did not work with him, so the son nailed here but not there; trimming out, but not evenly; mortises not matching; leaving the rough edges to ripped boards unsanded.

But finally the house was done.

The aggravated son got into his pickup thinking how much free time and fun he'd missed just because he'd taken on the building of this last dumb house.

But the old man came to his truck window holding out a set of keys. Here, these are yours, the father said smiling.

Mine? said the son.

Yes, as a gift. This house is yours... from me to you... to show you my gratitude for all the fine work you did on the three previous houses.

Well. Though one could say this story is about whether to be a conscientious worker or not, or whether to be immature vs. mature man and father, it is not a story only about those things exactly.

More so, though overtly a story about a boy-man building a house, it is also a story about how the inner workings of the mind might go as a man chooses how he will live, who he will allow himself to be in all his charisms that brook no acedias, how he will build for the soul in all things if there is no one there to watch. How he will be real by the soul's sight.

Will he build the beautiful house his soul can live in with joy, or will he slap-dash it together and then go busy-bore himself half to death doing repetitive, senseless endeavors?

The old father in the story mimics aspects of the archetypal father: the creator, the one who imagines and brings to fruition the wild and deep ideas in that younger male psyche. The wise old man of the psyche now says, Look, here's a leap of growth to be made, even though you're tired: This time, be true to yourself, to your gifts, your craft, even if no one is watching, even me... especially me.

The boy, without realizing it, is building a home for his own life; the walls or lack of them, the colors or lack of them, the breadth and scope or lack of it, the depth of meaning or lack of it. That he doesn't build with imagination to the edges of his craft and knowledge-regarding everything that shows above ground, and everything that is hidden behind the skins of the house-- represents a loss for him. A terrible loss of the vast acreage of the self; a loss of competent and cared for abode for the one wild and worthy soul.

The drive to become real is so important for habitation of soul, it is addressed in stories from ancient times to the present

Viz: not knowing how to construct, or knowing how, but nonetheless just turning one's head for a time, or somehow sloughing it all off a bit instead of being present to the craft of the soul- this ancient leitmotif of 'the uncompleted self' which mirrors the father/son carpenters story, is found in an ancient document called 'first letter to the Corinthians' 3: 12-15. Paraphrased, it goes like this:

"Don't be reckless in choosing the materials you're going to build with. Eventually, the inspector cometh. If you use cheap or warped goods, the jig will be up. The inspection will be by the sighted, not by the blind. You can't throw it together just to get by. If your work is even reasonably sound, the building is hale. If parts of your work don't pass, your errors will have to be corrected. You'll have to start over at those places that didn't work the first time. This might feel like being passed through the fire at times, yet you'll survive- but there might be scars."

In that 'first letter,' written by Saul-the-transformed (by falling off his high horse), the above words were written, I believe, by a man specifically to men. Paul is speaking about the grit of being a man who conveys, that is, who literally carries the holy knowing within. How a man lives his life in depth is like constructing a house by using the hand tools of his heart, his words, his deeds, his loves, his losses, and yes, too, his scars. Paul is saying, if you don't do it well enough the first time and many things fall, then whether you be father, lover, son or brother, you'll have more chances.

But, not without loss. Even though scar tissue may result from lack of knowing, from being afraid, from loathing to leave the rewards of trading real life for one of self-induced taxidermy, there are still generous possibilities for redoes of shortfalls and wrong turns... claw-hammering out nails, reorienting, retaking the castle so to speak, reshaping oneself-or one's offspring if the pattern's been accidentally handed down-rerouting one's genuine ideas to flow with one's actual actions at last.

That not so well constructed house can ever be rebuilt where needed, and with more care the second time around, sometimes a third time, or many more times if needed. It's alright; the integrity of the foundation is born into the man, even when he doesn't think it's so, or fears it is no more.

And that little workshop within a man's heart, where the soul presides and teaches, and where so much is given to repair, replacement, building? it's that protected temenos, that healing, strengthening and inventing space where the ego tamped down learns to dare be authentic... that is fully present in a man, too.

Fully alive. Fully real. Fully within reach.

"Getting Real: The Small Workshop in a Man's Heart" and "The Leaf Scar" poem excerpt from *La Pasionaria: Collected Poetry* ©2008 All Rights Reserved, Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés. Permissions: projectscreener@aol.com

---

Source URL (retrieved on *07/28/2015 - 13:54*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/el-rio-debajo-del-rio/getting-real-hidden-room-mans-heart-fathers-day-2008

Links:
[1] http://ncrcafe.org/node/27