

# *Sister Who's Perspective*

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*Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding.*

*Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed.*

*Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified.*

*Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who*

## *Holiday Stories*

*The word "holiday" actually derived from the two words, "holy day," which is not a particularly well-kept secret. What more often escapes our attention, however, are the ways in which our individual and unique celebrations of this holiday season are filled with the holiness of timeless memories and the integration within our minds, hearts, and lives of past, present, and future times of our lives.*

*As I was decorating my small tabletop tree last night, I found myself again confronted with deeply stirring memories. I knew the story of nearly every ornament, as I carefully unwrapped them from the bits of old paper towel in which they'd spent the last year, stored in the shed. Most directly of all were the two slices of wood taken from the bottom of live holiday trees my former life-partner and I had shared in the past. In each case, I'd taken a slice perhaps a quarter of an inch thick from the bottom of the freshly cut trunk, allowed it to dry for several months afterwards, and then written on the slice with a permanent marker, the corresponding year and the names of those whom our family included during that particular holiday season.*

*I was dismayed, however, to discover ornaments which had broken during the passing months in storage, some of them very old and rare family heirlooms. Perhaps it was time to move on in that area of my life, I concluded. As much as I am thankful for having an excellent memory for times, places, people, and experiences of the past, I know that this also encourages a tendency to hang onto things long after they have served their purpose in my life.*

*Additionally, as I reflect briefly on the story and significance of each ornament I*

*place upon my holiday tree, I am reminded of things about which I perhaps have not thought since I carefully packed the particular ornament for storage last year. More than the electric lights upon the tree, it is these memories and fresh reminders which bring the most light to my life during this otherwise darker time of the year.*

*The bright pink ornament on the lower right side was one I found in an antique store in New Glarus, Wisconsin, when my former life-partner and I were in the area one summer in the early 1990s for my high school reunion. The dark red glass ornament, pointed at both top and bottom, was purchased from the Macy's department store in New York City when I lived about a dozen blocks away while attending an acting school there in the early 1980s. The two tiny gingham hobby horse ornaments, one red and the other blue, I found at a small country crafts store in Estes Park, Colorado, early in 1989, just about the time I finally consciously discovered that I'm Gay, allowing my life to take a turn in a new direction I'd never before imagined I'd go. The snowflake made of silver wire and clear plastic beads was a gift from a friend who lives somewhere in the state of New York, whom I've never met directly but chatted with numerous times by telephone and within a specific Internet chat room. On the lower left side is a glass ornament of a nun on a motorcycle, entitled "Holy Roller," which I found at a gift shop in Ouray, Colorado, while visiting a friend who lived in a small town nearby. He is a remarkably dedicated school teacher, but goes to great lengths to hide the fact that he's Gay, for fear of losing his job. Higher on the left side is a glass ring-necked pheasant with a real pheasant tail-feather for a tail, which I found in a little gift shop miles from anywhere in*

the northwest corner of South Park in central Colorado, virtually in the shadows of Colorado's greatest concentration of fourteen-thousand-foot peaks. In Wisconsin, where I grew up, wild ring-necked pheasants were quite plentiful. On one of the lowest branches on the right, is a simple blue plastic french horn with a tiny red bow tied to it. It only cost fifty cents or so when I bought it from the dime-store where I worked just after high school for a year or so, but the store was torn down several years ago and is now no more than a parking lot, instead of an icon of a bygone era, with squeaky wooden floors and old clunky cash registers. A small blown-glass lion ornament hanging on a low branch in the center, is a gift from my former life-partner, mostly because we were both born within the calendar range of the astrological sign of Leo. Recent additions include the rainbow-colored disco ball and the dark purple beaded ornaments I purchased in Australia, the latter being specifically discovered at a small shop on Manly Beach which looked out over the South Pacific Ocean. I'd seen oceans twice before, once in New York and once in Texas, but somehow this one seemed much larger and a much more formidable separation between myself and the rest of the world, while I was there.

How very curious, this holiday season is, that it can both bring people together and also make them feel worlds apart, even when standing within the same room. all throughout the year, it seems, we are so very conscious of all the ways in which we are different and therefore feel the need to maintain emotional, psychological, and sometimes even physical barriers to honest relationship. Sometimes the barriers are built of the substance of past emotional wounds, sometimes of unfulfilled expectations, and sometimes of wishes and dreams that didn't survive the generally adversarial posture of the civilizations we have collectively built. Within this holiday season, however, like the seasonal switch from growing darkness to growing light, there is the invitation to create more positive events and directions. Even in the midst of sadness, we can make our greatest gift the planting of good things within the hearts and lives of others and of ourselves.

One such sad event within this holiday season for me was the death of Gilbert, my

betta fish. He was the only companion I had when I first moved into my current humble home a year and a half ago. The house was completely uninsulated at the time and even in the summer, due to the elevation here, the night temperatures could drop as low as forty degrees Fahrenheit. I was safe enough inside of my down-filled sleeping bag, but it was difficult to find a way of sustaining a healthy temperature for Gilbert throughout the night. On one occasion, the temperature in his bowl dropped to fifty and I could tell that he was struggling, but he did nevertheless survive as I hurried to gently raise the temperature again just as soon as I woke up in the morning. The solution I finally devised was to position his fishbowl on a heating pad and plug the pad into a timer which would turn it on from midnight until four in the morning and again from noon until four in the afternoon. This pattern kept the temperature in the upper sixties to low seventies range and I was always delighted to see my hungry little fish come to the surface of the water for feeding each night. Now I have just his picture on the wall instead of his vibrant colors floating about in the fishbowl, yet I remain very thankful for the blessing that he was to me throughout all of the days we shared.

Similarly, as much as people in general celebrate this holiday time with friends and family members, I am also reminded of the friends who can now only join me in spirit, especially those friends who have died of AIDS-related complications. I hope that I am a better person for the love and understanding they each contributed to my life, during the times we had together. I hope that because of them and because of my memories of them, I am not simply another year older but rather that I am also a tiny bit wiser, a little stronger, and a bit more of a person than I was the last time I decorated a Christmas tree here.

So as the wind howls around the house and the driveway fills with snow, as Galahad my little black dachshund curls up to nap because there's nothing more boring for him than when I spend hours on the computer putting together another newsletter, I give thanks that not all efforts go unrewarded and that through self-discipline, perseverance, and a generous amount of divine blessing, I am finally home.

## Updates and Exhortations

Last month's newsletter was printed on very high-quality paper because I was trying out a new process of composing the newsletter on my computer, emailing it to a professional printing and copy center, and having them print the newsletter for me. I no longer have a large-format inkjet printer because the printer I've been using for the last several years was not compatible with the new computer my former life-partner assembled for me. Unfortunately the low price originally quoted to me by telephone for this new way of getting the newsletters printed, turned out to be a misquote and the actual cost I was charged was far too high to continue. Not having the proper printer, therefore, I have had to resort to printing on letter-size paper and stapling multiple sheets together instead of printing on eleven by seventeen inch paper and then folding the paper in half. I hope this is not a problem for anyone, though if it is, I welcome all suggestions and also ask that you tell me about any problems caused by this change.

As to the production of television shows, a particular video player which I will need to use, is long overdue for a complete tuneup at the repair shop. Once this is accomplished, I can begin recording interviews and other actual show material. Since I am hoping to find new broadcasting and cablecasting companies interested in distributing my shows, it seems appropriate to once more create a new introduction for the show. My preference, considering where I live, is to videotape as much of this as possible, outside in the mountains near my home. The best time of year for such an activity, however, would probably not be until next May. As much as I would prefer not to wait so long, it seems wise to make every effort to make this the most beautiful, high-quality, and universally appealing introduction I can and to use the time between now and then to plan the introduction as well as possible.

With all of that in mind, I invite all of you to help me brainstorm the new introduction in all of its details by sending me whatever thoughts you may have about Sister Who's ministry, identity, significance, and so forth.

At this point I am planning to retain the same music as I have used since the very beginning, a kind of snappy upbeat organ-sounding music which includes rhythmic percussion. I am also planning to recreate the original first shot of my profile (out of costume) indoors in front of a window with a gauze curtain.

The shot begins by including all of myself from the waist to the top of my head and slowly zooms in to a tight shot of just the profile of my face, as the standard voice-over (my voice) is heard: "I always knew I was different, but I could never figure out what it was, so I was very unhappy. Then I discovered I was Gay and I began to like myself. Then from somewhere deep inside of me, I heard the calling to be a nun." The first drum beats of the introductory music are then heard, after which the shot cuts abruptly to a shot of--well, at this point I'm not sure. Of the three introductions I've done in the past, the first one cut to quick and alternating shots of myself out of costume and myself dressed as Sister Who, the second cut to a closeup of Sister Who's gold hiking boots walking along a road, and the third cut to various symbolic actions by Sister Who on a mountaintop (things like lighting a candle, putting together a jigsaw puzzle, etc.).

The current main idea of the new introduction is to videotape myself applying the makeup and costuming, somewhere outside in the mountains (obviously on a warm day). In that the music for the introduction is only about sixty seconds long, making a total introduction time of one minute and fifteen seconds and the time required to apply makeup and get into costume is about three hours, representative shots of various points of the makeup/dressup process would have to be used. The final shot of the introduction would presumably be something like walking to a nearby ridge and posing briefly with my arms outstretched in a prayerful gesture.

Yet something seems to be missing. I don't want to get too literal, considering that so much of Sister Who's ministry involves symbols and metaphorical interpretation, but neither do I want the introduction to be just a presentation of no more than the physical process of applying makeup and costume. I suppose the introduction should be somehow suggestive of the activities of a twenty-first century nun, but I have been unable to come up with any way of effectively portraying this within a few camera shots, lasting only a few seconds each.

So I am opening myself to the creation of this new introduction being in some sense a community activity, simply wanting to serve the work in the best way possible. In that divine creativity often shows itself in even unlikely ways and places, direction regarding the most effective form of this new introduction and/or series of shows might come through any one of us. I certainly never thought as a child that I would ever be a television producer in even the most marginal sense, yet my shows have

now crossed the mark of ten years of weekly cablecasting in the city of Denver, Colorado, and continue to be cablecast there every Sunday at 12 noon on channel 58. More importantly, judging by the direct feedback I've received from people while walking in parades, hiking in the mountains, or helping out at various educational and charitable events, the shows have been helpful to many, many people--which is perhaps the best reason to continue.

As long as there is any good any of us can do, it seems to me that we should do it, especially in a time when the world is once again teetering on the brink of war and self-annihilation. Whatever opportunities cross our paths to spread a little love, wisdom, compassion, understanding, peace, or even just to set a better example of how to behave, such moments may be divine gifts to plant seeds of a better future for ourselves and our world. Though I am unsure of the author, I am reminded of the quote, "all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good to do nothing."

But what is effective, considering how unresponsive the collective mass of humanity seems to be to individual voices of protest? I'm not sure any of can conclusively answer that question, when we reflect on the people and events that have shaped our collective history. Again and again, the most unlikely people have wound up in the most unlikely situations and through no great action beyond remaining consistent with their own personal integrity, effectively steered the world in a positive direction. Abraham Lincoln, for example, was a failure at virtually everything, without any obvious direction or focus in his life, until he was elected president of the United States immediately before the Civil War. Marilyn Monroe was Norma Jean, an incarnation of "Rosie the Riveter," yet wound up dramatically altering the popular perception of womanhood, glamour, and freedom of self-expression. One could even wonder if without the contributions of herself and others, the

freedom of self-expression of the 1960s in America would have been quite so broad and deep. Leonardo DaVinci was the illegitimate son of a peasant yet it is difficult to imagine the Renaissance which completely changed European society, thought, and life without him leading the way. But what did he actually do beyond make a few drawings, do a few sculptures, leave behind some scribbled notes about fanciful scientific ideas he had, and create a few paintings that for reasons we can only speculate, caught the public's attention? Galileo may have made enormous contributions to the science of astronomy, but he spent the last twenty years of his life under house arrest as an alternative to being burned at the stake as a heretic.

Yet with regard to all of those mentioned above and hundreds of others as well, we would not be who we are without them. In the greater unfolding of human history, any act of kindness we do could be ultimately as far-reaching.

As easy as it is to be discouraged by immediate political struggles which display little intelligence or even common sense, there is a bigger picture of life of which we must remain mindful and therefore refrain from putting all that we are into something so small as the battle for a particular piece of legislation or for the election of a particular candidate.

Somehow, even if the worst possibility actually happens, life will go on and we must be there to continue to guide its path in whatever ways we can. I invite you to join hands with me in making the world a better place, one moment and one person at a time. It is not just the job of ministers and counsellors to do this, because the task is far too great. The task is so great, in fact, that it will require all of us working together, if it is to succeed at all.

May all that is good and holy, guide our thoughts and bless our efforts.

#### Subscription Information:

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