

# *Sister Who's Perspective*

*Sister Who's Perspective, Issue #69, March 2005, copyright*

*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*

## You, Me, and We

As one might expect, graduate school is proving to be an interesting but very challenging experience. If I thought I was caught within an avalanche of new ideas, insights, and freshly empowering if also tentative conclusions at any other time within my life, such times were trivial in comparison to what I am experiencing now.

Many of the phrases I've coined within the past are coming back to me--not in the sense of haunting or challenging me, but rather with the intent to empower me to deal with current situations and circumstances.

"Within every moment of life is both a lesson to learn and a ministry to perform." Circumstances and events I find severely objectionable are not for that reason mistakes, which is why I ask (as neutrally as possible), "Why is it important for me to know this?" I do not wish to casually and quickly reject a particular challenge, but rather to honestly know its significance and educational message.

A public issue with which I was recently confronted (or should I say, by which I was viciously attacked), was that of racism.

Knowing this to be a very sensitive issue about which many cannot speak with an open mind or the intent to engage in relatively unbiased dialogue, I attempted to hold my tongue. Everyone who knows me to any great degree is probably now snickering, as they read this. No, I was not able to do so for more than a few moments.

I suggested that societal racism needs to be addressed separately from the individual practice of racism, if ending racism is truly our goal. Unfortunately the goal of those present was apparently not the eradication of racism, but rather the task of assigning blame.

The response I received from nearly everyone within the room was not the academic mutual respect I sincerely hoped would prevail. Rather, I was labeled inherently and terminally racist and my attempt at intelligent dialogue was swiftly terminated.

I maintain, in spite of this experience, that societal racism and the individual practice of racism

must be addressed separately, if we wish racism to fade into history.

In that this a very large and expansive issue within the evolution of human civilizations, I believe we will all have to work together, if racism is to ever fade away, to any significant degree. In order for us to work together, we will need to remain mutually respectful (something which is inherently incompatible with assigning blame). We will also need to begin with each of ourselves, since human civilization is far too vast for any single individual acting alone to make a direct and observable difference.

It may be, however, that by daring to begin with ourselves and to act alone, others will be inspired to do the same, until a more effective communal response is achieved.

My best personal response to the challenges of this societal situation will not be inspired, however, by making me the scapegoat for thousands of unknown predecessors who acted badly within their application of forms of administrative authority, which has never been available to me. I do not think, in any case, that there is great disagreement that American society is in serious need of reform in many, many areas.

To return to the bigger picture of life on earth, however, I once again am reminded that with the exception of isolated incidences, all extremes are bad.

It is just as bad, for example, to be heterophobic as to be homophobic. In both cases, one removes the possibility of relationships of unconditional love and rejects the contribution of the other--the other who may have been created by God in a specific way to meet a specific need that no one else can meet. Similarly, it is just as bad to obsess about racism as to insist that it does not exist.

If one insists that white men (or any other identifiable classification) are racist but is nevertheless unable to identify how a non-racist white man would speak, act, or think, the likelihood strongly exists, that one is practicing the very racism which is opposed--judging one

who is otherwise unknown, entirely upon the basis of skin color.

Within this and many other areas, I find humanity is being collectively reminded of a certain ancient wisdom. The Bible has generally rendered this as the notion of not attempting to "remove a splinter from your brother's eye until after you have removed the board from your own." I prefer the more modern paraphrase, "Whenever you point a finger at someone else, you have three more pointing right back at yourself."

Addressing problems within our world, begins with humility, requires honest self-evaluation, and demands that we address whatever impurities we find within ourselves, in whatever ways we can.

I'm still pondering the question of why racism is being presented to me so forcefully and in so many ways. A thorough self-evaluation with regard to this issue has failed to produce any new information and insisting that the problem exists within me but is hidden is helpful to absolutely no one--except perhaps to those who would have me become stuck in a stagnant loop of obsessing about the possibility of invisible racism within myself.

With regard to skin color, trading places doesn't solve anything. What we must learn is that there are no wrong colors, that every person who is visible is inherently colored, and that labeling someone "colorless" is an attempt to negate, invalidate, and render invisible someone who within other circumstances might be named a child of God.

Life must move on. We must individually and collectively begin today to create what we want the world to be, rather than simply recreating what it has been, by assigning the same roles to different actors. Double-standards must stop.

In speaking with a person who must daily struggle with certain physical challenges, I volunteered that I find no consolation within the knowledge that certain others face far more difficult challenges than I (though of course there are also those whose challenges do not even begin to equal the severity of mine as well).

"Everyone has personal challenges," I said, repeating consistently unhelpful words.

What occurred to me next, however, was that the real question is whether or not the particular person has either been given or been able to create, some mechanism by which to cope with the particular challenge. For example, a paraplegic who is receiving whatever assistance is needed to carry on daily life, has a certain peace of mind which is not available to someone whose car has just broken down along a remote highway, who also

does not have a mobile phone, radio, or any other means by which to resolve the immediate situation.

Thus it is not the particulars of the situation but rather our individual abilities to cope, which create the more basic emotional reality.

I recall again the insight within The Three Faces of Mind by Elaine DeBeauport, that emotions are simply the result of the mind's ability or inability to meet its needs.

Although I remind myself to avoid taking things personally, every moment feels intensely personal because it's me having the experience.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to imagine that anyone else having the same experience, might also both receive the same response and feel the same emotions. My observation of life continues to confirm that people do not act in bad ways toward me because of who I am, but because of who they are (their experiences, their beliefs, qualities of health and personality which are currently affecting them, etc.).

Similarly, I strive to continue acting, speaking, and thinking in ways that express who I am, rather than in ways which merely reflect whatever is around me. Sometimes the best response to the unfolding of evil within the world, is simply to go on being true to that divine spark of life and love, hidden deep within each of us.

The larger picture of life is often too large for any individual human mind to comprehend, but even a brief glimpse of this larger picture suggests that ultimately life is about the growth of the soul. We are alive so that we can learn how to love, how to be wise, how to balance paradoxical qualities and situations, and ultimately how to be just a little more like God.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

*"When I'm standing so close  
that I can't see anything  
beyond the present moment,  
may I always strive to bring to it  
the larger, wiser,  
and more loving self  
God has made me to be."*

*-- Sister Who*

## Time to Bounce

My thoughts are often drawn of late to a book I read a year or two ago, How High Can You Bounce. The central idea of the book was understanding that, like a rubber ball thrown downward at a concrete sidewalk, our response to times of great compression generally determines how high we will fly immediately thereafter.

My first quarter of graduate school has certainly been a time of great compression. I can only hope that I will always know two things: 1) when to try a little harder and 2) when I have done my best and (having done my best) to therefore stand my ground and refuse the possibility of being destroyed in any way by the experience.

I have often heard versions of the old adage, "what doesn't kill us, makes us stronger." I find wounding within this phrase to the extent that it is used to brush aside opportunities to show compassion to someone in pain. I find wisdom within this phrase to the extent that I am able to become stronger and to the extent that emphasis is placed upon the word "us."

So many more things become possible when we work together, that it seems odd to want to do anything all alone. Even competitive athletes prefer a cheering audience at the finish line, though I understand from personal experience the intense and sustained focus which is essential to preparation for such an event.

Such focus and sustained effort, however, is generally not encouraged by the world within which we all live. Countless challenges call for our energy and attention each day, each thing claiming to be more important than all of the rest, each thing competing for pieces of my soul--if there is in fact a piece of my soul that I am willing to surrender.

From one perspective, my soul is not for sale and never has been. From another perspective, I do surrender pieces of my soul to the pursuit of those dreams and relationships I find most essential to my life and happiness. One of the great challenges to myself within the previous sentence, however, is the recognition that the love in my heart exists in greater supply than do pieces of my soul.

I may have enormous love to give to whomever crosses my path, but I still have only twenty-four hours per day and certain limitations to my physical, mental, and emotional strength as well. It does not make me happy that I cannot demonstrate love to every person within every situation. It does not make me happy that I am never able to start and finish every creative project

which I've imagined. I am especially not happy with my tendency to be irritated and short-tempered with uncooperative people, pets, and circumstances, when I simply am too tired to be at my best level of behavior.

That's when it's time to bounce. How? By fixing my eyes on something higher, lighter, brighter, and bigger than the cold concrete sidewalk against which I have been thrown. I do not, however, do this in a way which denies the cold concrete sidewalk. Rather I do this in a way which identifies the concrete as a sort of divine hand, pushing me skyward. It is not that I have encountered an adversary who is intent upon destroying me, but rather that I have encountered a surface much stronger than myself, which is doing its best to launch me high into the air.

But it hurts. Yes, of course it hurts. A rubber ball has a certain relaxed density which feels comfortable. Compression causes uncomfortable feelings which inspire the rubber ball to push away. Without this compression, however, the ball will rise no higher than the surface of the sidewalk. Pain is one of the ways that the body is inspired to take positive action and to engage in healing. Without pain, the body will never know which part needs healing.

In prayer I once confessed that actually, yes, I would like (at least for a little while) everything to go well, all efforts to be rewarded with accomplishment, and all needs to be quickly and efficiently met. Unfortunately for me, I seem to have a major over-abundance of "reality checks." People are not always honest, life is not always fair, the good are not always rewarded, and the evil are not always punished.

All that being said, God is still God and I have never known more joy and peace than when I am quietly and calmly seated within God's presence. It's as if divine joy doesn't care how much is wrong within the world, nor how much is wrong within my life. It will exist anyway.

If only we could consistently aspire to the same standard: to dance as if the number of times we'd stumbled really didn't matter; to love as if the number of times we'd been hurt really didn't matter; to believe in God as if the number of times we'd doubted really didn't matter. These are real experience, yes, but they are all past experiences. We're about to bounce and by the looks of this time of pressure, it's going to be a very, very high bounce.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

## Soft Whispers of Night

The porch-swing creaked, swaying back and forth beneath the stars above. The dogs were barking through the fence at a stray cat in the alley, until it finally crept away, indifferent to the noisy protests of its presence.

There are not so many stars in the sky as when I lived high on the mountain, or so it seems. The glare of city lights has hidden them behind smog-filled skies.

Does it matter that there are fewer stars? The sun is our star, the only one we really need to sustain life on this planet. The other stars are distant, foreign, and not places to which we expect to travel--not within this lifetime, at least. Is one star better than another? Perhaps not, but if there are people on other planets, then they are probably thinking the same thing--that their's is the best.

Consider, in any case, the effect these distant lights have had. Countless tales have been woven around the visual combinations within the night sky, vast systems of mythology and perhaps even magic, described and guided by perceptions which are not duplicated anywhere else within the universe. From any other planet or point in space, none of the constellations would appear as they do from here.

Striving to be prepared for whatever lies ahead, we have crafted elaborate systems by which to predict the unfolding of our individual and collective lives. After thousands of years of such study, we still don't know precisely what the outcome of any life or situation will be. There are only probabilities and influences.

Why do I look at the stars? I glance downward and smile for a moment, feeling a wet nose against my hand. Galahad wants to join me on the porch swing and Tristan is not far behind. So the three of us sit for a quiet moment on the porch swing, enjoying each others' company, as I again ask myself, "Why do I look at the stars?"

I suppose it is that they are so mysterious, incomprehensible, and filled with possibilities. Perhaps just because they're pretty. Perhaps I sit here gazing at them (as an hour ticks away) specifically because I don't understand them and it's kind of nice to have something unknown within a world that seems a little too sure of itself.

"These are the answers--the only right answers," I have heard far too many times. For better or worse, I don't feel that degree of confidence about my own answers. Instead I feel like I have far too much to learn, to ever claim that

sort of intellectual authority. I look carefully, listen closely, think deeply, and (to the best of my ability) pay close attention to every intuition, feeling, and thought--working as patiently as I'm able, to weave it all together with some minimal degree of harmony and balance. It's a lot of hard work--just not the sort for which a capitalistic society is willing to offer financial compensation equal to even the most minimal costs of living.

But what is it worth? Hmm. What is the value of a few moments on a porch swing beneath a night sky filled with stars, with two dachshunds resting their heads on my lap? What is the value of the deep awareness within this quiet moment, of joy and peace and love . . . and God?

The old wooden floor in the bathroom is gray and unfinished. The roof on the front of the house is sagging in spots. The basement wall is bowed inward and has a big hole dug next to it, to discourage further damage. The furnace whines and wheezes at times. When it rains, I pump as much as eight inches of water out of the basement, because of negative drainage all around the house. The vinyl siding is old and has holes and cracks everywhere I look. The front door is so poorly fitted to its jamb that light shines through around all of its edges. The linoleum tiles on the kitchen floor have come up in spots and the cupboards are only half-painted. Fiberglass insulation is visible within some of the walls in the bathroom, held in by plastic sheeting. Graduate school so far has been mostly a nightmare of overwhelming situations, for which I feel very poorly equipped, and professors who seem incapable of clear communication. I was even given a failing grade on a research paper upon which I'd worked very, very hard.

But it's okay. This is my home, perhaps the most real home I've ever had. All the bad stuff may be true, but joy is true too and there is joy and love to be found in quiet moments on a porch-swing with two dachshunds, stars in a night sky, and the beautiful mystery of God's presence. If the world were to end tomorrow, I'm very glad to have been here for this beautiful and blessed moment.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

### *Subscription Information:*

*"Sister Who's Perspective" is a free monthly newsletter. If you have appreciated this newsletter, please consider making a donation to encourage production and distribution to continue. (Please make checks payable to Denver NeVaar).*

*Sister Who, PO Box 593, Westminster, CO 80036*

*Email: [dn@sisterwho.com](mailto:dn@sisterwho.com)*

*Internet website: <http://www.sisterwho.com>*