

Finding a Song – New Narrative After Murder

By Margot Van Sluytman

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For those who wish to sing, there is always a song.

Swedish Proverb

Senseless violence with the murder of my father, Theodore Van Sluytman, in Toronto, in 1978, completely devastated me. At sixteen, I was thinking about marks, pimples, and volleyball. When I found out from a very tall police officer that my Dad was dead, my world changed. Forever.

As if rooted in the soil of anguish and pain, I felt that no matter how fat or thin I was, I could not walk without dragging the entire universe of sorrow with me. At that time, healing from that anguish was not even a concept. One healed a bloodied knee, or a broken bone; one did not fathom what it might mean to heal a broken heart, to never again enter the world without unspoken anguish and raw incomprehension.

In a very simple, profound, and subtle way, I did enter healing, however. Words not only saved my life i.e. reading and writing. But eventually gave me my life back. The man who murdered my Dad, after reading about the work I do with poetry as healing voice, wrote to me. And I chose to respond.

I now know the words Restorative Justice, and I know many different meanings of that phrase. I now know restoration and transformation. And I know something else besides, and it is this: No one can tell you how to feel. No one can ever enter your personal journey, your story, and your life. Your journey through healing is your own.

I do not believe that any of us is exempt from raw savage pain. I do believe however that compassion for ourselves and for others leaves room for the beginnings of dialogue, challenging dialogue, with what it means to enter our life with a view to finding and or creating new normals that can in time include renewed hope.

I am filled with utter gratitude because the man who killed my father cares about what he did. His actions and words express that, and that matters to me. This is one aspect of Restorative Justice and hope. Only one.

Ram Dass' words speak to me in relation to the fact that Glen Flett and I have met, and have shared in ritual of hope and transformation:

You and I are the force for transformation in the world. We are the consciousness that will define the nature of the reality we are moving into.

I believe that the encounter we have shared asks me to acknowledge how I might participate as a force of transformation. A deep sense of being supported continues to fill me. In sharing this short essay now, I feel supported. You are too. That we have choice to give and receive kindness and hope has been highlighted for me in knowing that life always asks us, as Gandhi said, to participate in being the change we wish to see. We can find the songs we need, we can in fact write them. And we need many, many songs.

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<http://www.nald.ca/litweb/province/ab/acea/newslet/sept07/1.htm>

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Margot Van Sluytman is an Award Winning Expressive Writing Facilitator and poet whose courses, workshops, and talks have been presented in North America.

She is currently embarked on work with Restorative Justice, having the gift of receiving and accepting an apology from the man who murdered her father in 1978. In a most astounding manner, their paths have crossed, and marking ritual, respect, healing, and their shared belief and work with healing voice, has permitted content and concrete hope and possibility to victims and offenders alike.

Her most recent books include: *Dance With Your Healing~tears let me begin to speak*; *Contemplative Waiting~Write Into the Heart of Your Spiritual Journey. Poetry and Journal*; and *Layers of Possibility~Healing Poetry from The National Association for Poetry Therapy Members*, this book features the poetry of the poet-healers, and a Foreword by Robert Carroll, MD, of the Department of Psychiatry of UCLA.

She has just completed her book, entitled, *Dialogue of Hope*, about meeting the man, Glen Flett, who killed her father, Theodore Van Sluytman. Dr. Michael Hadley, University of Victoria and Dr. Howard Zehr, PhD, Eastern Mennonite University, will each offer quotations of endorsement for the cover Margot's book. Rod Carter, PhD, Queens University, will write the Introduction.