



**FROM THE POUSTINIA**

*a Russian term referring to a place set apart for solitude and stillness.*

*At Life/Work Direction it is the space where I meet with Spiritual Companions.*

**DREAMS OF CHANGE IN MY LIFE AND WORK**

*musings by Eunice Schatz on her life/work:  
how spiritual and psychological elements intersect—explored through dreams*

Winter 2009

*“I’m pregnant,”* I said to a friend last summer.

She looked at me, startled just for an instant, then laughed, waiting for an explanation. My remark came from the riveting experience of a series of vivid dreams beginning last summer. Something was gestating in my inner life, struggling to come to birth. I called it my pregnancy. I knew I was to pay attention and engage in the process just as a first-time expectant mother might.

**Awakened by Dreams**

The first dream set the stage:

*I am to enter into higher education, and am enrolling for the first part of the year.*

I lived big parts of my life saying when perplexed about my future, “When in doubt, go to school.” This portends a different sort of schooling, and my teacher seems to be God.

Another dream followed quickly:

*I am at Boston College being shown the magnificence of the architectural design of the campus and its buildings, stretching over a wide area and very grand in feeling. The buildings are of brick, and the bricks not used are set aside where people work on them as artisans, using their creative ability.*

*After surveying all this, I meet a young woman who conducts a preschool on campus. Surprisingly, she tells us that she is lacking certain basic tools and toys—like art supplies and the like. I am disappointed that such a grand institution would have fallen short in these details.*

This confirms for me the “schooling” aspect, and I note that a distinctly creative process is going on. I am the woman connected with a *preschool*, marking me as a beginner, an appropriately humble way to learn. The dreams that followed pelted me with clues about the inner journey I was on. It was at this point that I recognized it as a pregnancy—a feeling of fullness, of expectation, of something coming to birth. One dream put me at a funeral where I was to lead songs, and two little girls—one Hispanic, one African American—who understand the songs help me. (Maybe they were from that preschool! New developments in perspective often constellate a healthy childlikeness in us.)

Then came a classic *identity* dream where I kept leaving my wallet unguarded, yet I found it untouched. Since this year of participating in the Shalem Program of Spiritual Guidance, I am struggling with my identity—particularly with regard to the intersection of psychological work and spiritual companionship:

How are they alike? How different? How are they overlapping each other? The dream tells me God must be guarding my basic identity, and is helping me retain the gifts He has given me in the way I work with others.

A line from a subsequent dream seems to touch on this conflict of mine:

*We are granted access to a psychotherapist's patient records.*

My first reaction is to heed this as an injunction to be *patient*. Going deeper, I realize I do not need to have a therapist’s kind of “access” to another’s process, but I am to open myself up to God’s point of view, often quite different from a human perspective. In contrast to therapy, spiritual guidance does not depend on diagnosis and intricate examination of another’s process, but is more of a “being with” and openness to God’s direction.

Lest I lose my sense of humor, God drops another image into my consciousness one night:

*At a group meeting, I approach two people who seem to be left out. They are lying on the floor under a grand piano. I go over and say to them humorously, “How are these two mice?”*

And just to make sure I am really listening, this bomb drops on a subsequent night:

*A woman poisons two of her three children but they survive because the third child, an older girl, intervenes.*

Who am I? Am I the woman? Or one of the three children? I decide to focus on the third child who is able to counter the poison. If something in me has to die—and this is a universal spiritual principle necessary for new life to be born—I will need her fresh young intuition.

**In the midst of these dreams last fall, the outer world around is shattering—Wall Street crashed, the economy sputtered to a halt—even as we were in the throes of the most exciting election campaign in memory. I was living in parallel universes!**

## **A Pattern Emerges**

Slowly, as autumn leaves began falling, I detected a pattern in my night messages, as I interpreted them in relationship to my work as Spiritual Companion. Something of who I had been in the past was to be preserved, but I was also to reach for something deeper that God was birthing in me. It had something to do with a quieter listening, a “not knowing,” and not being as intent on providing answers. That need to *fix problems* had to die. Then came a seminal dream:

*A young man is guiding Don and me to a campsite in the summer time. The route seems familiar, and the scenery is beautiful—wooded, green. There are going to be changes in the situation, something big. The guide knows the way and drives surely.*

*When we get there, the guide and I explore an area in a cavern in a dark place underneath an overarching roof. There is a lot of trash lying around. My guide knows that there is a powerful figure not present who gives commands and oversees everything. This unseen master wants the young man to preserve these odd bits of trash, something he and I both know.*

***We know that the overseer can use these bits of trash and make them over into art objects of beauty.** Realizing this, I look for particular pieces that lend themselves to that. I anticipate joyfully the days ahead with this familiar guide with whom I have a strong connection.*

This dream reassures me that I am continuing to be led along a track, and I have a sure guide with me, a Christ figure, and also Someone in charge overseeing things from a distance. I see that a master artisan can turn things I might easily discard into objects of beauty.

This raised painfully probing questions for me regarding the way I work with others:

- How much comes from *my own psychological insight*, and how much am I content *not to know*, and depend on God's wisdom?
- What is it in my hand that I tend to devalue, but that God values and wants to transform?
- What about things I value that need to be trashed! How absurd if I cling to these!
- Does the way I use some of my gifts turn them into trash?

I could get confused if I try to understand the dream. That word again: *understand*—something I value highly, but it sometimes gets in my way. Perhaps I need to turn to my guide who knows the mind of the Maker.

A great insight—and I bask in it. But patience, Eunice. As so often happens, when I interpret a dream too facilely, God immediately sends another one to make the point in another way. This one was hilarious:

*I was working with a gizmo where I had to screw some bolts on it, but had not yet discovered how they fit, so they were not going to work.*

Just like me to assemble the screws and bolts before I know whether or not they fit! Not too subtle a message, deftly designed for me as God knows me. Wait, Eunice, and see if your insights *fit* before screwing them into place to support the structure of your life and work as they emerge.

## **Changed by Love**

So far, well and good. I was seeing my life and work from a new perspective. But to work well in this calling, I need to **be in love**, to live in love. My connection with God is a love connection, not a cerebral one. In October came a “mountain top” dream - a “higher education” - one that put me into the arms of a lover.

*A young man proposes a day hike up Mt. Washington. The young man is attractive virile, strong, sensitive. I am unsure about being able to hike in the higher altitudes because of breathing problems. We drive up, and I am at the wheel. I have to be intent on the road, so when we come to a spectacularly beautiful place where a vista opens out, I have to keep my eyes fixed on the road, though I am aware of the incredible beauty there. Then I am at a point where there are others who need help in finding the way, and I can show them.*

*We reach the top of the mountain and I am in a forest in intimate contact with the young man, and we are in love. But there is something he must accomplish first - and we both know he must be true and settle that first before we can proceed with our relationship. My feelings are strong and passionate.*

The hint of love's consummation lingers in this image. I am strongly cathected to the young man – a kind of angel figure. The strongest moment is my embrace of the young man and acknowledgment of our love and knowing “you must be true.” And I must wait for the consummation of our relationship.

Meanwhile a mixed message lingers: my intentness on driving keeps me from viewing the broader horizon, and yet I am able to give guidance to others. The mixture feels like my life.

I stop here - wanting to take in the quiet exhilaration of this image. *Stopping*, I am discovering, is *the* basic spiritual practice underlying everything else. Stopping to receive Love, to be alive in the present, abandoning effort and struggle. Why is something so simple, also so elusive? Something so trite on paper, but in my dreams, and sometimes in my life, so radiant and alive and grounding.

Oddly enough, a nightmare breaks through to another level.

*I am lying down and near me a bright blue bird is hopping, coming closer to me. The color is an electric blue, and the bird is the size of a raven or pigeon. I am afraid it is going to come and peck me, so I need to cry out to my mother for help. I struggle to make a sound, and finally succeed. Don wakes up, and quiets me.*

What is this cry for the mother? Is my need now for Mother God - the *motherness* of God in my life? And if so, is this “*my bluebird of happiness?*” - a nice way to soften the impact of a nightmare.

I felt the motherness of God within me yesterday as I met with two women - embracing, sheltering, shrouding with prayer. Common pregnancy with them, and an inner stirring.

My pregnancy is stirring the mother woman in me.

*Of course*, it is pregnancy that makes someone a mother! I resisted the mother image for a long time, though I receive it now with warmth. And ironically, it is my life/work calling that has teased out my own neglected mother-ness.

A dream a few days later stabilized this sense:

*I am visiting a New Pillars Community, set up for persons wanting to live together in a way that reduces their carbon footprint on earth, the way Mennonites are known to do. Someone is explaining the philosophy and practices of the community. I feel the cleansing of the air, the spaciousness and order of things. I see they sleep in simple dorm style rooms. Most of the persons are comparatively young.*

*I understand that this is an offshoot of an older established Pillars Community, which I can picture - with great white pillars in front of the entrance. This is for older folks and might be where I would belong. I am struck by the possibility and opportunity to live in such a way. It feels a bit monkish and draws me.*

I awoke from the dream with a “good taste” in my mouth - positive feelings of contentment and purpose that I could carry into my day.

## **Tying the Cord**

As much as I would like to be able to tie the ragged ends of my process together neatly, it is in the nature of the process itself to defy that kind of orderly result. Instead, I am asking you, as you read my story, to attend to your own ongoing pregnancy story—including dreams that descend upon you. Nighttime provides such a wonderful screen on which to portray the symbolic forms and circumstances that tell you what you do not know in any other way.

We are all a work in progress. We are never “finished.” I close with a story told by Anthony Bloom that carries its own point:

*St Philip Neri was an irascible man who quarreled easily and had violent outbursts of anger and of course endured violent outbursts from his brothers. One day he felt that it could not go on. He ran to the chapel, fell down before a statue of Christ and begged Him to free him of his anger. He then walked out full of hope.*

*The first person he met was one of the brothers who had never aroused the slightest anger in him, but for the first time in his life this brother was offensive and unpleasant to him. So Philip burst out with anger and went on, full of rage, to meet another of his brothers, who had always been a source of consolation and happiness to him. Yet even this man answered him gruffly. So Philip ran back to the chapel, cast himself before the statue of Christ and said, “O Lord, have I not asked you to free me from this anger?” And the Lord answered, “Yes, Philip, and for this reason I am multiplying the occasions for you to learn.”*

How liberating to call my discouraging failures *multiple occasions to learn* what God is teaching me as I navigate between *listening*—waiting for God’s wisdom, and *knowing*—leaning on my own insights.

If this is a nine-month pregnancy, I am entering my seventh month. I say to myself wryly, “Hey, I should be ‘showing’ by now!” Never having been pregnant, I can be allowed a bit of fantasy and humor about my process. The Poustinia where I work has been a wonderful Birthing Room. I am grateful for it. And for you.

As we pray for one another. . . *The Spirit helps us in our present limitations. For example, we do not know how to pray worthily, but God’s Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonizing longings that cannot find words. The ones who know the heart’s secrets understands the Spirit’s intention as they pray according to God’s will for those who love God.* Romans 8:26, 27, adapted