

*In a phone conversation with a LWD donor who was responding to our Donor Report, he used the phrase "When Eunice leaves the scene. . ." and went on to describe the necessary concerns this would raise in fund raising for a replacement. The phrase shocked me into consciousness—"leave the scene: sounded ominous and final! Yet, it evoked some thoughtfulness on my part and I turned to David Whyte's wonderful compendium of essays on words, and chose this one:*

## **THOUGHTS ON WITHDRAWAL**

—can be the very best way of stepping forward and done well, a beautiful act of mercy and as an art form, underestimated in this time of constant action and engagement. So much of what we are involved with, in even the highest cause, becomes involvement at the busy periphery, where the central conversation has been lost to the outer edges of what was to begin with, a very simple central invitation. Withdrawal is often not what it looks like—a disappearance—no, to withdraw from entanglement can be to appear again in the world in a very real way and begin the process of renewing the primary, essential invitation again.

Two words struck me: "essential invitation". What is that for me right now? What has it always been? I went back in memory to 1979 coming to Boston and seeking an opportunity to begin some kind of new work involving "life work planning"—the phrase I had latched onto in Chicago when I left for a new chapter in my life.

I remembered walking into Many Mansions—and the old building in downtown Boston being deconstructed—and then over the next months, recognizing the ministry envisioned there by others was not going to survive. At that moment the "essential invitation" for me was to spontaneously reach out to help Richard Faxon retrieve remnants of his own ministry vision, coupled with a half-formed sense that there was opportunity for something to rise from those ashes—something that Don and Richard and I could create.

Though life does seem determined to be a beautiful, and entrancing distraction—just as we ourselves are a distraction to others, testing them as we test ourselves and our mutual sincerity—our participation in this dance of distraction also makes more real, and more necessary, our ability to return to essential ground, to an essential person or an essential work.

How am I to participate in a withdrawal in my life and work now at this stage? Can I begin to see this withdrawal in itself as a *return to something essential* that has lain dormant?

We stick to the wrong thing quite often, not because it will come to fruition by further effort, but because we cannot let go of the way we have decided to tell the story and we become further enmeshed even by trying to make sense of what entraps us, when what is needed is a simple, clean breaking away.

This focuses me on the process of the past year where I have been conscious of the need to let go of many aspects of my working identity at Life/Work Direction. How may I sometimes have “stuck to the wrong thing” in the process: the search for a bookkeeper, the transition to a more intricate bookkeeping system, letting go of one bookkeeper and hiring another—a whole series of actions that were a sometimes unfruitful mix of effort involving others and clinging to what I knew how to control. Throughout the months, I wanted to make sure we did not abandon the simplicity and clarity of our tradition, and at the same time genuinely welcome new efficiencies that at the same time seemed more opaque to my “last century mentality.”

To remove ourselves entirely and absolutely, abruptly and at times uncompromisingly is often the real and radically courageous break for freedom.

So the simple, clean breaking away suggested by our Treasurer in January was freeing.

Unsticking ourselves from the mythical Tar Baby, seemingly set up, just for us, right in the middle of our path, we start the process of losing our false enemies, and even our false friends, and most especially the false sense of self we have manufactured to live with them: we make ourselves available for the simple purification of seeing ourselves and our world more elementally and therefore more clearly again.

We withdraw not to disappear, but to find another ground from which to see; a solid ground from which to step, and from which to speak again, in a different way, a clear, rested, embodied voice, our life as a suddenly emphatic statement and one from which we do not wish to withdraw.

What is this “other ground” from which to see? How am I to speak again “in a different way” and in a “rested, embodied voice”? Recently, I have been struck by what seems to me to be a new development in the kinds of issues people have been bringing to me in my work as Spiritual Companion. Several of these persons are older (67, 73 for example) and are exploring areas of their experience that call for a new level of depth, such that I am seeking Supervision from the person who most impacted my life during a turning point twenty-five years ago—a Jungian analyst (and former Carmelite monk). Working in this way does feel both rested and embodied and something “from which I do not wish to withdraw.” Rather, I seek the “simple purification of seeing myself and the world more elementally and more clearly again.