

CORPUS: Chronicles From the Vineyard

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The path for my spiritual journey was paved long before I was born. My great grandfather deeded a corner of the family farm in Canterbury, New Brunswick, Canada, to the local Catholic parish. A small chapel/shrine was built in honor of St. Francis of Assisi. I was baptized Francis Assisi Lawrence in that very chapel in 1927. Later in life I would joke that I was named after saints, both deacons, who were never ordained to the priesthood.

Since there were no Catholic schools in our area, I attended the public grammar school and high school. The first hints of my being attracted to the priesthood came with the death of a young priest in his early 30's who had impressed me with his vibrancy and sense of humor. When I attended his funeral, I was profoundly moved. I was also drawn into the mystery and mysticism of the Latin mass. But being in my late teens, I needed to get on with my life.

About two years later, I read Thomas Merton's **SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN** just after it was published. This account of a bright, educated young man who entered the Trappist Monastery stirred my soul. This time I really began to wonder if being a priest might not be my vocation. I consulted a mentor priest, and six months later, began a nine year educational journey: one year in preparatory school in Boston, two years at Holy Cross College in nearby Worcester, and six years at St. John's Seminary in Brighton, MA. I was then ordained in Boston by Cardinal Richard J Cushing in 1958, and, one week later, in the parish where I graduated from high school, I celebrated my first solemn mass. Among others, two assignments in my 14 years as an ordained priest proved to be most interesting and beneficial for my development. For twelve summers I was chaplain and administrator of Camp Pesquasawasis, the diocesan summer camp for girls in Danville, Maine. This assignment helped me develop organizational and managerial skills. It also provided me with a more casual environment compared to the rigid and role-bound atmosphere of rectory life. At a camp reunion two years ago, I told people that

every fall, when the time came to leave camp and return to the parish setting, I experienced a subtle but palpable feeling of depression.

The second assignment which replaced the first was a one and a half year position as a full time chaplain at the largest medical center in Maine. Here I learned to minister to people in crisis coming through the emergency center. I also did pastoral care in nursing homes, learning how to respond to the aging and dying. Both of these assignments were to provide valuable recommendations in my resume for future employment.

1968 was a momentous year for the United States as well as for Elaine and me. Independently of one another, Elaine (then Sr. Maureen, an Ursuline nun) and I were simultaneously assigned by our respective superiors to Waterville Maine in the same month of September. The synchronicity was so providential that we would later say that ours was a marriage made in heaven. Elaine and I were called to be coworkers in a variety of ways, not only through the CCD program and in the parish school where she taught, but also as members of Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam, known as CALCAV, and later as CALC.

Joining CALCAV was natural for me since in 1966, an event occurred which dramatically changed my views. An 18 year old had asked me to be his sponsor as a conscientious objector. I, whose pastor was a retired army chaplain, agreed to go with him before the draft board, one member of which was a prominent parishioner. When the CO status he had requested was rejected, a lawyer was engaged to bring his case to Federal Court in Portland. It was not until 1969 that Judge Edward Gignoux granted him CO status, -- the first Catholic in the state of Maine to receive it. In a subsequent case, a Catholic young man whom I also sponsored, was granted CO status by the same draft board. From that time in 1966, I became politically aware of issues of war and peace. I recognized then that governments sell warmaking to citizens, as they are doing now, and that in war, the first casualty is truth.

Joining CALCAV was natural for Elaine as well. Not only had I shared with Elaine an extensive article on Daniel Berrigan in **THE NEW YORKER**, but Elaine's other job as campus minister at Colby College nearby brought her in direct contact with the dramatic anti-war protests of college students at that time. In one of these actions, Colby College students, as others had done elsewhere, "occupied" the campus chapel where she and the other campus minister celebrated liturgy with the students on Sundays.

One memorable event we shared was the historic "Vietnam Moratorium" held throughout the United States on October 15, 1968. Elaine and I, along with other clergy, students and townspeople, marched from the campus to the center of Waterville. Standing next to us clergy was the distinguished John Cole who had recently founded The Maine Times which became a highly respected newspaper that championed issues of justice.

Elaine wrote to Anthony Padovano when she left the Ursuline Order in early 1970. His article in National Catholic Reporter had given her hope. Not only did he graciously answer her letter, but four years later when Anthony was keynote speaker at a CCD Conference in Maine, we made a point of attending in order to thank him in person for the support he had given us.

Once out of the convent, with her BA in English from the College of New Rochelle and her MA in Religious Studies from Providence College, Elaine continued teaching English in public high schools. My relationship with her continued even as later that year I was assigned as chaplain at the Maine Medical Center in Portland. During this time Catholic bishops worldwide had gathered in Rome for a Synod. Elaine who had also moved to Portland was eagerly following New York Time reports of Synod proceedings, hoping they would rule in favor of optional celibacy. But we know what happened to that possibility! After one and a half years as a chaplain, it became clear to me that I had to make a decision, -- either to stay in the clergy and end my relationship with Elaine, or leave the clergy and marry her. Up to this point, I had been in total denial that the option to leave the clergy was a real one. It was a wrenching decision, but once decided to leave, I immediately applied through the bishop to get freedom to marry.

Within six months, permission came from the Vatican under Pope Paul VI. Elaine and I were married at Holy Cross Church in South Portland on August 13, 1972.

Since my first job working at a shelter for boys turned out to be temporary, I had the experience of standing in unemployment lines to justify my unemployment check. I remember thinking, "This is what life in the real world is like." As my longtime physician told me, "They don't call the church 'Holy Mother' for nothing." My next employment as a social work supervisor for older people living in low income housing at Portland Housing Authority lasted for 23 years until my retirement seven years ago. Since I so enjoyed this work which I experienced as pastoral, I did not miss presiding at the liturgy.

Our involvement in our local parish has consisted in weekend liturgy when on occasion Elaine has also been cantor, membership in the parish peace and justice committee, and from the beginning, Elaine has been a lector. Whenever someone asked me if I were going to be a lector, I said I thought it was more important for the priest's wife to be in the pulpit rather than the priest.

Since the Vietnam era, Elaine and I have been involved in peacemaking, sometimes more deeply than others. We joined Pax Christi in 1980 and have been nurtured through that community ever since. In the early 80's we also became conscientious war tax resisters by withholding our portion of payment for nuclear weapons for three years, and symbolic amounts for the next five years. Today Elaine spends a lot of time doing "Email peacemaking" in addition to our participating in various peace actions in Maine, such as standing with Women in Black at a weekly vigil. If you would like to receive the insightful articles on peace that Elaine selects and forwards (some of which she gets from David Gawlik and Stu O'Brien,) just email her at Elaine@PortlandYoga.com.

As part of my peacemaking commitment, I have also for many years joined in anti-war protests at a Maine shipyard, Bath Iron Works (BIW), whenever warships are launched. Each BIW cruiser has the fire capacity equal to 840 Hiroshima sized bombs. One such

launching etched in my memory was presided over by Cardinal Archbishop John O'Connor of New York. The ship itself was named after a Jesuit priest chaplain. This is one indication of the acceptance in Catholic culture of such massive armaments. One Catholic Maine couple was so outraged by this that they held a sign for the Cardinal to see which read, "Jesus would have puked!" On another occasion at a BIW protest, I recall standing near Philip Berrigan when Federal Marshalls took him into custody for a previous Plowshares action there. Whenever I see a US flag displayed near the sanctuary in Catholic churches, I am reminded that the swastika was also displayed in German churches during Hitler's administration.

Elaine and I have Bill Manseau to thank for our joining CORPUS. When he came to Portland to speak to our Pax Christi group in 1990, we were moved by his presentation and grateful to discover that CORPUS was not a reactive but proactive community, one that we were eager to join. Since participating in my first CORPUS conference at the Twin Towers in New York City in 1991 (the very weekend Elaine was getting her yoga certification in New York), until the Dallas conference last June, CORPUS has continued to provide us with this very special community that we find richly rewarding, socially and spiritually. It is this element of faith sharing and the experience of brother and sisterhood in community which keeps us returning year after year. In Maine, along with John and Eileen Munroe, we are coordinators of a small statewide gathering of married priests and their wives. We meet four times a year for liturgy and a potluck meal. These gatherings are always animated and supportive.

Since the mid-90's, Call to Action Conferences have also helped us experience the kind of church where we feel at home. More recently, Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) has also drawn us, especially me. I admire the faithful persistence of members in educating themselves and holding the diocese accountable for its actions. I am strengthened by associating with these people of deep faith, integrity, and fairness. I realize the journey is a lengthy one, but since their process itself is satisfying to me, irrespective of results, I am prepared to be associated with VOTF into the future. As Joan Chittister so correctly pointed out,

VOTF may look conservative, but “The truth is that to aspire to give lay people a “voice” in the ongoing development and direction of the church stands for the biggest issue of them all: It stands for declericalization. And declericalization is the foundation for the renewal of the church.” (NCR 1/31/03)

Another enriching resource in our lives is Elaine’s work as a certified leader of the Dances of Universal Peace which are inspired by various religious traditions (Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Islamic and Sufi, among others). Her current mentor is Brother Joseph Kilegevice O.P. of Chicago who organized, outside of Chicago, the week-long Aramaic Lord’s Prayer retreat in 1996 led by Dr. Neil Douglas-Klotz in which Elaine participated. Dr. Klotz, an Aramaic scholar (who knows Hebrew and Arabic as well), has put some of Jesus’ words to music, viz, the Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes, and these “sayings:” I am the Bread of Life, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, I am the Vine, I am the Good Shepherd, I am the Door, I am the Light of the World. Deeply drawn by these unique dances, Elaine has since then studied yearly with Dr. Klotz who has given her permission to teach them. (He explains that they are not really “dances,” but rather, spiritual practices.) Accompanied by simple body movements which Dr. Klotz has created, the Aramaic Lord’s prayer “dance” consists of chanting the Aramaic words repeatedly (as in the recitation of the rosary.) In this way, the entire Lord’s Prayer can take up to an hour to pray. By now I have danced/prayed it many times both with Elaine, and with Dr. Klotz himself leading a group of about 100 people at the annual weekend dance retreat he has led at the Loretto Convent overlooking Niagara Falls in Ontario. I fully support Elaine when she leads sacred dance workshops, even lending my voice to hold up the men’s voices. This ministry is growing as she and I (who tag along) get invited by various groups, -- Catholic, UCC, UU, Quaker, and Maine’s Jung Center to lead them in sacred dance prayer.

It is amazing how one’s whole life can be turned toward a new direction through a mere remark! I was 51 and Elaine 43, that August in 1978 when we discovered yoga. It was I who, having witnessed a yoga demonstration, shared with Elaine my surprise by exclaiming: “Did you know that yoga massages the internal

organs?!” Intrigued, Elaine bought a book on yoga and began a practice that she found so compelling she began traveling out of state to get training, -- in Boston, in San Francisco for six weeks, in Bethesda MD, and even in Pune, India for nine weeks, to mention only the original training that she and I, perpetual students, make ongoing. Six years after discovering yoga, Elaine left her academic teaching profession of 23 years in order to devote herself full time to much yoga practice and a modest yoga teaching schedule at a local University. Then in 1989 she and I found a beautiful space for yoga near the Portland Museum of Art in the center of our charming city where we started our own Portland Yoga Studio. To find out more about our Studio where now 14 of us teach yoga, go to our award winning website www.PortlandYoga.com.

Yoga has brought us countless blessings, e.g. for me, relief from back and neck pain and, through yogic breathing, lifelong asthma. Yoga has also kept my adult onset diabetic condition under excellent control . Elaine’s arthritis and hip pain were greatly alleviated, and yoga did something dramatic for Elaine’s mother. It prevented her from needing the knee replacement for which her doctor was planning. Of course our bodies are still subject to “the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.” (Hamlet 3, 1, 62) In fact, Elaine is currently dealing with a knee/quad muscle problem. And, like everyone else, we also feel the effects of aging. But yoga soothes the stiffness and smooths the way.

Yoga is also a spiritual path for us in a way that enhances our Christian path. Pax Christi, CORPUS, CTA, VOTF are all organizations at the vanguard of the Catholic tradition in which Elaine and I grew up. Yoga, on the other hand, is an eastern discipline. (JM Dechanet OSB, author of Christian Yoga, called it “an asceticism.”) Although our spirituality is rooted in our Christian faith, it is expanded by other influences.

In my life, yoga has had a profound effect for the past 15 years. Though its postures are physical, they produce a spiritual effect which I experience regularly. This quote from Sam Keen’s *To A Dancing God: Rediscovering the Sacred Through Personal Mythology* expresses well what I mean: “Incarnation means grace is carnal,

healing comes through the flesh. The primary locus of the 'action of God' is in the viscera. A visceral theology demands reawakening of the body, the resurrection of the bodily. Words alone, even poetic words, are not enough. It is the real, literal, carnal body which must be resensitized and educated in the sacredness which lies hidden in its feelings." (pp. 144-160) I am also reminded of Ireneaus' saying: "The glory of God is (the human) fully alive."

For Elaine, from the beginning in 1978 when yoga drew her in, she was aware of the importance of keeping her Christian faith fresh. As Carl Jung said, (and she is paraphrasing here,) It is good, if possible, to stay connected with one's original religious tradition since it has much energy, reflecting as it does one's own authentic experience. As she felt the attraction of yoga, therefore, Elaine turned for balance to Edward Schillebeeckx' seminal book, Jesus, reading it with the eagerness with which while at Providence College she used to spend hours reading on her own about "The Quest for the Historical Jesus."

5

That interest of hers continued later with readings by authors of the Jesus Seminar, e.g., Marcus Borg. On the other hand, to digress a bit, what Elaine especially appreciates about Dr. Klotz books, especially (Prayers of the Cosmos and The Hidden Gospel, Decoding the Spiritual Message of the Aramaic Jesus) is that unlike the Jesus Seminar authors, his writing is not reductionistic. He is not interested in focusing on fewer authentic texts but on mining the gold in the existing words of Jesus. Elaine's spirituality is therefore clearly nurtured by her work with the sacred dances as well as with yoga.

On the subject of spirituality, Elaine's and my reading ventures range wide, but we also stay connected to our own tradition. We mention here only a few older authors and more recent ones which we especially appreciate: Thomas Merton, Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner, Eugene Kennedy and Donald Couzens. Elaine says that

John O'Donohue and Elizabeth Johnson's books are like an unguent for her. They provide her with such rich fare that she returns to them again and again for nourishment. We are both taken by Diarmuid O'Murchu's vision. Elaine says it gives her a similar sense of wonder that Alan Watt's book does, written in 1966: *The Book*, subtitled *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, was recommended to her by Dana Sawyer, an authority on Vedanta who teaches at the Portland School of Art. Elaine also recommends Pema Chodron's *When Things Fall Apart* and *The Wisdom of No Escape*, Bede Griffith's (OSB) *The Marriage of East and West*, Ken Wilbur's *A Brief History of Everything* and Helen Luke's *Old Age, Journeys into Simplicity* which was on the reading list for the course we took on "Conscious Aging, Conscious Dying," at the Jung Center to which we belong. For me, Huston Smith has been an inspiration. As a scholar of world religions he has studied and experienced all religious traditions. Yet he still returns to his local Methodist Church for worship serve. He is surely an extraordinary person, worth emulating.

Yoga is not a religion. Rather, it is to religion what philology is to language. Thus, just as philology is the science of language, not a language per se, yoga is the science of religions, not a religion per se. (Light on Yoga by B.K.S. Iyengar p. 39) Yoga therefore only broadens our views about life. For example, according to yoga psychology there are five causes of suffering called, in Sanskrit, "the kleshas. These are: ignorance of our true nature, egoism, attachment, aversion and fear of death. Patanjali, the author of the Sutras (2,000 BC) from which these teachings come, notes that the first cause of suffering, -- ignorance of our true nature, or "avidya," is at the root of the other four causes of suffering. Avidya could also be translated "not seeing," or "unenlightenment." So we can see that the eastern/Buddhist view of the goal of spirituality as "enlightenment" is encapsulated in this first "klesha."

Yoga has also provided us another way of peacemaking. Since wars begin in the human heart, helping sow peace within hearts, our own included, makes sense. We are grateful

too that it gives us a vehicle for direct ministry. We began teaching yoga at the local Cumberland County Jail in 1996 when Philip Berrigan and four other Ploughshares were incarcerated there for an action at Bath Iron Works. Now in our seventh year, we're readily recognized by the jail personnel. This jail ministry is something we need to do. We need to be educated about the realities from which our simple but protected lifestyle shelters us. We get more out of this jail ministry than we bring. We are touched by a lot of the people we meet in jail. One responsive inmate wrote: "You both gave me the gift of providing a sense of safety to tap into my inner self in an otherwise unsafe environment. I looked forward to being with you every week because you reminded me what I gave up for drugs and more importantly that I could return to Self and Spirit."

Here's another very big surprise for us! Even with a possible war looming over us, even with widespread news about the declining economy to frighten us away, Elaine at 67, and I at 75

6

find ourselves about to open an additional yoga studio in April! We blame our full time administrator who discovered the available space 10 miles north of Portland at a confluence of towns where there is need for a yoga studio. But we are especially in awe at the ways of Providence which melted our initial resistance and gave us unexpected energy to prepare the new space. As our administrator does the bulk of the work, we find ourselves very grateful that the Studio gives us yet another blessing, -- a way of being engaged in our community so that we can share the benefits we have received from this ancient practice. It is also our way of being generative. Elaine often tells people: "The Studio is our kids."

