



MIND MOON CIRCLE

SZC Sangha Journal
Autumn 2025

Grief and Joy are two sides of the same coin | Surrendering to our unique selves and to the flow of our unique lives



Supernatural excellence | painting | Janet Selby

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Thank you for contributing to MMC Autumn 2025.
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NEXT EDITION

MMC Winter 2025: What Colour is Zen?

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*Samhain has passed,
Sun low to the South,
Rain, wind, cold prevail.*

*At ninety, what is left?
Confined to a bed,
You write brief notes to others,*

*Spend time asleep, perhaps dreaming
Of people, places, birds,
Gardens with old roses,*

*Tiny flowers, grasses,
Of wilderness, of bare elm trees,
To a background of Schubert and Bach.*

*As with a sozu
Just one breathThok!
Then another.Thok!*

*To and fro,
Fro and to,
Through the day,*

*Through the night,
Following the sun,
Following the moon, till
Breath stops, life ends, Requiescat.*

CELEBRATING LIFE: RIDING THE WILD EDGE OF SORROW AND JOY

Subhana Barzaghi

Two dear dharma friends have recently died from cancer in the last 4 months. It has been heart-opening and heart-breaking. While grief and sadness of losing dear ones has etched my days, the treasure of their presence and spirit lives on in the heart and those who loved them. Joyce Kornblatt, dear friend, creative writing teacher, Insight Dharma teacher died on New Year's Day after a 7-year battle with cancer. Four months later, Julia Hush, a dear friend and long-term dharma practitioner's battle with cancer came to an end on 28th April, 2025. Both these amazing women were strong, inspiring dharma role models in how to wisely navigate the struggles and painful journey with cancer. Their legacy of wisdom, compassion and joy lives on.

At the celebration of Joyce's life, many hearts were full of sorrow, tears flowed freely and yet were bound together through love. Equally and joyfully, we celebrated the indelible mark Joyce had made upon all our lives. The other side of grief is love; they are woven intimately together. We grieve what we care about, value, treasure and love. It seems grief is made of tears and love and gratitude in equal measure.

While each person is unique and special, Joyce was one in a million. She was a celebrated brilliant author, a Buddhist teacher and gifted creative writing teacher which was her passion and her profession. Our woven fabric of friendship spanned 20 years. It was a privilege and joy to teach a number of meditation and creative writing retreats together. The title and theme that Joyce chose for those retreats was 'Broken Open Whole'. She often fondly taught that we can find beauty in the broken places, those tender vulnerable places of our inner life..... that is where the healing light gets in.

It was a delight to be part of Joyce's monthly writer's group for over 12 years. Joyce had an amazing capacity to create, a safe place of deep nourishment for writers, a refuge where everyone felt welcome and deeply accepted for who they are. She offered meditative practices of bearing witness, listening deeply to one's inner voices, writing into not knowing and trusting an emergent process. Her provocations and compassionate process gave permission to write about pain or family trauma, relational heart-ache as well as transcendent moments of revelation. Writing was a way of healing to work through her own painful traumatic experiences and then shepherding others. Her gentle compassionate presence was a deep and wide river which had been forged out of plumbing her own vital well-spring and depth. Believing that each person was gifted with their own unique voice, writing was

a way to express that gift. A common theme that emerged from her Sangha, Cloud Refuge and from the out pouring of heart felt messages from the writer's group was that Joyce had changed their life, undoubtedly for the better.

One of Joyce's gifts was her courage to turn towards that which was painful and difficulty and attend and befriend her experience. The strength of her compassion came from decades of spiritual practice, daily writing practice as well as ongoing therapeutic work. Joyce said, "My writing vocation, my teaching life and my spiritual practice have followed the single thread... stay open to surprise. Pretend you are seeing what's in front of you for the first time. Those words have become a lifetime's guidance, a support in times of pain, a challenge to wake up when I am asleep, and a sacred summons to meet things as they truly are, in all their difficulty and beauty.

Joyce's depth of spiritual insight was evident throughout the ravages of illness. She was rapidly declining in health in the last month of her life, as the cancer took hold, receding more and more into silence. While, cancer can steal the life blood out of people it could not steal away Joyce's extraordinary kindness and gentle heart even in the face of intense pain. Her partner Christopher invited her to use the pain as spiritual impetus to abide in one's essential true nature. Christopher asked her, "What's your favourite mantra?" Without any hesitation she said, "May all beings be happy." Joyce rode the wild edge of pain, balancing pain medication with her indomitable Bodhisattva spirit. Even in her last days, when she was no longer able to communicate verbally the mantra calmed her breathing. Her lips and tongue silently mouthing the words with Christopher, repeating them until she was calm.... serving her and everyone in her presence right to the very last breath.

Julia's death is so acutely fresh in my mind, the ending all too sudden. Tears flowed down my cheek synchronically with the recent torrential downpour, heavens opening up over the rooftops. We were due to meet the following afternoon, but seeing an appointment in my diary, opened a space that was now met with her absence. A little poignant empty diary marker plunged me into another wave of sadness, a reminder that she is gone. Yet, Julia's smile and joie de vivre, was evident even in the midst of painful operations for bowel cancer, reconstructive surgery and rounds of chemotherapy treatment for lung metastases. She embodied a joyful irrepressible spirit that continues beyond her.

Julia lived by the sea at Bawley point on the south coast of NSW. Her daily ecstatic ritual, her elixir for life as she referred to it, was immersing herself into the ocean. Julia's love of

the ocean played a critical part in her healing and recovery, a form of self-compassion from various ongoing complications from cancer treatment. Her daily mantra through her many rounds of surgery and chemotherapy was, 'I'm right here'. This was not just a reminder to be in the present moment, but to also be aware at a metta level of Being Here and Now. She termed the phrase, 'blue ocean consciousness', representing how immediately she arrived in the experience of the present moment as soon as she entered the ocean - 'I'm right here'. Blue ocean consciousness is the dimension of knowing that "I am aware of the vastness of the present experience that is one with the ocean itself".

There are three recurring insights that Julia had known as the three marks of existence - anicca (impermanence) dukkha (suffering) and anatta (no-self). These ongoing realisations emerged from her dharma practice and embodying blue ocean consciousness. The rhythmic ebb and flow of the waves helped her attune to the rise and fall of her breath; the ocean of breath had a natural calming effect on her mind. The ocean sent out its many invitations to become a connoisseur of change. The endless rhythm of the sea, the waves unfurling onto to a timeless shore, surge back and roll again. These continuous cycles, the swell rising and falling, pounding and crashing, roared the truth of impermanence.

All of us are marked by the great messengers of impermanence; sickness, ageing and death. Conditionality by its very nature is impermanent, dynamic, unstable and therefore is not a reliable source of lasting happiness. Joyce and Julia both took up the practice of contemplating the 5 Buddhist remembrances: wisdom that echoes down the generations.

I am of the nature to grow old.

I am of the nature to grow ill

I am of the nature to die.

I will be separated from all that is dear to me.

I inherit the consequences of my actions. My actions are my only true belongings they are the ground upon which I stand.

--from The Upajjhatthana Sutta

Our attitude to such troubling times, volatile conditions and changing circumstances can make a real difference. Every time Julia walked down the track to the beach entrance, she felt her whole body soften, shoulders drop and a huge silly grin would wrap involuntarily around her face. No matter what else was going on, the sea filled her with gladness and appreciative joy. "When I am in the water, I watch a bubble float past me on the water's surface, a second later it pops: gone! The ocean teaches me to kiss the joy as it flies." Jacques Cousteau

oceanographer and lover of the sea, "This sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever."

Thich Nhat Hanh wisely taught, "We are just like the waves appearing on the surface of the ocean. The body of a wave does not last very long, it is subject to beginning and ending, ebb and flow. The wave may be caught in the idea that, I'm here now and I won't be here later. But the wave has her ocean body. She has come from the ocean and she will go back to the ocean. She has both her wave body and ocean body. As soon as the wave can go back to herself, recognise and touch her true nature, which is water, the great ocean, then all fear and anxiety disappear."

Despite Julia's declining health, her last days were filled with so much gratitude for the preciousness of this life and her particular corner of creation. She felt truly blessed to have a loving partner and family, and her whole being would light up with joy, holding her young grandson, Finn. Every morning Julia swam at Murramurrang beach and offered gratitude to the Murramurrang people of the land and waters of the Yuin nation, where she lived. She felt so fortunate to have custody of a piece of land for her short life, looking after mother earth as best as she could, regenerating the green space and caring for endangered birds in the shorebird recovery program. "To live beside the clean clear waters of the ocean here, to hear it, inhale it, drink in its beauty, and immerse body, heart and mind in it each day is a special privilege. It has the effect on me of being an ocean of equanimity."

Julia's insights into anatta (not-self) also came from her deep meditative practice and her daily immersion in the oceans salty invigorating immensity. Grinning she said, her senses were tingling, alive, vibrant wide-open doors of stimulation. The frolicking buoyant sea, rocked and jolted her awake. "My heart-mind is pure clear awareness of all this, I know the flow and in that knowing there is a loosening of my sense of self which becomes like porous skin, so that the water gets under and creates space, washes out the self, then there is just experience." The small worried self is swallowed up by the expansive blue, the safe harbour and the wave.

There is a cautionary tale here about not suppressing tears and equally not being overwhelmed by our sorrow. Freedom to express sorrow is beautifully illustrated by a wonderful Japanese story of Satsujo, who was a grandmother at the time. Satsujo was a highly revered female lay disciple of Zen master Hakuin. She had studied with Hakuin since childhood. Satsujo was a wife, mother, grandmother and known for her exceptional clarity,

composure and wisdom. When she was old, she was found weeping openly in the garden of the monastery because her beloved granddaughter had died. The ardent priest frowned with disapproval, "Why are you wailing and carrying on? People will wonder what sort of enlightenment you experienced. An enlightened person shouldn't be crying as they have transcended all sorrow. Don't you know there is no birth and death." Satsujo scolded him, "You ball headed fool. My tears and weeping are better than all those rituals, prayers and incense. My tears are not just for my granddaughter but for all beings who grieve and have lost loved ones."

Satsujo does not hide or suppress her tears, her grandmotherly heart quivers with altruistic compassion. There was immense love in those tears falling all the way down to the bottom of the heart of humanity itself. I cannot think of anything more painful than to lose a child. It is most parents' worst nightmare. Satsujo shows us that our salty tears of grief from a broken-heart and eye of awakening emerge from the same boundless nature. She embodies the Bodhisattva that cannot get dry. She has the wisdom eye of intimacy and non-separation from the universal nature of suffering. Our cries for the world, are always calling forth the immeasurable heart of grandmotherly compassion that includes all beings who have grieved and lost loved ones.

In a similar vein, when I was studying with Yamada Roshi in Kamakura, Japan, I remember him saying, "Zen is just sitting, when sitting just sit, when walking just walking, when laughing just laughing, when weeping just weeping". There is boundless permission, intimacy and freedom in Satsujo and Yamada Roshi's message, to not cut off and suppress one's emotions. Emotions are a natural expression and a cord that connects us, yet it also takes composure and equanimity to not be distraught by hearing the cries of the world. We can ride the wild edge of grief and loss without being overwhelmed by sorrow, languishing in despair or becoming its partner.

We are all made of our grandmother's tears. Our cries of pain and suffering are ancestral, they reach back through the bloodline of humanity, they bring us all together and they can restore a sacred ground. Shantideva the 8th Century Indian philosopher, Tibetan monk, and Bodhisattva proclaimed, "To bring the happiness of all beings, may all their sorrows ripen in me". What an amazing practice: the true heart of altruistic compassion.

So many dharma friends have been gifted valuable wise teachings by these wonderful dharma sisters; especially how to live and die well. How to ride the wild edges of grief and

loss and to let go with grace of everything that is precious and dear and kiss the joy as it flies. They embodied how every painful situation can become an opportunity for practice, to step up and grow a larger compassionate response to alleviate suffering. While suffering and loss are inevitable it is our wise and compassionate response that is healing. My chest sighs full of sorrow one moment, then joy rolls in the next full of treasured memories of their wise free spiritedness. The limbic resonance of connectedness, a heart-broken-whole is touched by its boundless nature, stamped through with absence and presence, gratitude, compassion, joy and love. We can then celebrate this unique wave form, this vulnerable humble, beautiful yet temporary house of belonging, intimately one with our vast ocean consciousness of no name and form.

We are all offered an ongoing life koan in how to live a meaningful life, and what brings fulfillment, genuine happiness and peace. These are pivotal spiritual questions to be realised. These two beautiful wise women discovered the liberating truths of the dharma, that offered a path of fulfillment, wisdom, grace and even joy in their difficult, ordinary and yet extraordinary, wonderful lives. They leave us with the question; how do you want to live your one wild and precious life?

1 The Ocean: My Dharma Teacher - by Julia Hush, storics and talk given at Kookaburra Sangha, 90 Dec, 2024.

2 The 5 Buddhist Remembrances - The Upajjhatthana Sutta

3 Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, You Tube video - Plum Village App #Shorts <http://pvapp.to/shorts> * Story of Satsujo weeping.

From the Keikyoku Sodan (Thornbush Tales). Translated by Cleary in the Kahawai

Journal, 1984; Waddell in Hakuin's Precious Mirror Cave, 238.

4 Shantideva quote. <http://studybuddhism.com/en/tibetan-buddhism/original-tcxts/sutra-tcxts/cngaging-in-bodhisattva-behavior/dedication>

Soon after Tony, my life partner, died, a dear friend sent me the first part of Rainer Maria Rilke's poem, O Lacrimosa.

*Oh, tear-filled figure who, like a sky held back,
grows heavy above the landscape of her sorrow.
And when she weeps, the gentle raindrops fall,
slanting upon the sand bed of her heart.*

Thich Nhat Hanh's metaphor also eased the burden. "When we look at the ocean, we see that each wave has a beginning and an end. A wave can be compared with other waves, and we can call it more or less beautiful, higher or lower, longer lasting or less long lasting. But if we look more deeply, we see that a wave is made of water. While living the life of a wave, the wave also lives the life of water. It would be sad if the wave did not know that it is water. It would think, 'Some day I will have to die. This period of time is my life span, and when I arrive at the shore, I will return to non-being.' These notions will cause the wave fear and anguish. A wave can be recognized by signs -- beginning or ending, high or low, beautiful or ugly. In the world of the wave, the world of relative truth, the wave feels happy as she swells, and she feels sad as she falls. She may think, 'I am high!' or 'I am low!' and may develop superiority or inferiority complexes, but in the world of the water there are no signs, and when the wave touches her true nature - which is water - all of her complexes will cease, and she will transcend birth and death." (1)

Because the wave, the form, doesn't return to the ocean - it has never left the ocean. We're all waves. When life gets choppy - we can feel like those little waves that travel back from the beach and bump into waves coming into shore, making a slap as we smash against each other. And we can get so caught up in the hit, the splashback and turbulence, that we forget the ocean is all those waves crashing and surging and is vast and fathomless. And always changing.

And Dogen's reflections on the 10th Precept - Not Defaming the Three Treasures: 'The teisho of the actual body is the harbour and the weir. This is the most important thing in the world. Its virtue finds its home in the ocean of essential nature. It is beyond explanation. We just accept it with respect and gratitude.' The ocean of essential nature.

Staying with water, there's a story some of you may have heard where the teacher's encouraging students to practise gratitude so they can be free of strong reactions to the events of daily life and embody their Buddha-nature, their realisation. The teacher encourages them to maintain and tend that meditation practice, like a garden.

"It's a bit like filling a sieve with water, he said one day." The students were puzzled. 'Impossible!', one said, 'you can't fill a sieve with water! It'll come straight through. A student said later, "That sounds like what happens now, at least it does with me. I hear a teisho, or sit, or chant sutras, or help the neighbours - and I feel my heart's open - and for a while I don't get so impatient and my internal dialogues fade away - but before long, I'm back to how I was before. It is like water in a sieve."

Later, when they were doing kinhin along the beach, the teacher said, 'How about one of you

show me how to fill the sieve with water?" and they handed a sieve and a cup to one of the students, who were standing on the rocks with waves breaking around them.

A student bent down, scooped up a cup of water and then poured it into the sieve. Sure enough, the water had barely appeared at the bottom of the sieve, than it was gone. "It's just like that with our practice," the teacher said, 'as long as you stand on the rock of I-ness, and try to ladle realisation into it. That's not the way to fill the sieve with water."

"How do you do it then?" the student asked. The teacher took the sieve and threw it far out into the sea. It floated for a moment, then sank. The teacher said, "Now it's full of water, and it will remain so. That's the way to fill it, that's the way to practise. It's not about ladling little cupfuls of insight and bliss into your individuality, but throwing yourself utterly into the ocean of essential nature.' (2)

In the Genjokoan, Dogen says: 'To study Buddhism is to study the self: to study the self is to forget the self: to forget the self is to be confirmed by the 10,000 things: to be confirmed by the 10,000 things is to break down the barrier between yourself and others. No trace of realisation remains and this no trace continues endlessly.' That is filling the sieve with water. He goes on to say, 'That the self advances and confirms the 10,000 things is delusion' because right there, the "I" is centre stage again, ladling experiences and insights into the separate self.

There's a story about a Zen teacher who kept asking students, over the course of an intensive three-month practice period, to diligently search, not for the self, but for their view of the self, insisting they identify within themselves the conviction that they have an enduring, independent, inherent self-nature. No matter how hard they looked, an enduring, inherent self remained elusive - but they could definitely find their view that one existed! They were encouraged to become intimate with that belief and notice how desperately they held on to it, and how little they questioned it. (3)

Identifying a view of self doesn't represent the whole of Zen practice, but it's an important place to start because the matter of self is central to the practice of Buddhism (and therefore Zen). Dogen indicates that we need to engage in deep inquiry into the nature of self in order to be liberated from the self-concern and obsession the Buddha had identified as a problem over a thousand years earlier. Dogen then goes further, describing how it feels to function when one is liberated from a deluded view of self: We are "confirmed" by the ten thousand things, and are able to shed the limiting concept of separateness and experience intimacy with all of life. (4)

What does Dogen mean by "study?" In his book *Realizing Genjokoan*, Shohaku Okumura gives a further explanation of the Japanese word translated as "study" - *narau* - (pron. *nara u*) which is related to the word *neraru* and means "to get accustomed to," or "to become intimate or familiar with." Okumura further elucidates the term by explaining how the Chinese character for *narau* is composed of the symbol for the wings of a bird, combined with the symbol for "self." He suggests that *narau* implies the kind of study or learning a baby bird needs to do in order to fly - watching its parents, taking the risk of trying flight itself, and then practising over and over in order to do it successfully. It must study the self - *nera u* - to realise its potential bird-nature.

So the "study" of self Dogen refers to in the Genjokoan is not intellectual study. It's not about sitting around thinking about yourself or your life, or analysing your neuroses and trying to figure out where they came from. It's not about philosophising, or reading, or

even meditating in order to achieve some kind of transcendent insight about yourself. Rather, Dogen's "self study" involves turning toward your direct experience as a living being. We become intimate with our own bodies and minds through the practices of zazen. If you're new to Zen practice, you may think you're intimate, or familiar with yourself and your direct experience. However, when you sit down for 25 minutes with nothing to distract you but your own thoughts and feelings, you might be surprised at what you find. One of the most amazing things about Buddhism and Zen is that there are tried and true practices to help you "wake up" to what's actually going on! Nera u. (5)

Another translation of the first line of Dogen's famous Genjokoan passage is "to learn the Buddha's truth is to learn ourselves." So it's not just about gaining understanding about your self, it's also about learning how to use the self like a bird learns to use its wings to fly. This is a gradual, often challenging, process. The Precepts and the Eightfold Path are our guides, as is our sangha support.

Dogen: "There is a simple way to become buddha: When you refrain from unwholesome actions, are not attached to birth and death, and are compassionate toward all sentient beings, respectful to seniors and kind to juniors, not excluding or desiring anything, with no designing thoughts or worries, you will be called a buddha. Do not seek anything else." "If you want to travel the Way of Buddhas and Zen masters, then expect nothing, seek nothing, and grasp nothing." (6)

In his essay on death in Blind Donkey, Aitken Roshi writes: "Death is treated as a teaching in Zen Buddhism. It reveals and enriches the truths of impermanence, compassion, and karma. As a metaphor, it reveals the nature of step-by-step practice, and of realisation. Dogen Zenji places death among the countless acts of dana - giving - that make up our daily work: 'When one learns well, being born and dying are both giving. All productive labour is fundamentally giving. Entrusting flowers to the wind, birds to the season, also must be meritorious acts of giving...It is not only a matter of exerting physical effort; one should not miss the right opportunity.' In this passage, Dogen Zenji implies that death is more than relinquishment, even more than giving. It is entrusting. When we are practising - when we are turning the Dharma wheel - all our acts are those of entrusting.

Dogen Zenji's father died when he was two years old and when he was seven, his mother died. He recalled how, watching the smoke from the funeral pyre at this mother's funeral, impressed him deeply and sorrowfully, with the transience of life. Throughout his career of teaching, he linked this awareness of transiency with bodhicitta - the desire for realisation, the desire for enlightenment, the imperative for realising the Buddha. Bodhicitta is what brings us to the dojo to practice.

The Heart Sutra says form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form. Emptiness is the dimension of no magnitude, no dimension. It is vast beyond space, timeless beyond time. To call it vacuum or eternity is giving it a label. But that very emptiness is the form of you and me, of towers, animals, plants, oceans, mountains. This is the message of the Buddha and his great successors.

Bassui advises a dying man: 'If you think of nothing, wish for nothing, want to understand nothing, cling to nothing, and only ask yourself, 'What is the true substance of the Mind of this one who is now suffering?' ending your days like clouds fading in the sky, you will eventually be freed from your painful bondage to endless change.' (7)

Because each existence is in constant change, there is no abiding self. In fact, the self-nature

of each existence is nothing but change itself, the self-nature of all existence. There is no special, separate self-nature for each existence. Waves endlessly rise and fall away. This is also called the teaching of Nirvana. When we realise the everlasting truth of 'everything changes' and find our composure in it, we find ourselves in Nirvana, the liberation found in wisdom. This is ongoing practice to the final breath.

Thank-you for everything Tony. Your virtue finds its home in the ocean of essential nature. It is beyond explanation. We just accept it with respect and gratitude.

1) Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. New York: Broadway Books, 1999, pp. 124-125.

2) http://mmiweb.org.uk/microsites/religiousstories/buddhist/fill_seive.pdf

3) <https://www.existentialbuddhist.com/2012/07/the-harbor-and-the-weir/>

4) <https://zenstudies;odcast.com/glossary/dogen>

5) Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, , pub. Weatherhill, NY and Tokyo, 1970

6) <https://zenstudies;odcast.com/glossary/dogen>

7) Robert Aitken, *Death: A Zen Buddhist Perspective*, pub. Blind Donkey, June 1995



Waters flow as mountains | painting | Janet Selby

I am in the ocean rock pool at Palm Beach.

It is Christmas Day and I am four and three-quarter years old. I am playing in chest-high water. It reaches to the bear my mother has sewn on my red woollen swimming costume. My father is standing beside the pool watching the people, taking in the sun and keeping an eye on me. The sun gleams on his shock of silver hair. My older brother is swimming at the deep end of the pool and my mother is reading a book, seated on one of the white-washed concrete steps beside the pool.

I look down at my bear and pat it. I roll over in the water where the tiny ripples catch stars of sunlight. I turn over, take my feet off the firm sand and spread out my arms and legs, a star on the surface, and I am

Floating.

A delicious surprise bursts in on my body!

It is an unexpected Christmas present from the ocean. It is nothing and it is everything. I am suspended, without weight, gently rocking on the motion of the sea pool, a ripple on the surface of my world, held and dissolved into water at the same time. I close my eyes and it's dark, and I am cradled. I open my eyes and see the vast blue sky.

I drop my legs down, flail them about and hit the sandy bottom of the pool.

My head of black curly hair, my dark brown skin, my red wool costume (with bear) turn towards my father, lean and tanned.

"Daddy, Daddy, I can float! Watch!"

My father comes to the edge of the pool, stands with his toes over the edge of the whitewashed wall and smiles down at me as I show him what I have just done.

"Yes", he says, "So you can".

In my body a memory remains.

Water is the medium for my replenishing of energy and a Zen-like composure of 'being with the flow of life'!

Waves of the ocean sea are moving energy.

(p.13 'The Wavewatcher's Companion').

Water is the 'medium' through which the wave's energy travels. The ocean's surface becomes possessed by energy in the same way that a spiritual medium is supposedly animated by souls from the 'other side'

Well, not exactly the same, but the author of 'The Wavewatcher's Companion, Gavin Pretor-Pinney, takes a humorous look at the parallels between waves and Zen!

Waves are not frozen in time, and in reality the water within the wave at any moment will be left behind an instant later, as the wave rolls on. Though the timescales are very different, a wave passes through the medium of the water in much the same way that you pass through the 'medium' of all the physical bits of your body...

Without realising it, you can be swept out into a Zen-like spiritual reverie on how everything is, like, you know, interconnected, deep down, man.'

p. 35.

And, he goes further, into Yin and Yang: It can be no coincidence that the line dividing the black yin part, and the white yang has the shape of a wave. As smooth waves pass over the surface, water constantly shifts between one extreme (a peak) and the other (a trough), always oscillating on either side of the equilibrium level in between.

(opp. p.193 The Wave-Watchers's Companion, by Gavin Pretor-Pinney, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010.)

Being with the flow...while swimming in the 50m outdoor Olympic Pool while my ocean pool has a 6m swell....and is closed for the time being.

I am reminded of the 'Net of Indra', where each jewel of the Net reflects Everything else in the Universe...As the sun shines through shimmering nets under my goggled eyes -- on the floor of the pool!!

And of Hongzhi's "Cultivating the Empty Field" where one sentence has vividly captivated me....
Wandering into a circle of wonder...!
I love this phrase, and the movement it implies.

Also recalling so vividly when Roshi John Tarrant was bestowing my dharma name during Jukai.

It does include the word 'Wave'...(I am obliged not to reveal the whole name of course!)...I wasn't sure I would be able to live up to the name at the time! But he insisted....and I love the name.

Swimming again....breathing in...breathing in bubble, bubble, bubble....breathing out

*Here is a poem that has arisen from many
years of daily swimming, including through
the winter months*

Each day of the year,
I plunge my body
into the ocean ...

When the water
temperature drops --
14-16 degrees in winter,
I sit
by the ocean pool,
legs dangle in water,
'Not hot, not cold...
Just wet' --
the mantra...
I breathe deep
into the belly

Sliding into salt water,
I am swimming --
one movement...
Contracted,
tension,
cold hits.
Shock!

Body bitten
sudden change,
enveloping--
one-pointed intensity --

At the threshold
breath obliterates.

I swim, head out
for a lap...

After some strokes,
body adjusts
to sudden cold...
tightening --
felt as fear.
The body relaxing,
not resisting...
Being with cold,
singing cold.
celebrating cold

Two pauses between --
incoming,
outgoing,
breath --
each quite silent.

Thresholds --
dying, birthing.
Blowing out the self,
ripples of sound in water.
breathing in...
an oceanic universe...

After a part lap
head in seawater.
face as ice mask --
distinct.

After more laps,
breathing swimming,
bubbles of out-breath
make friendly burble --
a steady rhythm.

Exuding from arms,
swathes of tiny air pockets
ascend to the surface,
ribbons of white cells.
A few more laps --

I am dissolving
into a silkiness of sea
relieved of skin.
I am weightless.

Being water,
being breath, being...
tiny schools of striped fish
turning their heads
into the oncoming current,
Being
slowly furling sea-weed,
being blinking
pearlescent bi-ped
mollusc shells
open to the sea,
Being
lichen-covered
rocks, on floor of
natural ocean
rock pool,
Being
flickering fluid lines
of light in prisms
of liquid...

Sometimes
turbulent
tumbling
great swells
roll in waves
over the side
of our ocean pool...

A few brave souls
flail and bob
in shifting foam and currents,
waves running up,
slapping concrete retaining
walls
meet another,
in the backwash.

There's a swish as
froth, foam, waves,
wash over the pool sea-wall,
descend
in white cloudbursts,
underwater.

Through my goggles
I am white-out.
Submerged,
gestating --
presence...
contained,
content.
Selfless.
Skinless,
loud, vibrating,
bubbles in my ears,

No where.
No self.

Under a surface cacophony
of
conflicting currents --
Slipping through
a 'gateless gate' --

It is --
Quiet and untroubled
In the deep.

SURRENDERING TO THE FLOW OF LIFE.

Brendon Stewart

Surrender?
A curious way of thinking about this flowing on of life. What is it that could happen with a life that requires the special intervention of a surrender; is it like a giving up, calling it quits, throwing in the towel? We might surrender to a lover or to the will of an obstinate relative, we might surrender to the inevitable on-set of a terminal sickness, but to the flow of life, why? I don't think you surrender to the Tao, once you are alive you go until it stops.

Taoist thought doesn't entertain surrender, rather one journeys, up and down, in and out, around and around, aware and confused, happy and sad, wise and ignorant.

How thick is the present moment? A moment between the past and the future, a paradoxical time where something does not exist but it had existed and a time that does not exist but it will, just not now; while at the same time the past endlessly informs the present and the future refines by way of anticipation our present activities.

This thick moment is our life, full of our eyes, ears nose tongue; our body and mind, our tastes and smells, what we objectify as thoughts and feelings, our thinking indeed our very being conscious.

And yet with my consciousness I am continually confounded by a wilful ignorance which seems at times quite a comfortable ignorance; comfortable in not comprehending what our teachings point out, that we experience an acute anxiety, an existential discomfort from our intellectual and emotional failure to face up to the bare facts of existence.

"Sorry! The life style you ordered is currently out of stock"

For me the salvation of my Zen practice is that each time I recite with my sangha friends the Purification Sutra I am pulled up to face the facts of my existence including all the evil Karma ever created by me because of the endless recycling of my greed, hatreds and various ignorance's.

At the end of our Sangha sit each week we vow together to save all beings and to attend to the fact that greed, hatred and ignorance continually rise in our thoughts and body and this all takes place in a vast and fathomless existence. To play with philosophical language for a moment being a Buddhist is to be an existentialist, to hold that there is no 'telos', no end or purpose in our existence, life is a journey through each moment for which I must take full responsibility.

With the help of meditation and mindfulness our method for coping with anxiety is to make

room for it in our lives. – is this to surrender, I wouldn't call it that – because we do not rid ourselves of anxiety, instead we see it as an inevitable feature of our striving to live. This is a journey of "coming to see". A long, difficult process of transforming how we understand the world and our place within it.



image | *Brandon Stewart*

This isn't nihilistic comprehension, a meaningless journey in a neglectful sense, rather Buddhism calls us by the Metta Sutra, possibly my favourite reminder each day; this is what should be done by one who is skilled in goodness and knows the way of peace.

This is what SHOULD be done, no equivocation here, no confusion as to whether existence is empty or full. Loving Kindness is a meaning in life so is friendliness so is being modest and able, straight forward and gentle in speech.

And maybe too everything we do is much, much easier to understand if you are ever so slightly drunk! Or perchance, in the grip of a poem!

*You don't want to hear the story
Of my life, and anyhow
I don't want to tell it, I want to listen
To the enormous waterfall of the sun.
And anyhow it's the same old story
A few people just trying,
One way or another,
To survive.
Mostly, I want to be kind.*

Mary Oliver, Dogfish

Sitting in my dingy little lair with good intent to write, nothing comes so letting go I play a new album that had just been released on Spotify by Jazz pianist, and occasional singer, Ben Sidran. Surprise, his Album 'Are We There Yet' is spot on the theme I'm struggling with, sparking inspiration, what amazing synchronicity. Sidran is singing of Camus, the great French author and philosopher's assertion that Sisyphus would've had to have a smile on his face as he eternally rolled that rock back uphill, Why, sings Sidran, "Because he got himself a gig". No matter how well you play your instrument you're pushing a rock up a hill in a world full of pain until you've got a gig, then anything's possible. Yes I know, it's hard to imagine a song could be so complex, but it's free flowing jazz, more like beat poetry really, and more on that later.

So, I'd been in the doldrums, then 'WoW' out of the blue a key appears, then joy, here's something I can share. Also, connection with Sidran added to the feeling, he's been a favourite for years, someone I've idealized as can happen with artists we love, and what he shared was profound, and suddenly I opened to joy, connecting us all, dear readers, with Sidran, and indeed, the whole world. It's a heart thing.

It particularly arises in shared feeling in belonging, when the heart's right. I get that feeling when I walk into the Zendo and immediately unself-consciously sync with the joyful exuberance of Sangha,

Further synchronicity arrived next evening. Driving home from the city, turning on ABC radio I stumbled upon an episode of 'The Minefield' with Waleed Ally and Scott Stephens the topic amazingly being 'Is It Only Joy When It's Shared'. Okay then I got it, just trust the Dao and all comes forth effortlessly. Never thought I'd welcome walking into a minefield. Bizarrely, the discussion focused on soccer and the literally earth shattering joy that erupted when Liverpool won the championship a while back, though not the recent debacle I've just read about today. The discussants felt that the shared identity and struggle of the fans, their relief and surprise on their victory were key in facilitating the elevation of simple pleasure into literal earth-shuddering rapturous joy that was so intense that at the time scientists were able to see it on their seismic charts.

Also discussed on the same program was Beethoven's 'Ode To Joy' for the notable response of the audience on its debut. By then Beethoven was deaf and couldn't hear the result of his work but an appreciative audience aware of his struggle, also sharing their suffering and challenge in war torn Europe were moved to intense joy. A major element was the intense surprise for the audience in experiencing the inclusion of choral elements which had never been done in a symphony previously. Beethoven adapted the poem of the same name by Friedrich Schiller for the work, A hymn of unity and hope, it begins: 'Joy, Beautiful Spark Of Divinity' and elsewhere 'All People Become Brothers Where Thy Gentle Wing Abides' and later 'All Creatures Drink Of Joy At Nature's Breast'. Of course the joy of the infant on the breast in healthy attachment is singular and likewise birth itself filled with the intense joy and wonder of the miracle of life, yet born of the most arduous effort.

As a retired psychotherapist I have been privileged over many years of practice to have shared both the intense suffering of survivors of trauma, as well as the joy of release in

breaking free as the heart opens. In therapy there are moments, borne of painful working through, often referred to as 'Moments Of Meeting' that induce profound change where the spontaneous emergence of shared joy and surprise is a key element. Here ego is temporarily suspended and out of such repeated moments resilience and a more authentic, less defensive, robust sense of self develops. This stronger sense of self is more easily able to let go and open to the joy of things as they really are.

Likewise in the zendo, with the teacher there arises an intense joy as we penetrate our koan, and nothing is ever quite the same again. I'm reminded of Hakuin's caution quoted in Paul Maloney Roshi's excellent teisho titled 'Embodying The Practice: The Buddha Way Of Dogen And Hakuin' which I listened to recently as a podcast. Hakuin asserts: 'Anyone who engages in Zen and doesn't take up koans is a rascal of the lowest type'. Harsh words indeed, but for Hakuin without koan practice there can be no Kensho and therefore no progress.

It is, however, important for students of the Way to understand that if the sense of self is too fragile Zen practice or even simple meditation may be ill-advised and psychotherapy would be more helpful in the beginning. As Buddhist psychologist and Harvard professor Jack Engler quips 'You cannot lose the self until you find it' and 'You cannot be nobody before you are somebody'. Need I remind us in this context, to always seek guidance from a trusted teacher.

Sidran's free flowing jazz on that album reminded me of beat poet Jack Kerouac, himself supposedly influenced in his writing style by the music of jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker. There's even a recording of Kerouac himself reading excerpts from his most famous novel 'On The Road' to a background of bebop jazz. The beat generation had emerged out of the doldrums and destruction of the second world war. They were 'beat' in the sense of having given up and given in, but they emerged with joyful exuberance and freedom embracing new spiritualities and philosophies, spearheaded by writers, poets and artists, like Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg, Rexroth, Burroughs, Pollock. Out of the depths of destruction this troubled but playful new movement paved the way for the hippie counterculture of the 60's.

Many of us oldies' first acquaintance with Zen came from reading Kerouac's novel 'The Dharma Bums', a free flowing narrative about passionate, albeit naïve and undisciplined young hobo's who travelled the prairies, train-hopping, experimenting with psychedelics, asceticism, tantric sex and all else between, yet earnestly trying to fathom Eastern religions and philosophies in Kerouac's words 'of their Zen lunatic Chinese and Japanese' heroes like Han Shan and Bodhidharma. It's entertaining stuff full of zany off-the-wall antics, but with some interesting insights, nonetheless. It's 'crazy Zen' if you like, but everywhere joy is palpable. Ray Smith, the anti-hero narrator, who's probably Kerouac himself, quips: "I'm only interested in one thing in Buddhism, you can keep all the rest and that's the third noble truth, the cessation of suffering." How he goes about this, however, is maybe not quite what the Buddha had in mind, though Zen master Ikkyu perhaps might approve,

Finally Ray, and his poet, mountaineering, Zen student friend Japhy Ryder, thought to be modelled on poet Gary Snyder, undertake to climb Matterhorn

in the High Sierras. Taking shape as a spiritual quest they jostle with deep questions as they struggle with the arduous ascent. The climax, and a core metaphor of the novel, is that following the intense climb they furtively career down the mountain laughing and whooping in life affirming rapture.

The Buddha's own journey from the anguish of first encounter with old age, sickness and death on jumping the palace wall that bound him in ignorance up to his blissful awakening with all beings, to the morning star, is foundational. Though we are all familiar with this now, for many, back in the day, our first encounter with it was through reading '60's cult hero's Herman Hesse's novel 'Siddhartha' which was essentially the story of the Buddha. I so vividly remember, as a young student, the sheer joy of reading and rereading that wondrous poetic little book.

Then there's Bodhidharma's nine years facing the wall, Why so, since he already had some insights? Was he waiting until we were ready for him? My guess is he was just setting us a good example. In retreat, as we chant in The Heart Sutra, we settle into staying with anguish and distress. When it transforms the most profound peace and joy truly arises. Staying with our knee and back pain, observing Roshi's instruction, we go into it, feel its nature, then just like that it drops away, replaced by gentle warm serenity, How wonderful is that? Is this what the Buddha calls Sukha, in contrast to simple transient pleasure, which in time opens the heart as we sit together with sangha and all beings.

Here's another experience of joy where surprise and a shared experience clearly contributed. In my teens, hitchhiking I arrived alone and tired, knowing no one, at a Paris youth hostel. An American hipster type, a bit older than me, reminiscent in his dress and mannerisms of someone from a Kerouac novel had acquired the lately released Beatles 'Sergeant Pepper' album which none of us had yet heard and put it on, loud, on the ancient freestanding hostel gramophone. WHAM !! pure unadulterated joy punched out like a flash in a Lichtenstein artwork permeating the room as we listened, there was nothing else at all. When it finished we all laughed, shared, and drank wine.

It is well-known that such joy is easier in childhood where surprise is everywhere, and each moment fresh and new, as it really is, with less separation and self-consciousness. A psychotherapist friend of mine wrote his thesis 'Interest Heals' on the capacity of interest and surprise to heal in psychotherapy, to a degree re-evoking the joy and surprise of healthy infancy in that experience, Childhood wonder soon fades, and unless worked with so we can truly absorb each moment, becomes increasingly elusive, opening to Dukka, best translated as dissatisfaction, and increasing struggle.

Frequently however grace revisits in old age as we shift 'from our roles to our souls' as one writer puts it, with a resurfacing of wonder, and embodied connection. Though dependent on cause and conditions this is a welcome thought to bear in mind. Our true nature is only 'a quarter turn of the screw away' as Aitken Roshi comments in his Mumonkan. Here Guanyin himself sings and dances with all beings in perfect harmony.

I want to end with a poem by Padhraig Pearse, *The Wayfarer* written on the eve of his execution by the Crown, having been the leader of the failed Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916. I usually cry when I read it, not a result of age, tears of joy and sorrow. I have always been moved by it, since boyhood, growing up in an Ireland still intimate with the desperate hopes and dreams of those bright young intellectuals who knew full well how their fate was sealed from the very outset.

The juxtaposition of joy, sadness and struggle in this poem, written in the most unimaginable circumstances truly transcends all anguish and despair in its celebration of the profundity, simplicity and fragility of life in all its transient, eternal, beauty.

The Wayfarer

*The beauty of the world hath made me sad,
This beauty that will pass;
Sometimes my heart hath shaken with great joy
To see a leaping squirrel in a tree,
Or a red lady-bird upon a stalk,
Or little rabbits in a field at evening,
Lit by a slanting sun,
Or some green hill where shadows drifted by
Some quiet hill where mountainy man hath sown
And soon would reap; near to the gate of Heaven;
Or children with bare feet upon the sands
Of some ebb'd sea, or playing on the streets
Of little towns in Connacht,
Things young and happy.
And then my heart hath told me:
These will pass,
Will pass and change, will die and be no more,
Things bright and green, things young and happy;
And I have gone upon my way
Sorrowful.*

*Old dog, you were young, silent and broken
when we first met.
Darkest brown eyes, tan brows
and a mane like a lion.*

*Old dog, you stared. Still as a statue
at the back of the concrete pen.
Dogs either side yapping, yelling, pitching their
small lives against confinement.*

*Pick me they yelled, noses pushed through mesh, pick me.
Pick me, you whispered from a distance,
eyes fixed on mine. Pick me.*

*Old dog, I picked you.
We picked each other,
you and I.*

*Old dog, shadows are always
and you are mine. By this I mean
we do not happen without each other,
sharing a shaky heart.*

*Old dog, remember the afternoon
I sewed a carrier bag for you?
Yours is not a handbag sized life but I made a sling
so I could help you up the stairs.*

*Old dog, you were deeply unimpressed
but know this: I have plans for a four-wheel drive cart
to carry your rickety back legs
when you need it (and you will).*

*Old dog, your body is breaking
and if you are my shadow and our heart is shared
then I am breaking too. Please, let me make something to carry us
so we can break, quietly, together.*

MY ACTS ARE ALL I TRULY OWN /
THE BUDDHA'S CONSOLATIONS

Helen Gould.

*My nature is to grow old,
Nothing I do can prevent it.
My nature is to grow sick,
Nothing I do can prevent it.
My nature is to die and nothing I can do can prevent it.
All things that I own will one day be taken from me,
Everyone who I love will one day be parted from me,
My acts are all I truly own and I
cannot escape their consequence (Repeat).*

*My nature is to grow old,
So may I spend my youth well.
My nature is to grow sick,
And I rejoice in my health.
My nature is to die so may I live in full awareness.
All things that I own will one day be taken from me,
So may I use them for the common good.
Everyone who I love will one day be parted from me,
So I cherish each one.
My acts are all I truly own and I
cannot escape their consequence (Repeat).*

*My nature is to grow old,
May wisdom grow with the years.
My nature is to grow sick,
May I be humble and patient.
And may I die aware and free from fear.
May I leave all I own to those who will use it wisely,
May my response to dying be for my loved ones a blessing,
My acts are all I truly own and I
cannot escape their consequence (Repeat).*

To Know The Dark

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

wendell berry



We are not our minds. So then, if we are not our minds, what are we?

Picture this. It's a cool, misty autumn morning at Kodoji and the first bird calls have started as the morning star shines bright. The first rays of the sun are still below the horizon. It is a time of silent magic when, in the words of Bob Dylan:

"Ain't it just like the night to play tricks when we're trying to be so quiet."

It's a time when – if you listen carefully but not too carefully – you may hear the voice of God. Every sesshin so far – half a dozen or more – a theme emerges by about day three and a nugget of wisdom appears like a drop of dew on the morning grass.

It is in their nature that they arrive more like something that has always been there, right in front of me but overlooked, rather than a fresh discovery.

They also seem so blindingly obvious as to be almost mundane, except that they are anything but.

Like the 'thwack' of a stone hitting a bamboo stone that precipitated enlightenment for Kyogen Chikan as a swept a yard, it was not just the sound but the years of preparation that counted.

"With one strike, all knowledge was forgotten."

On this misty morning on day three of the first Kodoji session the realisation was equally obvious:

"Every moment is the present moment."

Tell that to the ordinary Joe or Josephine in

the street and they will look at you quizzically, agree that this is of course the case, and then move on.

But to this student of Zen, that kensho represents a profound shift of consciousness such that nothing was every quite the same again.

If everything is indeed the present moment then what is the past (memory), or the future (expectation), or time itself (still working that one out)?

And not for the first time, the dharma requires the sangha for full realisation.

How important it is to be able to share this will people who do not look quizzically, but who come back with their own take on the spiritual lesson.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky argued that we learn through social interaction and culture.

He coined the phrase 'zone of proximal development' which is the place of optimal learning – the gap between what the learner already knows and what they can achieve with guidance from what he called 'a more knowledgeable other' – a teacher or a peer. If the zone is too wide, we fall into the chasm of ignorance, but if the zone is too narrow, we don't learn anything that we didn't know already and we don't grow.

And so we come to surrender.

Since the past and the future can only exist in the present moment, and since are meaning-making minds are not us, it makes perfect logic that we actually have no option other

than to surrender.

Persian poet and Sufi mystic, Rumi, tells us that 'as we start to walk the way, the way appears'. This is one of my dominant dharma gates right now as I navigate the path of finding paid work with equanimity.

Rumi's message was to trust the flow of life and embrace uncertainty. After all, can you think of single life event that has occurred exactly as you imagined it?

"Don't get lost in your plans. The soul has its own path."

Though he also tells us that planning is a valuable tool if taken (like the koan plough) with empty hands.

"Try not to resist that changes that come your way. Instead, let life flow through you."

And isn't this the same as having no hindrance in the mind?

"The Bodhisattva lives by Prajna Paramita, with no hindrance in the mind;

no hindrance and therefore no fear; far beyond delusive thinking, right here is Nirvana."

Enough words. With one strike, forget all knowledge. Give up the search.



image | *William Verity*

I recently came to see five different attitudes and influences that had been with me since I was born. They came alive to me as 5 heartbeats. My heart was pounding and pounding. I was watching along and saw the mess within. One heartbeat settled when I thought of my mother. After a while I realised all five were metaphorical links to the five main people in my first stages of life: my mother, my father, my grandmother, grandfather and uncle.

They were my world.

Today's world is awakening to the long term and generational effects of war and other significant trauma crucibles. I don't think it is possible for us as regular humans to be and walk through a war and not be viscerally changed. I am reborn into a family where the events and effects of WWII are the air they breathe. A war where they did walk for weeks on end. Away. Decades later we are all in a golden land where the WWII events are far in the past.

Psychology tells us that we learn through total absorption. Mimicry for survival. Over there, in a text book, they tell me the link with my mother is the deepest and most fundamental link. I've seen it with others, the strong link between mother and child. And yet here in my heart are 5 beats.

In a flash, I'm in the centre of my being, seeing how the linkages exist in me with the people in my closest orbit, those I have clung to, extracted the knowledge from on how to be here in this incarnation. The other heartbeats are a mess, entangled, erratic, striving to break free. The landscape is calm, eerie but calm. Nature is quietly watching on. This too I soak up. Nothing is safe.

My learning pool of chronic complex PTSD people, blinded, now safe, disconnected from their homeland, running away from the pain of the past, striving to do something better here in this golden sun. I see how I connected the landscape and the people, the fears and the happiness into the idea of my being. Then promptly forgot it, as I executed the most critical aspects of my path, to stay alive, as I'd been taught through my absorption.

I was terrified that all the people in my life would die and leave me here alone. Years later they did.

The grief of what I thought I'd lost opened the heavy bolts on the doors I didn't know were there.

I never saw these heart beats before. It lightens my heart to see and connect all of the dots. I can see the beats untangling, as if I was the only one holding them in place.

I can hear my own heart beat for the first time.

It rained on me on the boat home tonight. The waves threw salty kisses on my cheeks and mixed with the clear rain water rolling down my forehead.

.

I sit on my cushion in stillness wondering if my brother will call me tonight with more reports of self-harm. I know my sitting helps him, and me.

.

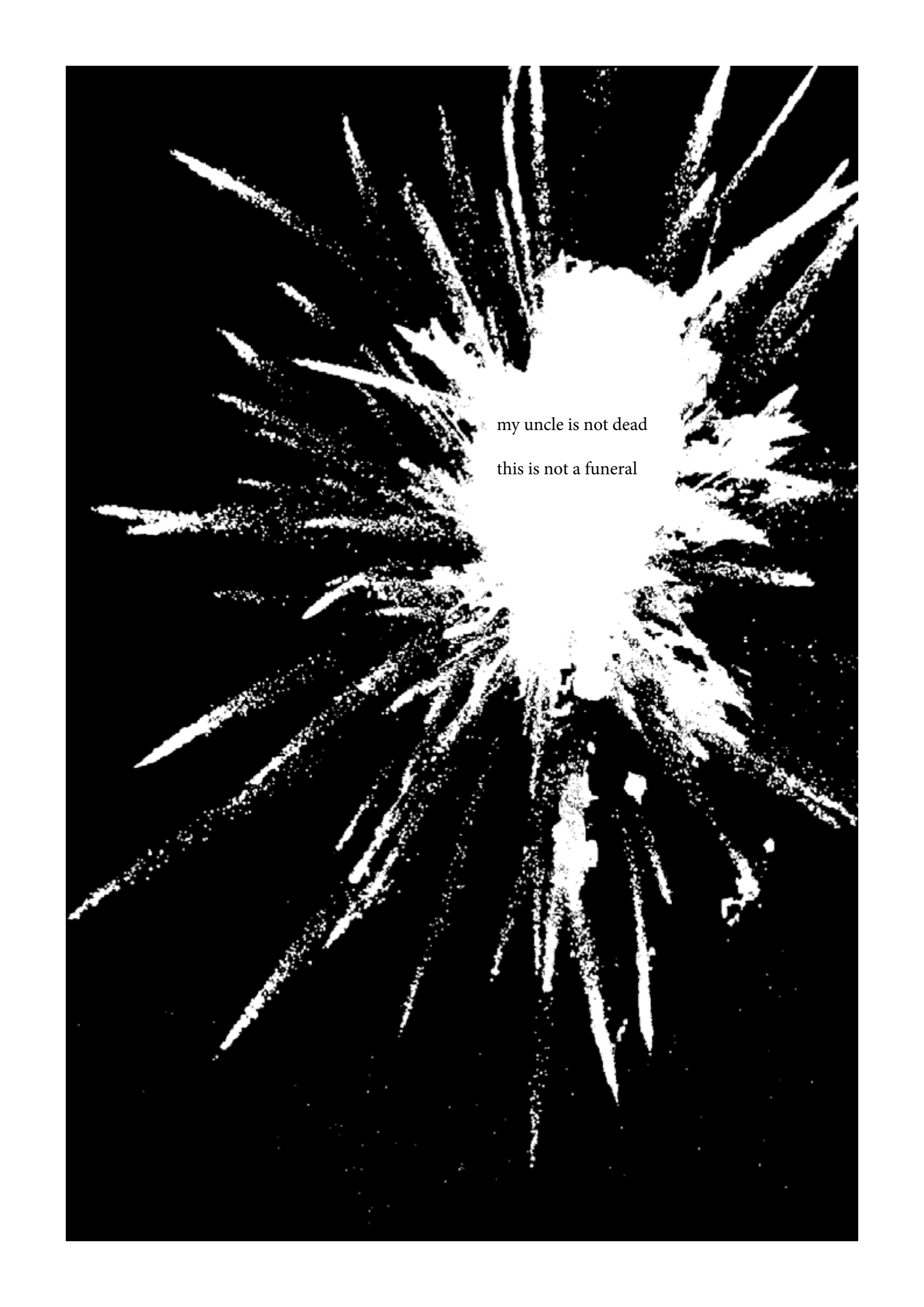
We speak for two hours on the phone and he seems stable and calm like the rain and ocean.

.

I feel ok even though a river of worry flows through me, acknowledged but undisturbed.

.

I choose to keep sitting because that seems like the right thing to do. And I'll sit 'till it doesn't.



my uncle is not dead

this is not a funeral



and...

this is not a firework

IN MEMORY OF UNCLE MICHAEL

Lisa Myeong-Joo

I take refuge in the Buddha.

Even though they tell me to kill the Buddha and that the truth is beyond words, I take refuge in the words and wit of the old masters.

I take refuge in the Dharma.

Everywhere, everywhen. Dharma gates stare me in the face but sometimes I don't see them. When I do, I am the sound, the source and the silence.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you....

I vow to keep all precepts.

Fall down nine times, get up 10.

I vow to find the place of no falling down or getting up.

I vow to practice all good dharma.

Done. But do it better next time.

I vow to save the many beings.

Either that is an impossible task or it is already done. Which one is it?

Tok, tok, tok.

I take up the way of not killing.

I vow to see the intertwined nature of life and death, emerging and fading, within all things. And surrender to these natural strands and rhythms rather than to convenience, habit and desire. And find freedom within the constraints of these natural strands and rhythms, rather than go against them through over-consumption and seemingly deathless products.

I take up the way of not stealing.

I vow to gain the courage and knowledge to push against the inequality of which I am part and parcel.

I take up the way of not misusing sex.

You complete me.

I vow to guide and ride desire so that sex completes we, not me.

I take up the way of not speaking falsely.

I vow to see things as they are rather than through the lens of ego.

I take up the way of not giving or taking drugs.

I vow to observe the nature of addictive things and my relationship with them.

I take up the way of not discussing faults of others.

When I notice the faults of others, I vow to also see the undifferentiated dharma in them too.

I take up the way of not praising myself or abusing others.

When there is self, stop talking. When there is other, start talking.

I take up the way of not sparing the dharma assets.

The Dharma Wheel turns freely. Birds sing, the wind blows. But now they need our help. Wise action includes silence, but it also includes the sword of Fudo Myoo to cut through delusion. I vow to share this precious gift.

I take up the way of not indulging in anger.

Greed, hatred and ignorance are like moth vine. You think it's gone and then you find 10 more. I vow to use the mind weeds to cultivate the mind.

I take up the way of not defaming the Three Treasures.

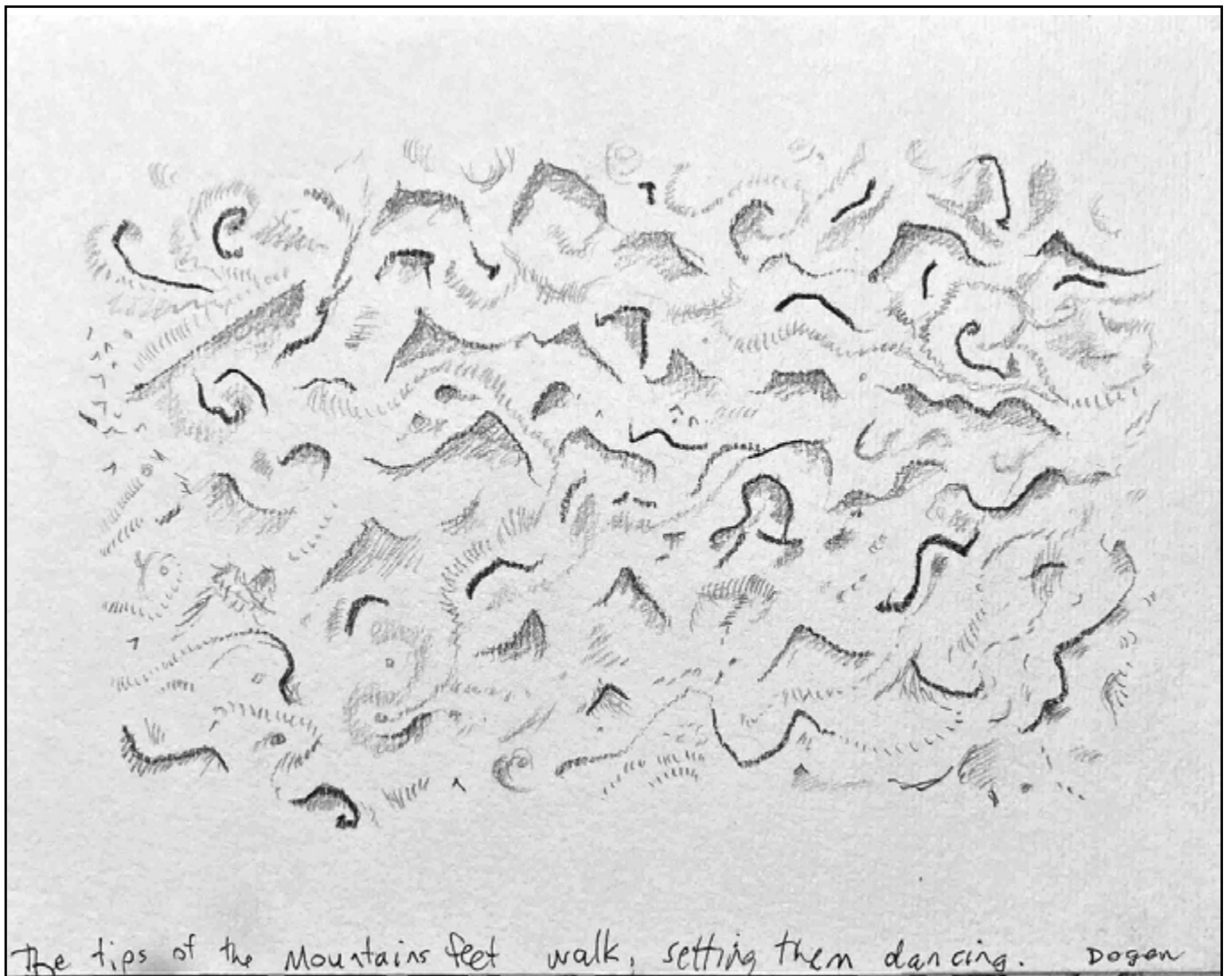
I vow to wear the robe of liberation,
The formless field of benefaction,
The teachings of the Tathagata,
Saving all the many beings.

Janet Selby

2 | Janet Selby | *Supernatural excellence* | painting

14 | Janet Selby | *Waters flow as mountains* | painting | painting

36 | Janet Selby | *Tips of the Mountains Feet* | drawing



Tips of the Mountains Feet | painting | Janet Selby

I am now of an age to get sick and die, a serious thought, but then again that possibility has been there from the beginning. When my mother was about to give birth, my father had to drive quite a few kms, then it was miles, over rough roads to get to the hospital. My aunty had given him a pair of scissors to cut the cord if I came en route. Fortunately he made it in his old car, an Austin 80 I believe, complete with a running board, to Mudgee maternity cottage hospital and I was safely delivered.

But before I was even thought of, the possibility of me was a question mark, a maybe, given my father was a navigator in World War 2, flying in Bomber Command over Germany, precarious to say the least. While he was on sick leave with mumps, his squadron was shot down and no one survived.

The who I am would have been quite different or not at all, had he not been sick that fateful night. He always felt bad about that, survivor guilt, I suppose. Then at the age of 1 year I contracted polio and was hospitalised for nearly a year in Sydney away from family, a life threatening, life frightening disease. But here I am 75 years later, still alive despite the various things that have happened including learning how to drive. Phew, that was a scary business, not at the level of my father's wartime duties, but in the beginning there were daily, life threatening near misses till I got the hang of it.

Now it is once again time to examine my life, that package of years encompassing joys and sorrows, disappointments and delights, loves and losses, and write again my last will and testament, before I take to the air on a trip overseas, just in case something should happen.

The thought of death does not scare me as it did as a child. Remember that childhood prayer,
Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child,
If I should die before I wake
I pray to thee my soul to take.

It filled me with terror. Now death and its sad accoutrements are familiar territory having farewelled grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, a few cousins, a husband, several friends, and some pets. It does not scare me but remembering all those departed leaves a train of sadness that trails along behind like a bridal veil. Except when I'm too busy and involved in the present which is most of the time.

I have written various Last Wills and Testaments. I remember getting quite excited writing the first in which I gave away a few books, my paints and my shell collection. What riches! But then a thought that made me crestfallen. "Oh, it depends on my being dead." Happiness muted.

I have just finished the last of several wills, this one done without a solicitor, just in case of disaster when I travel this week. My travel insurance deals with various scenarios, including hijacking and death! so writing a will seems like the responsible thing to do, the adult thing to do, the just in case thing to do, as you never know.

As I write this a friend is in Pakistan visiting family. She should be able to return next Friday but who knows? There is fighting between India and Pakistan and both sides have violated a peace fire and are lobbing bombs at each other. My friend can hear explosions at night. The airports are closed for the moment. I hope she and her baby will get safely home but it isn't certain.

I have been fortunate, a long and prosperous life, enjoyable work, a lovely home, a beautiful garden, many good friends and dear relatives and acquaintances, spiritual homes, a dear little dog, a democratic country, (hurrah! Elections with no murders or major thuggery) and now what I hope will be a holiday filled with delightful times and a safe return. But there are no guarantees, only the next breath and hopefully the one after that and a peaceful heart.

As I am writing a signing off letter of a sort...a will, a wish for all who read this. As the new Pope Leo said when he appeared after the vote,
"Peace, may peace be with you all."

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the undivided buddha nature of the entire universe.

I take refuge in the Dharma.

I take refuge in the Dharma, embracing all arising phenomena as the Dharma.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

I take refuge in the Sangha of all the many beings.

I vow to keep all precepts.

I vow to uphold the precepts and practice good in the world.

I vow to practice all good dharma.

I vow to practice all good Dharma on the pathless path, maintaining equanimity.

I vow to save the many beings.

I vow to keep a pure practice, leaving one's heart open to the gate of true compassion.

I take up the way of not killing.

I take up the way of being vegan.

I take up the way of not stealing.

I take up the way of being grateful for what I have and being charitable.

I take up the way of not misusing sex.

I take up the way of only having sex within a meaningful relationship.

I take up the way of not speaking falsely.

I take up the way of not using language as a means to manipulate the world.

I take up the way of not giving or taking drugs.

I take up the way of not becoming intoxicated by substances or ideologies.

I take up the way of not discussing faults of others.

I take up the way of not using language to sow the seeds of division where I could be promoting unity.

I take up the way of not praising myself or abusing others.

I take up the way of being humble, knowing all things are part of the one.

I take up the way of not sparing the dharma assets.

I take up the way of non-possessiveness and promoting generosity.

I take up the way of not indulging in anger.

I take up the way of forgiveness, not clinging to ideas of being wronged.

I take up the way of not defaming the Three Treasures.

I take up the way of respecting and nurturing the three treasures.

SURRENDERING TO THE FLOW OF THE TRAIL / RUNNING AS ZEN PRACTICE

Helen Redmond

In recent years my meditation practise has included embodied movement in the form of trail running. I blame my running mate and life partner Mark for getting me into this sport about 12 years ago at the tender age of 46. As a lifelong bush walker it was an easy progression from walking trails to running them. As a long term Zen student, dancer and fan of Tai Chi it intuitively became a movement meditation, a long rhythmic dance in the forests. I picked up a book called Chi Running and was hooked. This May I completed my 6th ultra-marathon (that is any foot race over 42.2km in length) in the Blue Mountains wilderness. Over 50km of steep tracks and fire trails in 9 hours. One seated rest of about 3 minutes. 79 thousand steps in one day. Crazy!

So how is this Zen practise? The preparation for an ultra begins 6 months out – longer if you have no base running fitness. Training runs are minimum 4 per week, including one long run on the weekend. The weekday runs are 40-70 minutes close to home in city streets and parks with a mix of intervals, hills and stairs. The weekly long runs are on bush trails, progressively longer towards the race, with the last 12 weeks being done on the actual course in the mountains.

Running is breathing. Running is body sensing. Running is being present to what is happening inside and out. Some run listening to podcasts or music, but I would rather not. Running is my chance just to be, with no requirements, except to align my posture-line, core and limbs, and let gravity do the rest. To get out of one's way is to relax while running. I follow running focuses relevant to the terrain or type of workout, which help ensure good technique and fewer injuries. Catching and noticing thoughts, I return to the body. Just like on the cushion, endlessly I come back to the focuses, or count my breaths, or let my koan in.

UTA50 Race Report 2025:

Yesterday was a long tough day but I enjoyed it. I was calm at the start line. My prep had gone well in the morning – tea, breakfast, 3 trips to the loo, one more pee in the portaloos at the start line. This may seem strange detail in a race report, but managing basic bodily functions and needs well can make the difference between finishing or not.

2,226 runners completed the 50km ultra this year. The event also had 11km, 22km, 100km and 100 mile events, nearly 7,000 runners in total. Ultra Trail Australia is the second largest trail running event in the world, and is held every May over 4 days from a start and finish at Scenic World in Katoomba. We ran on Saturday, setting off in 7 waves from 6am to 7am. I was in the 5th wave, with seeding based on last year's performance.

I kept an easy pace out to the turn around on Narrowneck 3.5km from the start. There was mist flowing over this sandstone cliff spur dividing the Jamison and Megalong valleys. We ran through it twice. I walked all the steep hills, and rolled gently down them. It was going to be a long day. Despite the excitement and energy I had at that point, restraint was key. On the way out I had passed Mark coming back who reminded me: "hike the hills sweetheart!" As a physio and my running coach as well as my partner, I listened.

Back past Scenic World and on to the cliff top single trail to Echo Point with spectacular views, mist still pooled in the valley. There was a queue for our first ladder, and a much longer wait to



Helen Redmond | photograph

get onto the Giant Stairway at the Three Sisters. Opportunities for chatting to fellow runners, taking in the views, taking on some glucose and fluids. It was slow going down the staircase. Race volunteers warned us others had fallen making delays even greater. No one wanted that. We were middle to back of the packers anyway. Speed was not the most important goal. After the long descent we continued on Dardanelles Pass to Leura Forest – exquisitely beautiful but somewhat technical single trail. I tried not to let a gap open in front of me. A good pace was kept up all the way up Fern Bower and beyond. A few faster runners passed me. I was breathing the forest and views, the twists and turns and endless stairs. Having the trail breathe me. Who is hearing? The lyrebirds sang. The sun shone above the canopy. Unlike last year no parts of the course were closed due to rain damage or landslides. Every one of the stairs included this time, for a total of 2,713 metres vertical climbing across the whole course.

I was full of gratitude for the track work that has been done on Prince Henry Cliff walk and many other parts of the course. Large sandstone stairs and stepping stones across many waterways, creeks, under seeping cliffs and beside waterfalls. Footfalls steady and regular for much of the way. There was beautiful new track work leading up to Gordan Falls Picnic ground, all joined up at last. Back down we plunged to Gordan Falls and Siolam Pool, the magical light of that place crossed with a constant stream of trail runners, a photographer in place to capture the moment for us, for later social media consumption.

On and up and around though drier heathier bluffs and on up to the suburban road to Fairmont Resort and our first check-point. I ran through but others stopped for water, electrolytes, nutrition, chips and watermelon. 18km done.

From Fairmont the single trail descended gradually down into more deep gullies and the Nature Track of the Conservation Hut. This was rough, wet, covered in black mud, sometimes slimy and treacherous. Unformed creek crossings slowed us down. Best to walk right through the water – no point trying to keep one's feet dry! Eventually we joined with the more open track to the Conservation Hut, and the ceaseless stairs in fact ceased for a while. I stopped briefly for a pee and then it was onwards to Wentworth falls – the Shortcut track then the Undercliffe Track – more

stunning rainforest gullies, more spectacular views. This is possibly my favourite part of the course. I no longer stopped for photos – too distracting from the task of breathing the views in, breathing in the energy, keeping my feet. I was very conscious of not holding others up on the track. I moved over to let others pass. Later unseeded runners were catching up and passing – young men loping and laughing.

Across the river above the falls and now I was really tired. The track climbs up and onto King's Tableland. I slowed to a walk. When the track flattened out I started a slow jog once more. I had completed 25km, not even quite half the course, but there was no denying that my quads were cramping, and my hamstrings, especially my right leg around my 'bad' knee. Not a good sign so early in the race. I checked in with myself and did a body scan. Had I eaten enough? No. Had I hydrated enough and had enough salt replacement? Almost certainly not. I had an energy gel, drank electrolytes and water. I moderated my pace, sensed my body. Was my posture line straight and strong? Was I relaxed around it like a needle in cotton? Was I leaning forward from my ankles and were my legs aligned? Were my legs relaxed? Most importantly was I running within myself, at a pace I could continue all day? I re-synced my breaths: two steps in-breath, 3 steps out-breath. I waved to the supporters and thanked the volunteers.

My cramps did not worsen. I nursed them up the road and onto the rough single trail across King's Tableland. This narrow track through the scrub is covered in trip hazards. Small woody stumps from cleared scrub still poke up at the sides of the narrow path. Warning some newbies behind me I tripped! But kept my feet. The track degenerates further as it follows the last km of road to the ruin of Queen Victoria Hospital. Looking more like a BMX stunt riding track at this point, with ruts and steep gravel mounds.

Arrived at QVH in just over 5 hours. 29km completed but I knew then that I would not make my target of finishing in 8 and a half hours – more like 9. I stopped to grab more gels, refill my flasks and add more electrolytes. This proved to be trickier than expected so I sat for a few minutes on a plastic chair to sort it out. But I had no desire to rest when Kedumba Pass was beckoning me. The next 17km were fire-trail leading off the edge of the table land and diving down through lovely stands of Blue Mountains ash (eucalyptus oreades), past tree ferns and Sydney red gums (angophora costata). I knew this stretch of the course better than any other, having run it dozens of times over the last 9 years. I knew where exactly to find the waratahs in October and the lyrebirds in June. My quads were better – in fact they felt fine and were not even sore! I let off the brakes on 8km of downhill and started passing people.

The big down ended at the Jamison Creek crossing. Time to get the running poles out and hike up the other side chanting the Sho Sai Myo Kichijo Darani under my breath, two syllables per step (attempting the preferred tempo of my teacher). Up and down and up and down to Leura Creek, with views of The Three Sisters from the other side crisp against a cloudless blue. The afternoon light slanting through the forest made the familiar feel different. I always saw it in morning light on my training runs. On the long hike up from Leura Creek I changed to Kanzeon – keeping my pace steady and unending. The trail sodden with days of rain became slippery clay and my poles sank deeper, my steps shorter and closer beneath me.

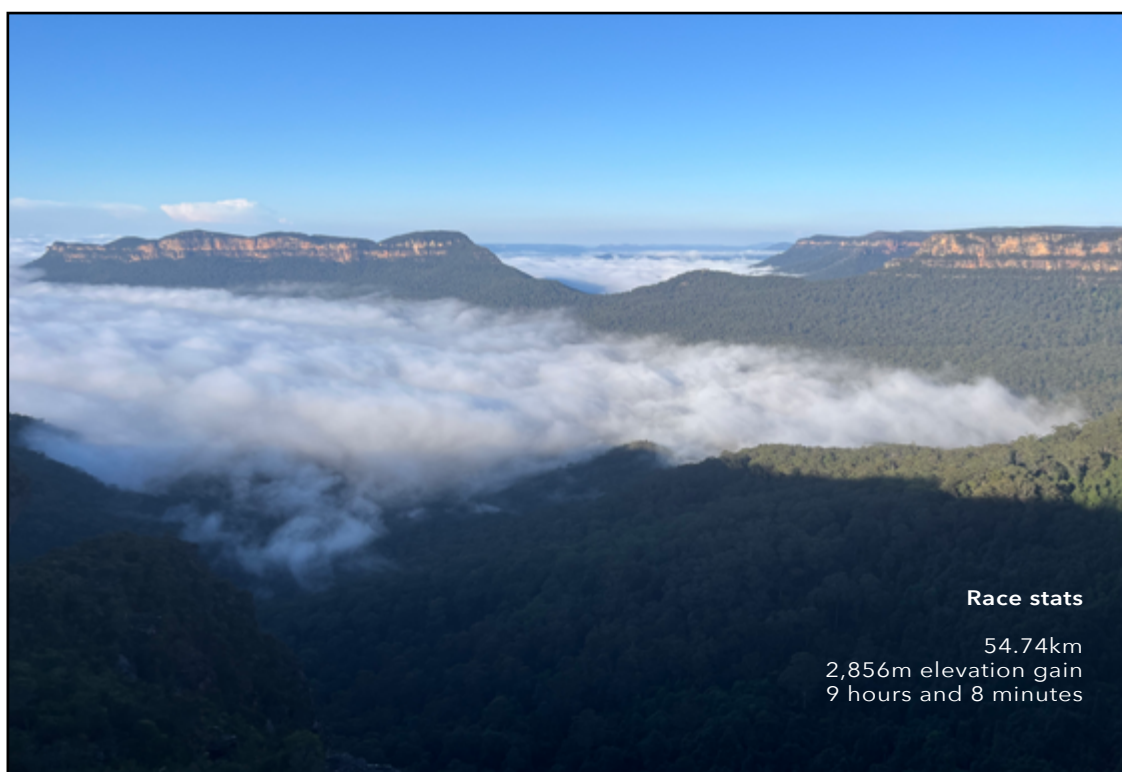
The still shade of taller forest and tree ferns, the isolated call of a bird (was it a bellbird?) and the screech of cockatoos marked the beginning of the end of fire trail. With relief I broke into a trot and lifted my poles as the ground flattened and undulated. Through the old sewage works clearing the track narrowed to a boggy single trail. Now the black mud began in earnest. With thousands of runners already through this area since Thursday it was churned up and spread over every rock and log on the trail. No landing place was dry or without risk. My quads and leg muscles were stiff and painful but that was irrelevant. I noted with interest that my troublesome right knee was completely pain free. There was only breath – cool in my lungs and on my skin, the constant scanning for footfalls and obstacles – how deep was this mud, that puddle? I had

planned to put poles away but quickly abandoned the idea. The light was dimming, the sun gone behind looming cliffs but the green gloom of Leura rainforest held me and soothed all concerns. I stopped a moment beside the rushing creek crossing to have another gel.

There was nothing but the trail and my movement over it. Black mud, sandstone steps and flags, creek crossings, vines and bracken, the sun filled valley and Mount Solitary glimpsed between trees as we passed beneath the Three Sisters on Federal Pass. I could have tripped at any step, but the effort of negotiating a thousand obstacles had become effortless floating, eyes seeing, legs responding, flowing onwards. Runners ahead, runners behind. Pass or be passed – neither held any significance anymore. Running had come to feel more like falling gently forward, in the embrace of trees and numberless beings.

Around a bend the sound of water. The final falls and infamous Furber Stairs were ahead. The track began to climb steps – gently at first. I moderated my pace, watched the puddles and eroded timber steps. At the creek crossing I opened my final gel and put my poles away in their quiver. There were chuckles and sighs of relief, weariness and anticipation in my fellow runners. Far above our heads we could hear distant cheers and bells from the welcoming crowd at the Scenic World finish line. 951 stairs were between us and being celebrated.

I climbed full of gratitude. My legs were free of cramps though I could sense them hovering nearby. Steady, steady, one step after another, pulling myself up with the hand railings where ever possible. My upper body was still full of strength despite nearly three hours using the poles. I looked behind and across at the top of one flight to see the setting sun shining full onto the Three Sisters. I drank in the spectacular view in an instant, and feeling the energy of the place surge in with the breath. Short stretches of flat relief under sandstone overhangs I barely broke into a trot. At the top of the final staircase was my partner Mark cheering and filming, encouraging and celebrating, wearing his finisher's medal. The stairs were over. The boardwalk and runners shoot and cheering crowds welcomed my final run to the finish line. The compares welcomed me by name as did the crowd. Emotion welled into my throat and eyes, but who was running?



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