

Ordinary Heroes

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The bodywork I do at Harbin gives me the opportunity to touch some remarkable people who come on healing retreats. I'm often amazed at the courage I witness as people open to parts of themselves that hurt. They surrender to the healing energy here and awaken to formerly hidden resources that grow in them and all around them.

As famous workshop leaders and gurus come and go from Harbin, I often think of those I've touched and who've touch me. Their presence here draws no followers; they write no books - ordinary folks facing extraordinary challenges. Yet it seems to me that every time I witness these one-person-at-a-time transformations, the world changes a little and peace becomes more possible. These are my gurus, my heroes - people who just do what they have to do.

*A young woman tells me of an industrial accident in which her body nearly ripped in two - her arm cut off. Beyond the survival the hospital team helped her with, she came to Harbin for another kind of healing. She'd been a dancer and now wanted to discover what this deeply scarred body was for. As we work in the sacred warm water, I see and feel a core of strength that softens everything in me - no pity, no need to fix - just to touch the spirit of this woman so young, so brave, so full of light. She guided both of us through the agony of the accident to a place where no harm is possible.

*He had carried supplies and medicine to war-torn parts of the world. The decorated war heroes moved on to new battles, and this humble man cleaned up the mess left behind. He thought he was just coming for a relaxing massage, and his outward good humor belied what his body revealed as we began to work. His body on the table carried what he'd seen - each step on his war-torn path offering itself as a portal to light. As the terror unwinds through his body, we found peace seeping up through the wreckage. His burden transformed to allow movement in a whole new way and a rededication to the ways of peace.

*The child within held the terror - the one that knew only darkness and starvation while the rest of her grew up. Holding this inner child in the warm water, the fig tree dropped its fruit

just beside her head. I placed the fig in her mouth as it formed an infant's suckle - nurture, warmth, healing. In these sacred waters she found the courage to dig through the pain to reach the truth of her being - a child of light and potential.

*Once an accomplished artist, a stroke curled his painting arm and hand in pain close to his body; he paints no more. He braces the winter cold to be helped from his wheelchair into the pool and my arms - an hour's surrender and relief. Each time the pain in his arm retreats a little longer. There's time to tell me about painting. As we look at the trees around the pool, he remembers how they revealed themselves in his watercolors. The contracted arm and hand open more, as does the heart that remembers.

*It'd been over a year since she had a massage. Nursing her child through his first year, her wonder at life expanded and grew. But where was her body and where was *she* anymore in this body? She felt depleted and just folded onto the massage table. Each touch brought her home - to her body. She left full of energy to share with her family again.

*For all his life he trained himself not to feel because as a young boy he'd been humiliated, tricked, tortured and neglected. He came to Harbin for months before trusting enough to be touched. In the first session, his eyes darted around on alert, ready to protect again from pain. With each tiny surrender to touch, the feeling that emerged was anything but welcome. Initially, there was no experience to support a trust that by opening to feeling and light, he would heal - that there wouldn't just be endless pain and terror. Very slowly and with more courage than I thought possible, he opened to experience life as a little more than constant vigilance against feeling. This hero's struggle goes on, each retreat taking him more into the full truth of his being.

*She'd had a mastectomy and chemotherapy left her bald. Without bathing suit or head scarf, she bravely entered the private Conference Center pool for her first Watsu. In the warm embrace of the water, she found she could feel beautiful again and also found the courage to meet the sadness of her loss. A year later, she proudly and joyfully entered the public pool, a new trust in her body and those at Harbin who would accept her.

*Sometimes it's joy or a growing awareness of our own radiance that takes courage to face and embrace. Those who come to Harbin after a soul diminishing job or relationship has ended, are often shocked to discover qualities in themselves they didn't know were there. That we are capable of expanding so much or feeling so alive can be an overwhelming experience. An awakening soul often demands dramatic shifts in who we think we are and what our life is about.

These and many others would balk at being called heroes or teachers. Many arrive at Harbin's gate not knowing why, but discover something in themselves that is ready to change. Others are nudged here by an injury, built-up stress, an illness or life transition. Most heroes don't set out to be heroes - they just do what they had to do. Heroines meet obstacles with courage and in so doing they touch the world around them.

These ordinary heroes leave Harbin a better place. Always a center for healing, this water and land seems to sigh in satisfaction as their healing qualities are recognized and used to help people grow. When the fig falls at just the right moment or the frog's sudden croak triggers the perfect response in someone's body, I'm reminded that I never work alone. Sometimes it's the turkeys who meander beside the pool just as someone needs an assurance of life's abundance or the song of a bird that brings just the right vibration to a session. Those who come on a healing retreat to Harbin get a "full-meal deal" and they usually take a little bit of it home with them.

We who live at Harbin - the frogs, the birds, the figs and people thrive on serving and witnessing those heroes who come on retreat - the ordinary heroes who just do what they have to do. These sacred waters dance a little more blithely after they've been here.