

Challenges for Our Time
New Jordans Lecture November 6th 2008
Restorative justice: transforming the cycle of violence
Marian Partington

Thankyou for inviting me to give this lecture. I would especially like to thank Tim Newell whose faith, encouragement and support initiated me and enabled me to enter the realms of Restorative Justice on my 'outer journey'. It is almost exactly four years since I led a walking meditation at Old Jordans within the context of a residential process of discernment about services for those affected by violent crime initiated by Tim (from which the project Escaping Victimhood emerged).

We walked mindfully, in silence from the barn, past the graves and into Old Jordans Meeting House, some of us barefooted, opening ourselves to the mysterious wonder of the present moment. In the potent silence of the Meeting House I spoke George Fox's exhortation that has been at the core of my spiritual practice as a Quaker and as a Chan (Zen) Buddhist. I now offer them in New Jordans:

“Discern all Deceit and Rend all Vails that the Pure may come to Life, that deceit hath trampled under.”

Unfortunately there is not enough time to include the detail of the 'outer journey' with Tim and others in my talk this evening, but I am offering this in written form (see website) ¹as witness to the reality that my inner search led to an outer form, as faith in action.

Our society has lost sight of the stage of the journey from revenge (maximum punishment) towards forgiveness. This leaves us in a state of 'dis' (apart, asunder), where we have become 'dis-membered' by fear and violence and crippled by the habit of needing to scapegoat an 'other'. We need to move towards 're' (afresh, anew) so that we can face and transform what keeps us from our natural state of ease and harmony. We need to develop our deepest human potential and creativity so that we can 're-member'

¹ <http://www.jordans-quakers.org.uk> Addendum to lecture. Part 2

this journey and help each other to live it. The way that we approach those who harm us, and those we have harmed holds the key to our future.

In December 2007 I received a letter from a prisoner in HMP Highdown. I had been contributing something of 'my story' as a contributor to the The Forgiveness Project². Archbishop Desmond Tutu made the comment during his speech at the opening of the exhibition in 2004 that all of these stories reflect 'true healing'. Another response was that the stories all had in common a healing mixture of 'pain and hope'.

Antony had written to Marina³ with the question that he now asked me:

Am I allowed to accept that it took something as sad and vicious as the Wests and the Yorkshire Ripper and hearing Marian and Richard's stories to bring me to the point of knowing I can and will change?

Marina had replied:

The whole point of forgiveness is to learn from each others' stories. Empathy connects us as human beings and through hearing real stories from other people we are inspired to change. Also remember it wasn't the gruesome details (of the crimes) that inspired you, it was the way that Marian and Richard had used their 'tragedy' as a spur for change, to give back, to create a greater good of you like. It makes perfect sense.'

I wrote to Antony:

I choose to come into prison and share something of my story because I have experienced many times that by sharing our suffering (the truth of our sorrow, our loss) a mysterious process happens.

Once I was walking in a forest after it had been snowing for three days. All of the trees were weighed down with snow. My arm brushed against one of the branches and suddenly the snow fell off and the branch sprang back into its natural place. This seems a

² www.theforgivenessproject.com

³ Marina Cantacuzino, Director of the Forgiveness Project

bit like the process of becoming more forgiving. As we get to know what is in the way of us becoming naturally free the snow falls away and we spring back into shape. Then we are naturally forgiving because we want others to know this place too.

We begin to understand that everyone has this unresolved pain and when we connect with that in others our own pain goes away (the branch springs back) and they begin to heal too.

So when I think of the Wests and their sorrow that caused them to harm others, if I wish them well (which has taken many years!) I free myself.. If I 'think' about it all too much it can become overwhelming. But the truth is, that if they hadn't behaved in the way that they did maybe I would never have had to go on such a journey in my search for some sort of place that can hold the horror and pain of the collision between them and my dear sister. When I find this place (in glimpses) I know that I want them to feel this place too, because it is how we are all meant to be, when the snow drops away'.

If what I have said has enabled your desire to change then my vow to bring something positive out of Lucy's death is being fulfilled and I am truly grateful for your courage.

My quest has been one that faces us all in these challenging times:

How do we transform cruelty into compassion and work towards a justice that brings healing and a sense of belonging to all who have been harmed and those who harm?

Or maybe the question could be more theological:

How do we cast out fear in order to find 'perfect love'? I use the word perfect in the sense of 'that which embraces all'.

This evening I invite you to travel with me. I am speaking experientially and I ask you to bear George Fox's question that has been present in my mind, as I composed this lecture, in your own hearts and minds as you listen:

What canst thou say?

Lucy Partington was my sister, four years younger than me. On 27th. December 1973 she left a friend's house in time to walk to the bus stop in Evesham road, Cheltenham, intending to catch the 10.15p.m.bus back to our home in Gretton. She didn't catch the bus. She was 21 years old and in her final year of doing an English degree at Exeter university. She was reported missing and a national search was launched. She became one of thousands of "missing people" for twenty years.

On March 4th. (her birthday) 1994 Frederick West told the Investigation Team in Gloucester that there were more bodies in the basement of 25 Cromwell St. and one of them was Lucy's.

The grotesque details surrounding Lucy's death are part of my life. I can't pretend it didn't happen. I work hard to understand. I remind myself that Lucy went through it only once and that we can never know exactly what happened. But there is something about trying to get the measure of it before one can let go of it. It is vast and slippery. It is sticky and staining.⁴

This has been my territory for the last fourteen years. My experience of moving towards acceptance and understanding involves an enlarging of context and an investigation of the interconnectedness of life. This attitude is also at the heart of a justice which aspires towards the restoration and transformation of all those harmed by crime, those labelled as 'victims' and 'offenders' and their families and communities.

It has involved facing and integrating my response to traumatic loss which reaches back to my parents' divorce when I was twelve, Lucy's 'disappearance' when I was 26 and the unearthing of her remains in 1994. It has involved developing a new relationship with my 'self' and exploring the subject of forgiving: facing my own cycle of being harmed and harming and reaching beyond the labels that restrict our potential for change.

⁴ 'Salvaging the Sacred' by Marian Partington. Quaker Books ISBN 0 85245 353 1

In the words of Rumi:

There is a place beyond

Right and wrong

I will meet you there.

1994 first vow

In 1994 I made a vow (a deep prayerful intention) to try and bring something positive out of Lucy's terrible death, something that would bring positive change into our society in some way. I have learnt to trust that guidance is deep within me if I can only listen and respond.

The first words that came when we began to learn of Lucy's terrible murder were:

'Lord have mercy upon us. Please don't let me have to go through this on my own.'

The Orthodox Christian prayer was not part of my chosen theology. But I have come to know that of mercy. The gratitude that I feel when I reflect upon all who have walked with me is truly humbling. Lucy had been received into the Catholic church at Exeter University Chaplaincy five weeks before her abduction, rape and murder. I became a Quaker five weeks before her remains were unearthed, twenty years later. Did these commitments offer meaning in the context of human atrocity?

frozen silence

*'It is very difficult to find the words or an image to describe the pain and disorientation of one's sister simply disappearing without trace, for 20 years. It's a bit like trying to search for a body which is trapped somewhere beneath the frozen Arctic ocean, as the freeze continues and the ice thickens and there is no sign of a thaw, no sign of a seal hole. The features of that world become distorted as the seasons pass and the ice builds up and you have to go inside to get warm if you want to survive and carry on. But you have to be ready for the thaw, for the rescue. Somewhere inside I became disconnected from the past and disabled by the future.'*⁵

⁵ *ibid.*

But this severance seemed to allow something else to arise within me that came in the form of a dream. It was like going into another room for a while, and knowing a truth that seems more real than anything that came before. The experience faded away but left a trace that informs the core of my being, creating a yearning to know that place again, touching upon 'perfect love'. When I was speaking in Holloway prison with The Forgiveness Project the Muslim chaplain reminded me that there are many guiding dreams in the bible. It as if there is a well of healing deep in the heart of consciousness that is atavistic and a natural aspect of our creative imagination, arising in dreams. Trusting these images has been an essential aspect of my journey.

1974 first dream: a peace that passeth understanding

In 1974 I received a dream shortly after Lucy 'disappeared'. In the dream she came back and I asked her where she had been. She said:

I've been sitting in a water meadow near Grantham. And then she said:

'If you sit very still you can hear the sun move.'

The feeling that came from/with these words was of everything being in place, at ease, belonging. The place of harmony (the Greek 'harmos' means joint), where everything joins up. I call this place the 'shining silence' because to speak would be to diminish the ultimate *logos*. In this place forgiveness is spontaneous.

As the Chinese sage Lao Tsu wrote:

'Harmony is the basis of existence, benevolence is the keystone of virtue'

1973-1994 not knowing

It took me a long time to obey the instruction, to sit very still. Those 20 years of 'not knowing' were haunted by the unresolved absence of Lucy, a fear of dying and never knowing what had happened to her. I made destructive, rash choices that were sometimes hurtful to others. I found it difficult to trust life and relationships. My friends did try to understand and offered love, but at first I pushed it away and shut off from my feelings. I felt isolated and confused. My parents struggled with their own grief. It took me a long time to grieve for Lucy as my 'sister' rather than my 'parents' daughter'.

During this time my three children were born and I moved to mid Wales. My children have two fathers which is an ongoing source of conflict. I settled down with the father of my third child and we married after 27 years in 2007 (another challenging vow)! I read somewhere that:

The severity of the loss elicits a longing for closeness and intimacy..often sought for sexually, then guilty feelings.

I can identify with that as part of my response to Lucy's disappearance when I was 26. It led to harm, guilt and the need for forgiveness.

I began to study homoeopathy and set up a practice in our local town. Through this discipline I worked with a holistic model of healing that has informed my response to life and been complimentary to the model of restorative justice. Seeing the person as a unique individual, who has physical, emotional and spiritual needs and the dis-ease that builds up within a context of unresolved pain and unresolved relationships. My life was 'great busyness' and maybe this was my way of 'moving on' at the time. But there was always this part of me that was 'on hold', waiting to know.

This feeling got worse as time passed. My children knew about their 'missing aunt' and slept in 'Lucy's bedroom' at the Mill. My mother kept all of Lucy's books and a chest of drawer full of her university notes and correspondence. Recently she passed them on to me when she moved to live nearby, after her husband died. I spent a while combining our books from our common study of English Literature in impeccable chronological order, sifting out the duplicates (e.g.Sweets 'Anglo Saxon Reader'), noticing books that I had given to her, and realising our different interests. We shared a love of T.S Eliot and mused about 'the intersection of time with eternity'. Lucy was a real scholar with high ability and aspirations. It was healing to join up the books. Now I feel ready to study again.

Fourteen years after the water meadow dream, in 1987, I began to attend Quaker Meetings for Worship in my attempt to learn more about Christianity at a time when my daughter had decided that she wanted to be baptised. I wanted to support her, but did not feel comfortable with the liturgy of the Church in Wales. Sitting still with others, 'waiting

on God', was a way of travelling that became an essential part of my life. Healing from traumatic loss treads upon holy ground, sowly, slowly, step by step. I know that I could not have been making this journey without the sometimes silent, sometimes practical, always prayerful and non-judgemental support of the many people who have continued to answer and reflect that of God within me. I have been upheld and guided by grace.

Developing a forgiving approach to whatever arises in every day life has become an ongoing daily discipline of paying attention to my thoughts, words and actions. It is not a noun that is completed and ticked off. It is an ongoing verb in which I begin to unravel the delusion of my self-centred place in the world. Who do I need to forgive and who do I need to be forgiven by? What does this feel like? Painful, exasperating, humbling, renewing, enlivening, liberating, essential, endless.

It is time to re-learn more about the process of forgiving, which has long been promised as a liberating expression of our deepest spiritual potential. Why? Because without this possibility of healing and renewal, this dimension of who we truly are without all that imprisons us, we can only move, inexorably, towards increasing violence and destruction, possibly towards extinction.

1994 second dream: facing the truth

A month after Lucy's bones were unearthed the next dream arose. I wanted to know 'what was left of Lucy'. I was shown a pink sack by the pathologist full of numbered bones. This assembled itself into a full sized skeleton which I embraced. It became Lucy in flesh and I remembered how she felt in body. This dream led to the following actions with two friends in the chapel of rest in Cardiff where her bones were labelled (JR5 Body6) and locked away as 'an exhibit for the defence'.

I pointed to the smaller of the two boxes, which was plain brown with a hinged lid, and asked, "Is her skull in there?" As the pathologist nodded and began to lift the lid, a feeling of strength came over me. As we drew nearer I gasped at the beauty of her skull. It was like burnished gold and it was something that was part of Lucy that had survived to tell the tale. At that moment I was full of the joy of finding something that had

been a part of Lucy after all these years. Not a glimmer of fear not a morbid thought entered the experience. I lifted her skull with great care and tenderness and kissed her brow. I marvelled at the sense of recognition in its curves and proportion. I wrapped it, like I have wrapped my babies, in her " soft brown blanket", her snuggler. I pressed her to my heart. Before I placed her skull back I laid a branch of heather entwined with sheep's wool from the top of Plynlimon in the bottom of the box. I visualised the space and beauty of the wild mountain top, the brown peat, the sheep, the warm wind, the distant range of receding mountains, the top of the world with its feeling of freedom, close to the sky. A place Lucy would have loved. A place that feels close to our Welsh roots. I offered it with so much love.

I am happy to say that sharing these words in my Guardian essay led to increased respect and understanding of the needs of families in relation to the bodies of loved ones who have died in disasters that involve a criminal investigation. During a piece of research at Edgehill⁶ university I met relatives of those who had died in Hillsborough football stadium who had not been allowed to say goodbye to the bodies, and also parents whose children had been shot in Dunblane. Respecting and trusting the wishes of relatives rather than 'protecting' them from the reality of violent death, is a vital, empowering part of their healing process.

1995 second vow

I made my second vow, to try and forgive the Wests, at the end of my second Buddhist retreat in 1995 because I knew that this would be the most creative, liberating way forward. I struggled to know how to live with the dark without being overwhelmed by it. Almost immediately after making this vow I experienced **murderous rage**. It was as if the enormity of the terrain ahead irradiated me. The involuntary, physical, terrifying, violent nature of this rage that seemed to erupt out of nowhere, brought my own darkness to light. It did not seem to be about the Wests. It was like a pure emotion that needed to be expressed. Now I was not separate from those who have killed. It also made me realise

⁶ Studies in Crime and Social Justice ESRC Research Seminar
Disasters: Origins, Consequences and Responses

the traumatic loss involved in acting out that feeling. I began to make a link between the labels of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' within myself. I began to be kinder to myself.

I experienced my own capacity for murder, the heart of my own darkness. This increased the power and urgency of my quest. I realised that which needs to be healed within us in order to know wholeness, to be able to live in community with each other. The way towards healing involves a movement from the self-centred perspective towards one which is open to being changed and enlarged in some way, made whole (as the root of its word suggests: *Old Saxon hal, hale: whole*). The words health and holy also have this root.

1996 finding words

Finding words, writing, became one approach in my search for meaning. Sharing those words changed my life. Why and how did I write?

I needed to reclaim Lucy's truth from the Wests and the media. I knew that this experience of traumatic loss required honouring with time and serious effort so that I could somehow minimise the legacy of unresolved pain that would be passed on to the next generation. Initially I allowed a day a week of solitude and contemplation, simply 'sitting with' whatever arose and writing down the images and words that came to mind.

Sometimes I felt that I was risking the disintegration of myself without the assurance that a new whole would emerge. But I did not seem to have the choice to turn back. I knew that I would have to spend days when the words were nowhere to be seen and the sky was dark. But gradually I found trust in this as part of the process of creativity and healing.

My instincts had led me towards silent places. The silence of nature, the silence of solitude. There was also the shared silence of Buddhist retreats and Quaker Meetings for Worship. There I found a place to explore and sometimes share with others who are also

committed to searching within for a place of belonging, without avoiding the thaw of what we would prefer to edit out or bypass.

While I was writing (from December 1995 to April 1996) there was a serious, ecological disaster. An oil tanker, 'The Sea Empress' burst its contents into the sea near Milford Haven. This was the coastline of our childhood holidays, and of family holidays with our children. The media images were of seabirds blackened and glued-shut with crude oil, beaches gagged with a black adhesion. 'The rescue work was called 'salvage'; reclaiming the birds, the sea-life, the beaches, and the sea from this toxic, suffocating death. I felt a resonance. The title had arrived: *Salvaging the Sacred*.

My voice had returned like a solitary migrant bird, flying across the decades of frozen silence. My truth, our truth. Not just us as sisters but us as women in search of meaning with common family roots in a culture that seethes with all that we would prefer to edit out: paedophilia, serial killing, trafficking of women, drug and alcohol abuse, material and spiritual poverty and a hypocritical veneer of democracy.

The words that arose within me came from an instinctive need for a terrible truth to survive, a bearing of witness, a speaking by proxy in the face of unspeakable demolition. If I had tried to carry on with no words I would have allowed death. That kind of dying is too common, especially amongst women. Not speaking because of fear of the consequences. Not speaking because of a feeling of inadequacy. Not speaking because there don't seem to be any words there. Just a frozen silence. If only Rosemary West could have spoken.

Eventually Myra Hindley was able to find words. In 1996 she wrote about her violent upbringing, the wife-beating of Friday nights. *'All the kids used to jump out of bed and rush outside to try and stop our fathers hurting our mothers, and we were often turned on too.'* In her brutal upbringing she learnt to *'tremble, cry and grieve inwardly'*. She was told she was abnormal, *'soft in the head'* when she cried inconsolably for weeks after a friend's death by drowning when he was 13. She perfected an *'ability to bury her*

emotions as deep as she could. She identifies this ability as the **'fatal'** and main ingredient in her relationship with Brady. *'All the compartments in which I'd locked away so much of what I couldn't bear to think about had to be opened one by one, taking years to gather the courage to examine and attempt to analyse their contents.'*

The Deceit and the Vails are within us all. Forgiveness offers a dissolving of 'the hope for a better past'.

1997 spring: the depth of grief

Two years after the murderous rage the depth of my grief surfaced during another retreat. This was another turning point for me. (Repentance can mean a turning towards God). I was trusting and honouring my own healing process without compromising it for fear of embarrassing others. I stayed with the other participants, sitting very still, investigating. I allowed the tears and snot to drip off my chin, wondering 'How many bowl fulls?' I waded in the Vale of Tears and saw that millions of others were there too. I was not alone. I realised that bereavement by murder was sadly, a not uncommon human experience. This connection brought a deep stillness. I was accepted; I belonged, with my face covered in tears and snot in the vulnerable truth of that moment.

1997 summer: asking for help/being upheld

In the summer of 1997 I applied for a Fellowship from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. I knew that I needed spiritual and financial support to be able to take my quest forward.

An extract from the application reflects my aspirations and concerns at the time:

One of the most challenging aspects of this tragedy to me, where I get stuck in a mire of prejudice, is the gap between Lucy's literacy and commitment to truth and beauty, which I share, and the depraved world of the Wests. I ask myself what would have made a difference to their lives so that they would not have become so profoundly sick. I need to increase my understanding of the roots of violence and abuse.

As Friends we need to find ways to confront the darkness within ourselves, and within our society/Society. We need to remember the source of our being and reflect the sacred inheritance of every moment. I hope that my contribution as a Fellow would deepen my understanding and ability to live this and speak this to others.

Ultimately I would like to be able to forgive the Wests. I would hope that my journey during my year as a Fellow would help me to move in this direction, painful as it is. I need to look more deeply into the path towards forgiveness as the way to move out of the cycle of violence and abuse and to reach towards a deeper understanding of the huge love and grace involved in that realisation of our spiritual potential. By sharing this exploration in some way I would hope to be deepening the life and thought of the Society of Friends in Britain.

(I hope this is what I am doing this evening, 11 years later!). The response of the trustees was wise and generous. They rightly discerned that I was not in a position to do this 'outer' work yet, as a Fellow, but could see that I needed time to be true to this journey as it was unfolding. They had read my essay and could see that finding the words, sharing them and the national response had changed my life. But as one trustee said, 'It's as if you are on a train that is travelling very fast and you won't know where you are until it stops'. I had never been good at asking for help. During my interview I realised that this was what I was doing.

The generous grant and the feeling of support for my journey ahead encouraged me to continue. It deepened my faith. I will always feel deeply grateful for the discernment and trust of fellow travellers, of which there are many.

1997-1999 sitting still: contemplative time

During my time as a grant holder I began by being physically ill. During this illness I had been confronted with my physical vulnerability and could no longer avoid my deep need to be still and withdraw. The message came loud and clear, physician heal thyself. If I

was going to be of use to anybody I had to listen to one of the Quaker 'Advices and Queries':

'Do what love requires of you, which may not be great busyness'. I had to let go of my role in the world as a homoeopath.

It was a direct lesson in recognising and making clear my own needs and facing my own vulnerability. The unravelling of the frozen past continued, layer after layer as I sat still and investigated, and walked in the Himalayas with my daughter, where I faced the reality of my own death in a culture that respects the interdependence of all forms of life and the reality of death.

As I reflected upon the first year as a grant holder I began to see the direction and pattern of the process of the invisible, silent healing of my soul. This inner work was towards discerning, trusting and affirming my "real work". When I was able to stay true to this, whatever form it may take (writing, relationships, listening, sharing, letting go, praying, being) I felt closer to who I am and to the source of my being. I became more aware of the grace that caught me as I fell and turned me back towards the light. I accepted my woundedness and experienced this as a blessing that allowed me to be vulnerable and develop compassion. I knew that I was living closer to the harmony of the heaven within. I was given a further grant so that I could bring this process into a book. This year was difficult but essential. The book has only just been sent off (10 years later).

1999 winter third dream: denial

Denial is an important part of survival, but as a conclusive position it attempts to bypass, trivialise and negate or delay the pain of the healing process. To fix it, make it more comfortable to live with. Denial can lead to lethal, oppressive regimes. I have tried that one and sometimes wish that it would work for me, but it leaves me in the frozen silence which is driven by a wish to deny pain and carries a perverse power which can haunt, oppress and destroy vitality.

In the third dream (late winter 1999) I had decided that I must forgive 'Rosemary West'. I put her name in inverted commas because I came to realise that this was somehow me. We met on the edge of a park, by some railings with spiked ends. It was night. We faced each other and I said (without looking at her face), 'I forgive you'. It was a meaningless moment of misguided, arrogant hypocrisy. There was no response. She evaporated into the drain. The railings were spears of ice. The skin on my hands froze and tore as I tried to loosen my grip. How could I have been so patronising and pretentious, so premature? Forgiveness, what does it mean and how will it come?

In the next scene of the same dream I was sitting in a basement with 'Rosemary West' and another woman who said that she was a mediator. 'West' was scooping handfuls of flesh from a glistening pile of meat, on the floor by her feet. She was pushing it into small polythene bags.

She lined up the bags. They looked like chicken giblets from the innards of frozen supermarket poultry or chopped placentas. On the wall behind her there was a dark space, like a window with no glass in it, opening onto a blackout night sky. She picked up each bag in turn, tossing them one by one over her shoulder into the black rectangular frame. She didn't turn her head to follow her actions once. Her eyes were all pupil that strained towards me like a sharp point trying to burst through a bin liner. She repeated a sentence to herself, the tone was matter of fact, like a chant without heart.

'I keep throwing them into the sea, but the waves keep bringing them back.'

I looked at the mediator with triumphant illogic. 'Rose' must be mad if she thinks that the sea is outside the basement. How can I speak to someone who is so mad as to think that the sea is outside the basement? I simply cannot understand or relate to anyone who is so mad as to think that the sea is outside the basement. My sense of reality has nothing in common with hers.

'I keep throwing them into the sea, but the waves keep bringing them back.'

She could not see us. Over her shoulder, into the hole, one after another. But as I looked closer, sure enough, the number of bags was simply increasing.

'I keep throwing them into the sea, but the waves keep bringing them back.'

My focus was drawn towards the power of the sea. I couldn't hear it, but it wasn't swallowing those bags of flesh. The sea knows the rules. It would not absorb nor accommodate the rotting flesh. It would not allow it to disappear. There was nowhere for it to hide. Soon the room would be full of these neat transparent bags that refused to follow the rules of waste disposal.

This is a complex dream, but the feeling was of more darkness coming up within me, and the need to face more of the easily demonised 'Rosemary West' in me, my own shame and guilt and the bits I would rather edit out. They did arise in a moment of deep compassion that left me closer to an acceptance of myself and her. Facing and acceptance the pain of loss, of shame, is an essential part of the process of forgiving.

My time as a grant holder ended with an **International Forgiveness Conference** at Findhorn where I offered a workshop and met others on a similar quest, some of whom became fellow contributors to the Forgiveness Project.

However this was not a grand finale to be ticked off as completed and resolved.

2000 summer: mercy

I did not know how to go on. It was hard to return to earning a living when I felt I hadn't completed this huge journey. I was facing the relationships in my immediate family that needed forgiveness. I juggled my commitments and felt frustrated with myself.

In 2000 I was sitting on another Chan (Zen) Buddhist retreat within the rigorous ascetic discipline of 'sitting and investigating' for eight hours a day. By day 4 I could feel this horrible depression that meant that I didn't want to go on breathing...too much effort. It all started to surface again. And I thought Oh No, I thought I had finished with all this. The self I have had enough of is this snivelling, grieving mess.

Then I found myself in my only interview with the great Chan Master Sheng-Yen blurting out that I was struggling with a deep karmic obstruction and that I was also

feeling that I didn't want to go on breathing. My Buddhist teacher John Crook added the information that my sister had been murdered. Neither Shih Fu nor his dear Abbot looked at me. They spoke rapidly in Chinese and then the Abbot gave me an interpretation. I realised that my whole life had led to this point and it all felt natural and affirming of what I have been trying to do.

Chan Master Sheng-Yen said, '*Just know that your suffering is helping to relieve the suffering of others.*'

The journey had to continue and I had to stay true to its direction and pace.

Back on my cushion the grief flooded back, and my desire to breathe returned. I thought of Rosemary West and tried to say to her, I am feeling a terrible pain, but I hope that it might help you in some way. And then the most profound realisation of the depth and extent of the suffering that she has created for herself and many others filled me with an authentic response of really hoping that she is being helped in some way. I thought of her terrible isolation, in a society that has demonised her, and how irrevocably her family is wrecked and fragmented.

I also faced and accepted my deepest shame, the unborn children that I had chosen to have aborted during the early years of 'not knowing' when my life was so confused, isolated and unresolved. In that moment, when I experienced a deep empathy with her suffering, and acknowledged my own unresolved shame, my pain went away.

forgiving

The word *forgiving* became alive. Now it meant a new relationship with pain. It was not because of someone else (who is worse than me, is the 'other', who must be made to know this effect upon me by receiving as much pain in return – punishment). This position encourages isolation and revenge. But it is *for* someone else in order that they may be free of that which caused them to harm in the first place. A giving for. *For*-giving. The unexpected by product of this compassion (empathy with suffering) seems to be a feeling of being freed, being more alive, released in some way.

Lucy's woven bag

During my time of serving on the Crime, Community and Justice Group⁷ we were asked to imagine what true justice would feel like. One of the images that both groups came up with was something that was soft, like hand spun woollen cloth (a far cry from the prison environment!).

Lucy gave me a little hand made woollen bag that she had made when she was 10 and I was 14. It speaks of her generosity and her patient, inquisitive nature. It struck recently that the way that she made it is a metaphor for the process of healing. I began to use it in my work in prisons with the Forgiveness Project.

crisis: an opportunity for change

First Lucy collected wool from the hedgerows in the Top Ground. Then she walked home climbing over stiles and gates, carrying the matted, raw fleece, choked with thorns, twigs, moss, earth and dried sheep shit. This is the matter and mess of the thick sorrow created by crime that can seem too complex to tease out into the soft, clean fleece needed for the spinning of the thread.

confession/repentance: facing the 'Vails and Deceit'

Back at 'The Mill' she faced the raw fleece. Her creative inspiration led her to carefully snap large thorns away from the branches of a rose bush and push them through two sheets of cardboard. These were the 'carders' needed to loosen and clean the sheep's wool. Patiently she worked through the messy pile until she produced a mound of soft, untangled wool, using thorns to extract the thorns, slowly teasing out the knots and clots as the dirt dropped away.

⁷ Friends House, Paula Harvey 0207 6631036 paulah@quaker.org

integration: becoming present

The third stage of making the bag was spinning the thread, creating the means of something new. Lucy took a cotton reel and a pencil to make her spindle. Lifting the carded fleece she pulled a pinch with her fingers and twisted it into the beginning of the thread. This first twist was somehow attached to the end of the pencil and the cotton reel spindle was twiddled and dropped, allowing the weight and turning of the 'spindle' to twist the fleece into a long thread which she wrapped around the pencil, feeding in the soft fleece. The thread is uneven, sometimes thick and then thinner but unbroken and long.

transformation: a new shape

Finally Lucy took the thread and made a loom creating the warp and then the weft, weaving a length of woollen cloth. Folding the cloth into thirds she sewed up the sides for four inches, leaving a flap of four inches that tucks over the opening. Three strands of the warp have broken and it is slightly unravelling. Somehow it feels alive. I keep my prayer beads in it.

It was her gift to me and now I share it with others as something to hold and something to contemplate. Many hands have treasured this bag feeling the gentleness, aspiration and hope. Many whose hands are stained by violence. Many whose hands long to be put to good use, to be valued, who long to be free of shame.

Once I saw a man in prison gazing lovingly at the bag He later told me that he 'didn't usually have experiences like this, but when he had looked at the bag 'there seemed to be light pouring out of it'.

Lucy's name means light. The violence of her death has been transformed into light within me through the grace of 'that of God' in all who have answered. I offer this for the benefit of 'all sentient beings'. May we be well and happy and free from fear.

In deep gratitude I offer Lucy's poem and vision as the last words:

Things are as big as you make them –

I can fill a whole body,

A whole day of life

With worry

About a few words

On one scrap of paper;

Yet, the same evening,

looking up,

can frame my fingers

to fit the sky

in my cupped hands.

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Challenges for Our Time
New Jordans Lecture November 6th 2008
Restorative justice: transforming the cycle of violence
Marian Partington

Addendum (Part 2)

2001 the outer journey

In March 2001 I felt ready to move out into the world again and offer something of my privileged experience to others.

I began by visiting a local woman who had been trying to contact me, Wendy Compton⁸. Her son, William, had been brutally murdered in a town nearby in 1996. I listened to some of her traumatic story for about 5 hours on our first meeting. I left full of questions about the criminal justice system that needed answering, and with the shock of the rawness of her pain that was as fresh as if it had just happened. (Four years later Wendy experienced a deep moment of healing in the barn at 'Old Jordans' during a residential week as a participant on Escaping Victimhood)..

The questions that Wendy's story provoked in me led me to contact Tim Newell, a fellow Quaker and governor of Grendon Prison at the time. Tim invited me to attend the first **International Conference on Restorative Justice** in this country at the end of March 2001. It was at Winchester. The last time I had been there was in 1995 for the judge's summing up at Rosemary West's trial. I was astonished to be amongst a community of people who were also looking for another approach to justice.

I watched two reconstructed trials about the same fictitious crime. Judge Bria Huculak (from Saskatchewan, Canada) performed as the judge in both trials and the other parts were played by actors. The first trial was the predominant adversarial way of dealing with crime which is dominated by the legal professionals and leaves no room for the sense of truth and justice that I am interested in. Its concern is with establishing the guilt or innocence of the offender and deciding upon an appropriate sentence (punishment). The second mock trial took the form of a **sentencing circle** (this is one structure and process that comes under the umbrella of the broad term Restorative Justice). The approach is founded on Aboriginal peacemaking and mediation principles. Judge Huculak has been involved in this dynamic judicial process since 1992. It is inclusive and involves the participation of offender, the victim, their family and friends and people from their communities. It is rooted in a search for understanding, context, connection and healing of all those harmed by the crime. Its form is circular and it begins with prayers and ceremonies. There is an equality of speaking and being heard, of listening

⁸ See Wendy's book: 'Justice for William

and feeling. It is often empowering and transforming for all participants. The 'justice' is reached through cooperation and a willingness to take responsibility and make amends.

As I watched this process I knew its power to heal and its connection with all that I aspire towards. Its structure and process allows the hope of re-newal, the dissolving of the unresolved pain. It involves the expression and acknowledgement of that which has been lost (not simply on a factual, material level), the context of the crime (what was going on in the personal life of the offender at the time), the experience of empathy, the feeling of remorse, the offering of apology, the understanding and maybe the offering of forgiveness. It was as if my inner search had led to an outer form.

Grendon prison (therapeutic)

Immediately after the conference in Winchester Tim invited me to attend a visitor's day at the therapeutic prison HMP Grendon and Springhill prison . I found myself sitting in a circle of people in Grendon prison. Six prisoners and six visitors. No-one else. This was 'any questions' time. The prisoners were on line. So were we. We had been shown into a room with a circle of chairs on 'D' wing. 'Tom', one of the prisoners was the facilitator in our group. Visitor's day is part of their therapeutic regime. He suggested that we went around the circle saying why we were there.

He began. His name, his age, the time he was serving, his crime. 'Rape', in his early 30's is what I remember.

I was the first visitor to speak. 'I have been searching for some sort of truth and understanding about my sister Lucy's brutal death. Like all of you in Grendon, I have ended up having to search inside me, investigating my own cycle of violence and abuse. I have found debilitating grief, fear, shame and murderous rage. I would like to be able to understand what kind of circumstances lead to the acting out of the criminal impulses that I have found within my self. Lucy was gagged when she died. That is one of the most difficult aspects of her death for me. She couldn't speak her truth. I am here to listen to you'.

Next came 'Rob'. I am serving 12 years for murder. I'd like to say that 'Bill' from A wing made me feel very angry this morning when he talked about himself as victim. (Yes, he'd spoken with emotional detail about his victim years, which had led to his perpetrator years. I had flashed back to the endless graphic details of sexual depravities and brutality that were read out hour after hour, day after day at Rosemary West's committal trial. If I had heard one sentence about her childhood years of victimhood I would have found something about the truth that I was searching for then. A broader context for her crime, a sense of her history as a damaged human being. Later I discovered that she had been abducted from a bus stop and raped when she was 15, shortly before she met Frederick West. Four years later Lucy was stolen from a bus stop, raped, tortured and killed.

Grendon prison fosters a culture of enquiry. Within the therapeutic community prisoners continually challenge each other and learn to express anger in words rather than physical violence. They learn about trust and honesty.

Next Tom took the lead. He turned to look me in the eye. 'What you said has really affected me. Until I heard you speaking like that, I think I had just been playing at 'victim empathy'. Something has hit home'.

I wasn't expecting this. Tom's response moved me in a way that is impossible to define in words or logic. It felt healing. An openness, a shared suffering, a truth.

Horfield prison Bristol: Restorative Justice in prisons project (2001-3)

By November 2001 Tim had invited me to contribute to his pioneering project Restorative Justice in Prisons⁹. There were three prisons involved. I was at Horfield prison (Bristol), Quaker Lesley Moreland¹⁰ was contributing to Norwich prison and Lorraine Nolan to Winchester prison. Our role was to raise 'victim awareness' amongst

⁹ Bristol, Winchester and Norwich prisons

Restorative Justice in Prisons Project, Thames Valley Partnership Resource Book and Report

¹⁰ 'An Ordinary Murder' by Lesley Moreland ISBN 1-85410-745-3

staff and prisoners. My experience as a homoeopath came into play. The remedy that I was offering was 'potentised words'.

I was deeply shocked by the overcrowding of prisons, the constant moving around of prisoners, the exhaustion and disillusionment of the staff, the levels of violence and drugs, self harm and suicide. The bars, wires, walls, dogs, cells, uniforms, jangling keys. And yet there is dignity, devotion and integrity amongst some of the staff. I learnt more about Rosemary West by those who had worked with her (her rage and desire for privacy).

I remember asking the 'drug wing', 'Is it easier to serve a prison sentence than it would be to face those you have harmed by your crimes?' There was a unanimous yes. I mentioned that what had happened in our family was like 'the ultimate burglary'.

Two weeks later I received a letter:

'Paul'

May 2002

Dear Marian, I would like to say thank you for coming to Horfield prison to talk to us about how victims of crime feel. It made me look deep into my heart what affect my drug problem was having on people mostly the victims.

I used to look upon the houses I broke into as just another house. But just something simple like the actors and the play opened my eyes. I started putting faces to my crimes which had a big impact on me. Women and children I had taken away their sense of security. Plus little things that seem worthless to me might mean the world to the victims.

I contacted the police. They took me out today to my flat in Bristol where I showed them stolen items and little things that might mean a lot to my victims. I gathered all the things together then asked them to take me out in the car where I showed them the houses I burgled, so the property could be returned. I shocked myself doing this. As the police could not prove before

hand it was stolen. **I'm in a bit more trouble now but its worth it. To know some people have got their things back. I told the police to say I was sorry I know it will not change a lot. But it's a big change for me.** I'm not sure what else to say right now.

You have made me rethink which path in life I should take you have also made me realise that **drugs and crime do not just scar me, my victims as well. This chain needs to be broken.** Thankyou Yours... I've put a poem with this letter. I hope you like it:

End to beginning

Morning dew to evening sun

Winter days to summer trees

Withered plants to honey bees

Old to new

Broken lives to unfulfilled dreams

Deserted lands to glaciers of snow

Light of truth

Sands of time start to flow

Rivers run oceans

Tumble

Our inner child's dreams

Are in the stars

Child of innocence

Tears so blue

*Happiness and joy
The mirror of your inner self is in you*

*Faded promises, distant dreams
Darkened soul becomes
Heart so bright
Time to forgive, The broken
Child begins to fight*

*Every man has a precious stone in his heart
Soar on the wind
Like a bird that is free
Hope of the humble
We might say
That forgiveness comes our way*

I've been searching all my life to feel good about myself and not feel like a reject of society. I'm starting to love myself and others around me.

Innocent
*Child so small and innocent
In adults I did not
Believe, bruises and negative
Messages I did receive.*

*Darkened skies, mother with
A tear*

Wickedness surrounds me

Abuse I own

The smell of beer.

My destined life, I would

Trade

Heart of hatred

This is how an addict is

Made.

I might not be responsible for being down. But I am responsible for getting up! I am so grateful for what you and the team of people have done for me. You have not just made me realise what impact and harm I do to my victims. But what harm and destruction I do to myself as well. The most important thing to me now is **to be honest with myself and others if I stand any chance of living a good life the way every man should....**

I took time out to ask a few friends honestly how do they felt. Mostly the answer was the weight of the burden, remorse, hopeless, no sense of direction, resigned to the fact that they will always use drugs. They are caught in the trap.

We used drugs to escape Then got caught in a trap. But when I look into their eyes I see a battle going on. This battle which they are slowly losing could be won! With something so simple they don't even know about, Restorative Justice. I just hope and pray that one day Restorative justice will be introduced into all prisons. Without this what chance do people have of breaking the chain?

Time to heal

A time to heal, a time to dance and be free

Forgiveness for every soul

We hold the key

I know I have to give myself a chance and make that leap of faith. As I think to myself what it would be like to settle down and have a family of my own or just live a normal life, I see nothing

just a dark run down castle with all the flags torn blowing in the night air...with not a soul for miles. Then sometimes I dream of a great lake with children playing next to the water in the reeds. I can hear them laugh as I lie with my head in someone's lap, watching the Canadian geese glide in and out of the lilies. The water is made up of a million diamonds sparkling in the sun..My heart melts away. I feel as light as air. I breathe in the love and breathe out the destruction with every breath I get lighter.

Maybe these two dreams are the two roads I can take at the cross road. One road back the way I came (castle) and the other forward (lake)....

I hope I get the chance to say sorry to my **victims**. I thought the other night about the way I affected them. The way they must be feeling. **I feel so helpless, I just want to put things right.....**

The thought of walking a dog in the woods sounded wonderful! I sometimes forget how beautiful life's experiences can be. Even sometimes just being clean from the drugs and rebuilding relationships with family and close friends, having respect for others, forgiving others is a big part of **feeling human (alive again)...**

I truly believe that every victim, every offender should be given the chance to experience a very powerful thing. This would in most people lift the burden of guilt, shame, anger and **all the bad feelings that come along after a crime has been committed.**

Restorative Justice would be a great step in all prisons for everybody involved in a crime to move forward in life.....

I'd never written a poem in my life before I met you. And the only way I can let go of the pain and express my self – **speak from the heart is poetry**. I never knew Lucy used to write poems. I would like to dedicate all my poems to Lucy because in a strange way if it wasn't what happened to her we would never have met and I would still be in that dark lonely place....

I know my poems don't mean anything to most people. But to me they mean the world. I have over 40 poems now. They all have a little story to tell. They are part of me. They are like a window into my heart. Every time I write or read one of my poems I will remember how you and Lucy pulled me from the dark lonely pit which would have destroyed me. ..

All my life I have never been able to **honestly say how I feel. Just doing this makes everything real around me.** I could never have written poems and found myself if I didn't speak from the heart. When I push my feelings down to the pit of my stomach I get frustrated.

(Many young men and women who end up in prison are illiterate.).

Mark and I have been in correspondence (on and off) for 6 years. He is my friend and he is now living in Exeter (where Lucy was at university) with his partner Crystal (his 'precious stone!') and two children. He is free from drugs and in touch with his family again. He had realised in prison, *'I'm better than this'*, and never turned back .

Mark (Lifers' wing)

I met another Mark in Horfield on the Lifers Wing, where meal times were still called 'feeding time' and some of the staff believed in the death penalty. This is an extract of a report that he wrote.

I recently attended a Restorative Justice Discussion Group which was held on B Wing.

I am a lifer, and was convicted of murder in January 1989. I moved through the system quickly and after having addressed my “area” of concern, namely alcohol, was released in November 1999. After being out for some 18 months I was recalled after an alcohol related driving offence.

I, like everyone else was quite apprehensive as to what to expect, **after all how many people convicted of murder actually get to sit and talk with a member of a victims’ family.**

Whilst listening to Marian sharing her experience you could almost ‘**feel the silence in the room**’, from the pain of finding out what had happened to her sister, through to what is happening in the present, it was an experience that I for one will never forget.

I have never seen so many people so **relaxed** talking about a subject that is when you think about it quite gruesome, people that through personal contact, I know find it very, very difficult to talk about themselves or what has happened to bring us here, or what direction we are heading in or toward now.

The topics covered that afternoon opened my eyes to issues that I had not resolved myself, without going into detail these issues probably led to my own return to drinking, hence my recall to prison. I for one truly believe that Restorative Justice is a very good way for people to gain a fuller picture of what they have done, to others, and to themselves.

I learnt more about myself in an afternoon than I did in eleven and a half years of talking to professionals. **Once people gain that fuller picture, then and only then can they have a chance of moving forward with their lives.** Thank you for giving me the opportunity to partake in this group.
Mark H.

Mark later revealed to me that his realisation had been that he couldn't forgive himself. He is now working 'outside' as a counsellor. We contributed to the Prison Video Magazine¹¹ on Restorative Justice which was shown to the prison population in the UK.

justice: belonging

Crime is about violation, about injury to the body (sexual abuse, rape, murder), to property (burglary, arson) and to one's intellectual and spiritual integrity (slander, libel and racism). It is about thoughts, words and actions that come from a place of having been violated, maybe physically and psychologically but also in the spiritual sense of not being connected to a feeling of integrity, a feeling of not belonging in some way. The prison of self-centredness denies a vision of wholeness and interconnectedness. The practice of punishing and locking away denies the possibility of taking responsibility for the effect of one's actions on another, of expressing remorse, of being redeemed within one's family and community.

The need to exert physical (and sexual) violence on another seems to come from a corruption or even absence of feeling, a deadness, a dis-connection, that needs to come alive. The essential core of being human (feeling and expressing empathy for others, a capacity for well-wishing) is buried or obscured, missing or lost, hidden behind the armour of dangerously destructive egotism.

¹¹ see Prison Video Trust pvm@breathe.com

The transformation of these destructive emotions allows the arising and shining forth of our true nature. The inner work of all spiritual endeavour involves the cultivation of the freshness of being fully alive and responsive to the wonder of the present moment. It moves towards the experience of the interconnectedness of all forms of life, and the true knowing of our place in the world. Towards our belonging as vulnerable, gentle, fearless, compassionate, well wishing human beings.

Those harmed remain locked away from the possibility of facing, understanding and maybe forgiving those who have harmed them. The frozen silence becomes literal and paralysing. There are no structures to allow growth, a 'moving on' in its fullest sense.

On a practical level the restorative approach involves challenging and re-defining our social structures so that this kind of experience of justice which aspires towards healing and the restoration of right relationships (as opposed to punishment, scapegoating and exclusion, which further the cycle of violence) becomes the right of all.

David Self¹² was able to analyse this journey towards forgiveness in a helpful way:

All the people I spoke to selected stories from their lives that had affected them deeply. .. What impressed me was the messiness, the complexity of the struggle over a long period of time to grow through what they had done or what had been done to them, or both.

Everyone revealed an internal disorder and a struggle to grow within it.

Forgiveness Project

¹² Struggling with Forgiveness ISBN 1-55126-395-5 ('my story' is in the book with a helpful analysis)

You will witness this same struggle in all of the stories on display in the Forgiveness Project. Marina Cantacuzino interviewed me at the end of 2003. At the opening of the exhibition in 2004 I met others who had been treading this holy ground. We all shared that this had been a lonely journey at times. This need to be true to one's individual journey but somehow know that we are not alone touches upon the heart of the spiritual journey. Every story is unique and yet there is a cumulative effect in gathering and bringing these stories into one place. There are those who could be labelled as 'perpetrators' and those who could be labelled as 'victims' but the point of forgiveness is to go beyond those labels and prejudices into the realisation that "Love is the pain of being truly alive" (Joseph Campbell).

A society that promotes true justice must be one that encourages our human potential for transformative change and allows us to experience a feeling of belonging in a way that is naturally forgiving and empathic, where we can take responsibility for our pain and show mercy and love to each other. It must be open to the revelation of a healing truth.