

"DOORWAYS of TRANSITION" **Sunday, June 8, 2008**

Introduction – Sandy Reimer

Doorways are a good symbol of the transitions of life, the thresholds we stand upon and pass through as we grow and age. Some of these doorways are in the outer explicit world; some are in our internal personal world. Each doorway presents us with both the opportunity of new possibilities and with the necessity of letting go.

Sometimes doors slam shut behind us, making the transition all the more difficult. And sometimes we have to shut the door ourselves, firmly and finally, and walk away, which isn't any easier. Through stories, music, and movement, Star Bradbury, Brian Harper, Sally Simonis, and Jim Trebilcock will share with us a time in each of their lives where a door closed, or they closed a door, and knew that their life had been irrevocably and forever changed.

In fairy tales, legend and myth, there is often a gateway representing a special time and place, where the heroine or hero must choose or is forced to step through the threshold and go beyond the known world. Tina Malia's song, "The Shores of Avalon," intertwines two myths of those liminal doorways of transition. This song itself is from the film, "Lord of the Rings," when a number of the elves choose to leave the land of Rivendell, because their time there is over. In leaving, they can preserve something of who they are, but they also know that once they leave, once they cross over that threshold, there is no going back.

Avalon, of course, is part of the legend of the Holy Grail, the mystical island of King Arthur's time where he was taken to recover from an-almost-mortal wound. Avalon, the home of the Priestesses of the Goddess, appeared and disappeared into the mists of the sea, visible only under special conditions and to particular people. It was a sacred place of healing and safety. In the novel, the *Mists of Avalon*, King Arthur's half sister says, as she crosses to Avalon, "Then like a curtain being pulled back, the mist vanished, and before us lay a sunlit stretch of water, a green shore, and the light flooded the land with gold and silence. She felt her throat tighten with tears, and she thought, without knowing why, "I am coming home."

In these stories of legends and myths, in our own stories and the stories of others, we hear the sounds of passage, the sounds of doors closing and opening. Alice Walker, who won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her novel, *The Color Purple*, reminds us that *Storytelling is itself a healing process, partly because you have someone there who is taking the time to tell you a story that has great meaning to them. They are taking the time, because our lives could use some help, but they don't want to come over and just give advice. They want to give it to you in a form that becomes inseparable from your whole self, that becomes a fabric of your whole soul. That's what stories do; that is why they heal you. ~ Alice Walker*

Reflections and Dance - Star Bradbury, Brian Harper, Sally Simonis and Jim Trebilcock

Sally Simonis - As I look back upon my nearly 60 years, I see several events that were life altering. Some were out of my control, but others were the result of decisions I made to take a road more or less traveled along the way, sometimes with consequences I could not have foreseen. But perspective is one of the benefits of age, so I share with you a story of a decision made at the age of 24 that gave me a new frame of reference for the rest of my life.

I had had a safe and traditional upbringing in a moderately affluent suburban community, had gone to college here at UF, married a safe, traditional young man and was moving resignedly toward a safe, traditional adulthood, when a series of events caused me to question my whole life. In the land of orderly days and ladylike behavior, I felt like an interloper and, at the age of 23, I began to chafe at the satin ribbons that bound me to my life. I wanted something different. I had a hunger for something more substantial, but I had no idea what it was: adventure? excitement? God? I had no frame of reference for this other life.

So, in 1973, having divorced the previous year, I quit the coveted professional job that I had been so proud to do the year before, deferred acceptance to a doctoral program, sold my new car, stashed my belongings and bought a one way ticket to Nairobi, Kenya. I had been corresponding with an acquaintance who was doing research in South Africa. In a world before internet, cell phones and globalization, I had only a letter posted in April inviting me to meet her in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania sometime between the 2nd and 6th of September, in care of American Express. Alternately, I should contact a certain professor at the University there. I wrote and told her I would come. Communication in many countries then was notoriously erratic and mail could easily go awry. No return reply arrived. Faith and hunger for my true self propelled me forward.

After many days of travel by train, plane, bus and train again, I arrived in Dar Es Salaam on September 2nd to discover that there was no American Express there and that the professor was away on holiday. For the first time in my life, I was entirely on my own in an unfamiliar, exotic place where most of the people looked different from me. I had no itinerary, no real plan. I did sort it out, find adventure, excitement and resourcefulness I had never used before. And perhaps it was God who helped me find my way.

Jim Trebilcock - "Talk about a time in your life," she said, "when you knew you were closing a door, knowing that your life forever would be changed."

Sometimes, life has seemed little more than a series of closing doors, of knowing life was never to be the same. Which door to stand in front of again? That's the question.

Leaving home at 15? Everything coming undone so close to the altar? Turning our girl into the police?

But in the end, I guess it has to be Dad, Even after all these years. It was a stupid incident. He wanted me to do what I was told. As always. I wanted to defy him. As always.

The whole situation was weird anyway. After running all over the country, what

kind of sick twist of fate put me in an apartment just two blocks away from him? Dad and I were doing the "neighbor" dance, but it was just, well, weird.

Anyway, our beloved family pastor passes away. Dad wants to go to the viewing together and sets a time. I want to go alone. Dad insists.

I go alone.

Even that same evening, I wonder why I had done it. Why couldn't I let him have his way? Guess I should be a man about it, walk up the street and apologize. Don't know what I'll say. What will I say? Oh, forget it. It's just a dumb viewing. He'll get over it.

The boatyard I worked in was a small place. You could pretty much see everything from nearly any angle, so you always knew who was coming, you never got caught by surprise. But, it was a surprise to see my brother Rick walk into the yard the next day. What WAS he doing here?

"Jim," he said, looking down at the ground rather than at me, "Dad is dead. Someone murdered him at his house last night." Then, he hugged me, and walked away.

It still seems unbelievable that I failed to just drop my paintbrush and walk out with him. But, an hour later, there I was, painting away. It was a brilliant blue day, but everything seemed hazy and unfocused.

The strangest thing was the song. It kept looping over and over in my head. You know, the old Skeeter Davis one: "*Why does my heart go on beating? Why do these eyes of mine cry? Don't they know it's the end of the world? It ended when you said goodbye.*"

Knowing that my petty defiance prevented me from going over to his house that night haunted me. I could done something, I said to myself again and again. I could have stopped it. No matter. I did not go, and everything changed. Some doors you close; some doors slam shut in your face.

But maybe life shuts doors when you lack the strength to close them yourself. The year my father died, I quit smoking. The year my father died, I actually held a steady job. The year my father died, I took my first college course. The year the door slammed in my face was when I stopped looking backward and started moving forward.

Music: "The Shores of Avalon," by Tina Malia

Be brave my love, the time has come to cross the tinted grey sea.
The fragrant air, the apple blossoms, have all been beckoning,
And there we'll stand, looking out upon the world that we've known,
All fear will be gone when we reach the shores of Avalon,
You'll be greeted there, by maidens fair, with eyes of the wild sea,
In the garden they will braid your hair, with violets and rosemary,
And there we'll stand, looking out upon the world that we've known,
All fear will be gone, when we reach the shores of Avalon.
Feel the wind on your face, as we cross the stormy sea,
Close your eyes, don't look back, there's nothing left to see.

The other night, you came to me, like an angel you appeared,
And we climbed the endless sky and held each other near,
And there we'll stand, looking out upon the world that we've known
All fear will be gone, when we reach the shores of Avalon. Be brave, my love.

Prayer – Sandy Reimer

Think of your story of a door that closed in your life – pray for that story, pray for that part of you. See yourself in that story – see your body, how you walked and moved, perhaps a motion or gesture that you can picture that brings your story into view in a new way.

Pray for what you have left behind as you have moved past that closing door into a new and different land.

Pray for the healing that lies within the telling, the remembering, of your story.

Pray for what you seek, Pray for your spiritual journey, for the doorway into that realm of light, flooded with gold and silence, for the assurance of God's grace, rising up within you, echoing those words "I am coming home."

Within the circles of our lives,
we dance the circles of the years,
the cycles of the seasons
within the circles of the years.
Again, again, we come and go,
changed and changing. Hands
join, unjoin in love and fear,
grief and joy, each by all the others held.
In the hold of hands and eyes,
we turn in pairs, that joining
joining each to all again. ~ *Wendell Barry*

***HYMN – "All This Joy, All This Sorrow"**

***BENEDICTION**

In the doorways of your life,
In the midst of doors that close and doors that open,
May you be held in the grace of God.
In the circles of this summer,
In the midst of going away and coming back home,
May you be held in the light of God.
In the everyday moments of your life,
In the midst of joy and of sorrow,
May you be held in the everlasting love of God.
Amen – blessed be!

