

A photograph of a narrow, winding stone staircase built into a hillside. The walls on either side are constructed from rough, stacked stones. The path is made of flat, irregular stones. In the background, some green trees and a clear sky are visible. The lighting suggests it's daytime.

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Four hundred
and forty-two
steps,
each
one
down
a little deeper,
bring me to
the rock-water womb
where life above
goes bustling by.

Here the bustle
is only water
kissing
the bounds of its container
swishing
as the world turns
currently in motion.

There is no need
to choose to move,
just
to be moved
turning, twisting
sucking, kicking
preparing for life
upstairs.

DEEP CONVERSATION AT THE SEA

Amalfi Coast, Italy

Ron DelBene

AWAKENING

The morning mist approaches my door
tentatively
wanting to knock, perhaps,
but afraid
that the sun may steal away its moisture
on its morning rounds.

I ponder my choices today
determined so much by nature's whims
and choose to accept the unfolding hours
as gift of nature's cycle,
knowing well
she is the visiting professor
in my class of life today.

NEW TONE

Renovation happens
even in the soul places of our lives,
where memories cease to be basilicas of worship
but drift into clouds
changing shapes in the wind
mostly fancifully real-looking.

Stones fall upon stones
raising choking dust
causing coughs and tears
from ruined spaces of chaotic truths
believed and belied over time
making unreal the real,
unwinding the wind from the East
until all is left is a single note to be sung.

The tone of truth sounds from the birthing bowl
echoing from the “let their be light” and
vibrates me into knowing who I am in I Am.

PARALYZED

At once the sea looked black
and of swallowing depth to my eye.
To go down to the sea of my soul
scared me to my foundation
where rocks and stones were falling
one upon another
making rubble of my life.

But I walked the steps to my sea
one
by
one
counting them aloud.

At one resting place
an inner voice commanded
“Look down.”
I did.

The black was shades of blue and green
and browns and swishy whites.
I was afraid.
The black sea looked calm and serene;
the blue-green sea was vibrantly alive.
I was afraid.
Life was not what I thought it was.

Each step tightened my grip on the railing and rock.
My innards wanted to jump off and be done with it all.
“Turn back or I’ll jump,” they cried,
with a fierce-voiced command.

My life siren went off, sounding the call
“Come to the sea. Come and see.”

ISLAND

Did I pop up through the sea
or
was I cut off from the mother/father land?
My origin makes no matter how
only that matter is.

Alone
Cut-off
Independent
Solitary
Content
Scared

I cannot swim or even float.
My thoughts chain me to the rocks.
This land is my land.
How do I choose to be
for you and me?

A SAFE PLACE

The rocky crag's open womb
caves me into darkness primordial
and I remember yesterday
when I caved in
into inner darkness.

How long it takes to light a fire
with stones
wet wood
and leaves left and blown within.

I'm no match for this depression.
Fear enters behind me.
"No way out" fear shouts at me.
Memories appear etched upon the rock faces
warriors in battle
with the giants – some even human.

Fear covers me and sings her lullaby
until I fall deeper
into sleep's death
and only then
is there a glimmer of the dawn to come.

Shivering until I warm myself,
I sing a song of six pence
and wait for the death pie to be cut
so I can fly free.

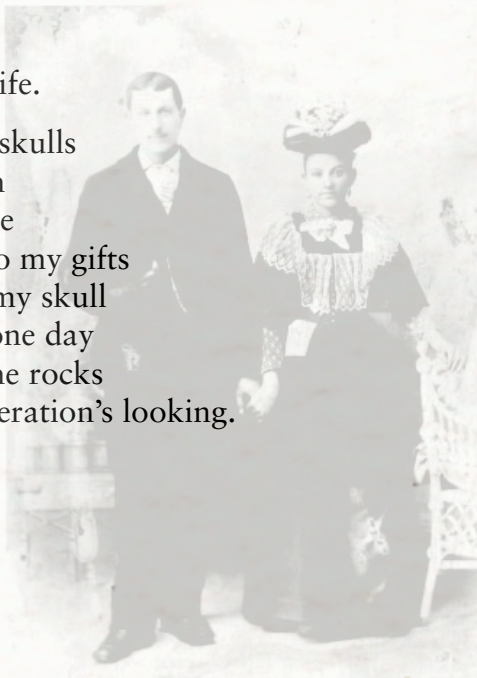
When another's voice repeats a new refrain
found in my breath,
I incline my ear and hear
"Dawn cuts open and morning breaks free."

ANCESTORS

An old skull found upon the rock
recalls the face of living
now giving space for life
to grow through it again.

Empty holes and cracks
dirt-full
grow tell-tale signs
that all is one
over and over
in death as in life.

My ancestors' skulls
dirt my growth
encouraging me
to be present to my gifts
knowing that my skull
will give way one day
to be dirt on the rocks
of another generation's looking.



TODAY'S LESSON AT 2:30 PM

Storm clouds wind their way
through white cotton candy
reminding me
that all is not sweetness in my life.

Facing one way, the sun warms me
forcing my face to feel the invitation
to light and life.

Facing the other way, fear's frightened face
glares at me
making me wonder if I can get home safe.

The war is on within me.
Why always one or another?
Why not both/and?

If I were not wearing worry
would I be content with looking at the clouds
and knowing they teach me this afternoon's lesson.

- I feel the heat of my heart's learning.

END

Thoughts of death
sneak into my solitude
bringing scare and secrets
yet unknown
about life as it can be.

Do I fear what can be
and then yearn to destroy what is
now even emptying itself to be filled again?

To end it all is the answer
only if life
does not offer life again
to those who walk the way
through despair to hope.

We are called to jump off the cliff
to fly not die.

When I ask
why do I want to drop down deeper,
I answer by flying up to my nest
where my eggs wait.

SOMEONE IN MY GROTTO

Why do I think
my special place of solitude
is not open to others?

The arrogance of what ties me
to my “what should-be”
cries foul
and I am left annoyed.

How is annoyance
the womb of wisdom in my world?

How am I called
to see beyond self-knowledge
and enjoy the world’s gift for all?

For how long
shall I determine the limits
of the sea or of the seeing?

What do I learn
from my Job-friend of old
who still lives within my genes
coding me human now?

Better that I put my finger to my lips
and wait to see face to face.

IT'S OK TO CRY

Tears wash my face
like the washing of the waters over ancient rock.
No pore or crevice is exempt
from the waves of tenderness and rebirthing,
recalling water's presence at the first wind
rising from the East.

Making still the chaos
my own emotions overflow
into gentle drops becoming storm torrents
sobbing from the depths not yet stilled
into pools in the grottos of my life.
The sea is always close to the surface
because it is who we are within as well.

Tears artesian their way to my buckets when I cry.
Naked, I water my garden
and have a sense of paradise.
I find myself mated in my selves.

LAUGH

The rock face
laughs at me.

I watch it across the water pool
noticing the open lips of silent sound
causing hearing within my mind and heart
bringing a smile
upon my own face
and artesian sounds of surprise
which bubble out loud
in the stillness of the birds' songs.

Remembering the many laughing faces
who have surprised me in life,
I rejoice
and sing with the birds.

SITTING

I sit in the setting sun
waiting
waiting for the colors
and the smell of news
that it is eventide
when the water laps gently and
the sea senses the depth of my desire.

My mental brushes are poised
on the canvas of the sky
stretched upon the frames of my mind
this day of all days
the end of this soul journey.
These strokes will make final
this series of solitudinal sun-running
from East to West each day
newly stretched out before me on my easel.

Ah, the joy of pinks and blues and yellows
morphing
into
vibrant sectioned oranges and graped-wine-purple
draped upon the sea as costumed
for the night-time ball in the grotto
lit by candles on the mountainsides
from shore steps to the heights of godly-play and dance.

TIME ZONES

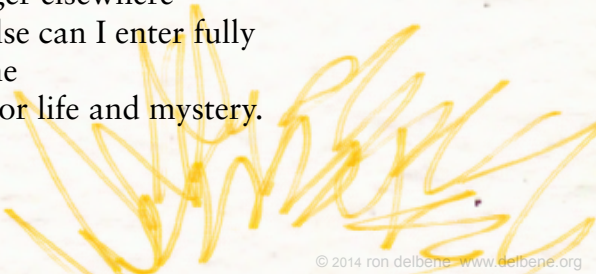
In the midst of the night here
noon is approaching there.

In the midst of my life
two inner clock zones
vie for my wakefulness.

Transition does not change time
nor time change transition
and
one's life cannot be spent
continually
wearing two watches
comparing
wondering
wandering away
from the truth of the present.

The position of the sun often dictates
its letter of the law within my soul
bringing me to see my inner action
as belonging to me and not another's zone.

When the sun rises where I am today
I will know it is my time of day
and I will be here
no longer elsewhere
for where else can I enter fully
into my zone
of passion for life and mystery.





Ron DelBene is a poet, artist, author of books and videos and an Episcopal priest. He has been doing spiritual direction and leading programs in the area of spirituality and pastoral care across the country since 1963. He holds a Master's degree in Theology and a Doctor of Ministry degree in Spirituality and Organizational Systems. With his wife, Dr. Eleanor McKenzie DelBene, he directs The Hermitage, a non-profit corporation devoted to providing spiritual growth and direction. He was an assistant professor of theology, director of a campus ministry center, and the national consultant in religion for a CBS education division. Since 1980, Ron's leadership in organizational systems has been primarily in churches, empowering them in understanding their mission, goals and structure for effective and creative ministry. Ron and Eleanor have two grown children, Paul and Anne. Paul and his spouse, Gayle, have a daughter, Matsue, and a son, Luca.

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