The writer of wild soul

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"Now that's the book I want to read!". These words spoken by Geneen Marie Haugen at the "Writing the Wild Soul" workshop in November 2017 activated a sequence of roles in me over the following years.

Geneen is a well-known poet writer who lives on the west coast of America — she had come to Australia to run this 4-day residential workshop. Geneen spoke these words in response to my reading of a piece of writing I had completed in the workshop, "a Letter to my Beloved".

Some participants were weeping when I completed my reading. I was puzzled. They were *emotional appreciators*. And when Geneen spoke, in her role as *enthusiastic coach*, I remember thinking: "oh, that's nice." I was a *bemused observer*. I was unable to connect with or accept what she had said, nor could I connect with the heartfelt responses of others.

Over dinner that night, some other participants asked me "how does it feel that Geneen said she wants to read your book?" I could feel envy coming my way. I could sense that I was meant to feel proud and excited.

I did not feel proud or excited. I wanted to reject and ignore their envy, to minimise my writing and make more of their written pieces. I recognise this response as an old role of the *fearful minimiser of self*. She who is afraid of the animosity of others that comes from standing out or being chosen by the teacher. Now, I understand this as a role response from my original social and cultural atom. A response to being born "too big" and making myself small to make others more comfortable.

The next day over a cup of tea, Geneen says more to me about my writing. None of which I remember. Except for "Writing seems to come easily to you."

I have not written since she spoke the words "writing seems to come easily to you."

The *pragmatic coper* has been active; she completes the daily writing requirements of a professional counsellor, makes social media posts and the shopping lists of life. The *writer of wild soul* has been dormant. She had become disempowered and waiting.

Fast forward to January 2024. I am in the workshop "Tasting Life Twice, a workshop for writers" led by Diana Jones and a large group of participants at the AANZPA Conference. As I finish telling the story of Geneen and writing the wild soul, I see a smiling director move towards me with a gleam of recognition in her eye and outstretched hand beckoning me to step onto the stage. In that moment, I recognise the strong mutual positive tele between the director and myself — tele that has developed over many years of periodic connection at AANZPA Conferences. This becomes a sense of trust and safety as I accept the invitation and proceed onto the stage.

The scene is set. I choose auxiliaries for my many writing accoutrements which concretise both my addiction to stationery and my avoidance of writing:

- A beautiful sturdy roll top desk
- A view of particular trees
- Thick creamy textured sheets of paper
- A collection of fountain pens. Two in particular, a scratchy nibbed one, which insists on being written.
- And one wooden pen, hand created in Ireland of deeply dark ancient knotty Bog Oak.

As these accoutrements are enacted by auxiliaries, I become aware of great pleasure in the physicality of these objects. I recognise that are all support roles to my warm-up to writing. I notice how I love to look at them and touch them. Perhaps even at times caress their textured surfaces.

On reflection now, I wonder if they truly are support roles to my warm-up for writing. Perhaps they might in truth be distractions/diversions from taking the action of actually writing. Nevertheless, they provide great pleasure, and I have enjoyed collecting them, convincing myself that they all assist in my warm-up, even though the evidence says otherwise: the page is blank, the ink is not flowing.

The scene is set. I ought to be ready to sit down and write.

But I am not. I am conflicted. I know that I can write. I love to write: if there is a reason, or a structure that has the purpose of writing.

A kind of malaise hits me. I have a physical sensation of resistance in my hands and in my gut. Many questions reel through my mind. What's the purpose of writing? Is it a waste of time? Are there other more important practical things to get done? Who will want to read it anyway? Is it too personal? Will I embarrass myself? Or my family? Or my parents?

I recognise that my father is here on the stage. I chose an auxiliary.

Here is a beloved man of Irish sensibility and working-class background. He is very smart, my Da: a mathematics whiz and a hard worker. Born in the middle of eight children and always having lived in Government Housing

with not much money. He began work at 16 for the Sydney County Council as a clerk and retired in that same role with the same Council at 55. He has always been, and remains, a f*ierce lover of family* and especially of my Mum. In my childhood, Da was the *stern disciplinarian* who was often absent because of working in multiple jobs (Council clerical work being poorly paid). He had strong ideas of the roles and responsibilities of a father as the provider of material supports.

As the first born of six siblings, I have always been certain of his love for me and for all of us. I was 10 when my youngest sister was born. With six young children in the house, I learnt to be independent and responsible.

My Da was proud of my intelligence and capabilities. However, he was emotionally unavailable, and I was far too busy reading books to care. Over the years, Da has always been proud. He has always stood with me and my siblings, even when we have done things that are less than pride inducing (even shameful). These days he expresses his love regularly and with ease: he says, "I love you" and I remain the responsible eldest. I am the one who organises 70th, 80th and 90th birthday surprises, the one who executes wills and powers of attorney.

In the drama, Da reminds me of several roles that I had and that he believes are still within me. In the moment, I recognise the truth of this. There is the small freckle faced curly haired girl who was deeply earnest and invested in the imaginal worlds. This small girl wrote all the time. She is such a *spontaneous creator* in her writing. An *intense and serious expresser*. This is a job she is deeply committed to.

Da reminds me that he keeps copies of my stories and writings that were regularly published in *The What* — that weekly newsletter of the Caringbah local public library. *The What* was printed from an inky machine with a revolving crank handle on porous various coloured blotting paper.

As I write here, I remember that as an eight-year-old I was deeply wounded by a comment from an editor of *The What* about my writing. The editor said that it was "very earnest and drawn out". I was deeply offended. I also recognised that it could be true. My response was a measure of the depth and seriousness of my love for writing. I am an *intense and responsible expresser*, always.

An early love affair

My greatest love up until the age of 10, was the Caringbah Public Library and its crammed bookshelves smelling of musty paper and each book shining with plastic wrapping that was supposed to protect them from thoughtless handling. I still have an intense hatred for people who dog ear books or place drink cups on the cover or pristine page… why would you do that?

My library card was my most prized possession. I recall the day I discovered the library and carefully carried the card home for my mother to fill out. It would give me access to a whole world of magic and expanded reality — worlds I did not know, except by instinct. I was five years old. And then there was the pride and joy of seeing my own writing in print in *The What*, with its particular inky smell. Apparently my Da loved it too, as evidenced by his historical collection of *The What*. But only the ones I was published in.

Back in the drama

My Da reminds me of a cluster of roles that were and are still alive in me, our ancestral Irish thread. This is a role cluster he has carried from the ancestors and passed on to me — my white (paternal) thread; that thread that holds the struggle of survival and the poverty and deprivation of living with an overlord. He loves that I keep deeply investigating all these Irish ancestral roles, and that at various times I had recorded this in my letters to him.

As I reflect on the drama now, I see that my writing has given him joy and the depth of many understandings. It has expanded his life experience and knowledge of himself. And his proud knowledge of me: the writer. I understand now that this is the purpose of writing, not just for my Da, but for any reader. As a *writer of wild soul*, I recognise our purpose is to enact the roles of *perspective explorer* and *experience broadener*.

As the protagonist in this drama, I notice the white thread that is carried by my Da from many generations of Irish ancestors and given to me: "The only worthwhile achievements are those you work hard for because life is hard and survival, even just staying alive, is success."

I recognise in this drama, that somewhere along the weaving that is my life, I have chosen to enact the coping roles in response to this white thread as a priority. The roles have become over-developed as the white thread's message of the practical importance of survival has been inherited. This choice and its effect on my writing has not been conscious until now.

This has meant that my coping roles of the *hard worker*, the *committed achiever*, the *pragmatic responsible family member* have been in the forefront of my functioning. These roles have rejected and kept suppressed the *spontaneous creator* and the *earnest writer*: after all, what purpose do they serve in the commitment to survival? How can they be of value if they come easily?

It dawned on me that somewhere along the way I had lost touch with the pleasure, the ease, and the earnestness of that small girl who *wrote all the time* in her exercise book, and with a blue biro. Right now, I recall the Irish' love of story and their valuing of the imaginal world. I am sure that is in my *white thread*, overlooked before, and yet the foundation of my writer of the wild soul.

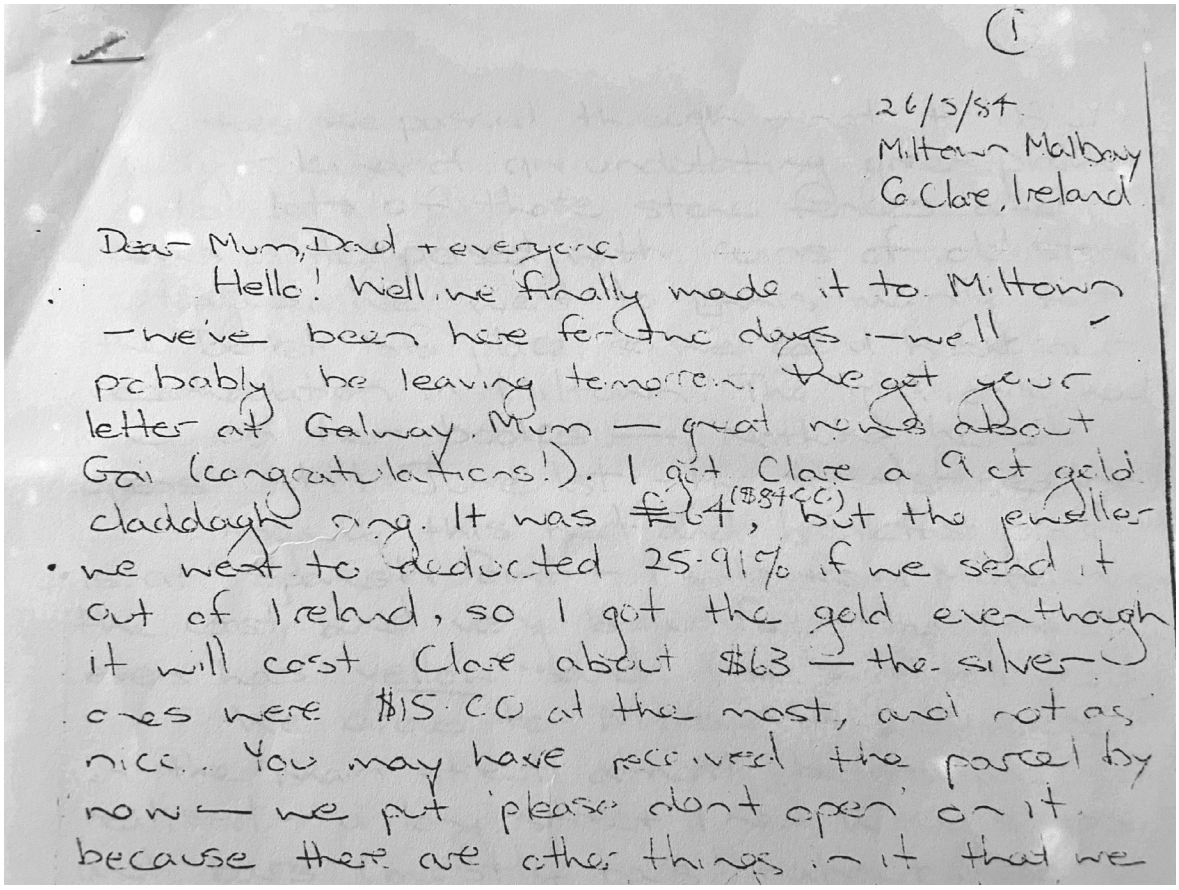
Does writing come easily to me?

I don't know if that is true. I do know it appears that some others might think so.

I am now in 2024 and have many social and psychodramatic roles: I am still a daughter, and a mother, grandmother and partner. I am a therapist and a teacher. I am a practitioner of psychodrama. I am finding her again — that small girl who just knows that she must write. I can smell the inky pages again and feel the shiny plastic book covers. I am creating a relationship with her determined certainty that life is more than survival. I am loving that she is an earnest explorer of the depth and breadth of life. The drama allows me to give life to her *dedicated recorder* in writing of the seen and the unseen.

Love letter

In the drama my Da reminds me of a many paged letter I wrote to him from Ireland on my first visit when I was 23 years old. Back then, letters were handwritten and posted. My Da had never visited the ancestral lands. In the



(1)

26/3/84
Miltown Malbay
Co Clare, Ireland

Dear Mum, Dad + everyone

Hello! Well we finally made it to Miltown — we've been here for the days — we'll probably be leaving tomorrow. We got your letter at Galway. Mum — great news about Gai (congratulations!). I got Clare a 9ct gold claddagh ring. It was £64 ($84.00), but the jeweller we went to deducted 25.91% if we send it out of Ireland, so I got the gold even though it will cost Clare about $63 — the silver ones were $15.00 at the most, and not as nice. You may have received the parcel by now — we put 'please don't open' on it because there are other things in it that we

Love letter from Ireland, 1984

letter I told him of my search through the pages of handwritten Baptismal records at the catholic church in Miltown Malbay County Clare, and of finding his father (my grandfather) recorded there in those inky, textured pages.

I told him of the falling down tumbled stone fences which follow the ups and downs and ins and outs of the green landscape and hold nothing in/keep nothing out especially the rampant nettles and hawthorns. And the colour coded sheep with their variety of splotched colourful identification who always seem to prefer the grass and foliage on the side of the road rather than in the green fields. I write of finding and meeting the grave digger who knew where my great grandparents were buried in an unmarked grave. I discovered Tommy Kearney, an 87-year-old in 1984, long gone now, who had known my grandfather and his passion for football and that his nickname was "Didna"— because apparently, he was a know-it-all. (The apple does not fall far…)

My Da still keeps this letter, handwritten with blue biro on exercise book paper. He is 90 now, and I am 65. Da knows, and has always known, that I am a writer, and here I am; writing.

Reflections

I am reflecting on my journey to becoming a psychodramatist and the writing that was required. That in that process, my *hard worker* and *committed achiever* managed to have a cordial relationship with my *spontaneous creator* and *earnest writer*. It was a communal effort for a mutually satisfying purpose.

As a psychodrama practitioner, there are only rare experiences of being a protagonist in a drama and being directed. It is something of a relief for me to be able to express myself in a trusted group and be guided by a trusted director.

My years of directing dramas have given me a deep appreciation of my *spontaneous creator* and my ever-improving capacity to remain connected to her when I am directing. I am noticing that my hard work and earnestness are also required, and often undervalued by me.

Through my drama at the AANZPA Conference and this writing that has followed, I have understood that every role has value, a purpose, and a message. In my role development there is a core role. She is the *wisdom keeper* who understands the value in every role, supports and maintains the relationships between the roles and remains focused on mutuality. She is my inner director, my central organising role. She says that writing is a purpose in and of itself, and a true expression of spontaneity and creativity.