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“A little part of you lives in me. Sadly, the converse is not true, based on observation of walking on this earth for 75 years +, Marianne”

“I came, I saw, I wanted to leave.”. “They came, they saw, and they could not stay.”. This has been the dominant theme in my life as a person in and out of what is currently and politely called mental health. Sadly, I do not see much health in our mental health system, not for us at the receiving end of the care provided nor for the care providers, themselves. When nurses have to resort to drugs to cope with the pain they are dealing with as a result of a physical altercation with one of my fellow patients, while these same care providers are trying to help us off the drugs with different drugs, I just shake my head and wonder who is taking care of whom. Maybe a self defence course early on would have helped deal better with her “assailant” (aka patient or as I prefer, customer).

And exactly what is a drug and what is not? Even food can kill us if we eat the wrong kind of mushroom or lick or ingest a certain toad. And when is inhaling misty vapour good for our lungs and when will such activity lead to lung cancer? As much as we want to find one single answer to all that ails us, this is not a one size fits all kind of world despite the games our fashion industry plays. When I was able to put on a pant suit labelled small, I knew the garment was mislabelled. I am just not a petite kind of person and as I age my bones structure is widening so even if I lose all of the extra 10 pounds I have put on over the years (though, in terms of weight, I have gained and lost several people over my lifetime), the clothes from my younger days will still be too tight.

What about the time I was confined in an acute mental health ward and I went into the dining room between meals and started to take my jacket off? My bedroom that I shared with another was always very cold but the dining room hot. As soon as I started to take my jacket off, a young boy, I would say about 22, started to masturbate under a table. My jacket stayed put and I left the room to shiver on my bed. I was not so much angry but more sad knowing such a young lad was so disturbed. Others, patients and staff alike, found this young boys behaviour funny but I was not laughing.

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When us “nut” cases have a breakdown, we are initially thrown in a ward for evaluation unless there's already a history of serious wrong doing. Some will find enough healing to be discharged from the initial ward, others sent to longer term facilities, while yet some others are sent to wards for the criminally insane. As a patient, I would have no means of knowing anyone's history and other patients are my mates in an “us (the inmates) versus them (the staff, the gatekeepers)” scenario not unlike real jail.

To add to the experience of rebuilding access to my own brain, I am quite literally being evaluated by some point system to see if I am ready to face life on the outside. And I want out from the get go, to go home, not yet able to understand why I cannot. Like most I do not like having my freedom of movement restricted . But alas, instinctively I know I am overpowered and must wait for permission from a higher human authority, hence after first folding, I cooperate with whatever comes my way (medications, needles, hourly roll calls, no privacy and flash lights shone in my face to see if I am asleep). And I learn the current brownie point system very quickly, waiting for freedom to come. Interestingly, it is not all that difficult to fool this system and be discharged too soon which can lead to yet more trouble when making decisions for myself since rebuilding access to my own mind needs a lot of time and does not happen the day of discharge. Furthermore, I committed no crime and yet being hospitalized like this feels like I did. Hence when I say “shrink” jail, I mean that quite seriously with the emphasis on jail!

Until January 17, 2013, in the aftermath of hospitalization, I did understand that what happened and the treatment I received was necessary given the knowledge available at the time, though that treatment was never perfect. Since January 17, 2013 I have completely lost faith in our mental health system finding it both cruel and dangerous. The best treatment I received (overall) was in 1965, though the amenities were terrible. Since my discharge from my 2012-13 bout with psychosis, my 6th hospitalization, all I can say is the care I received in conventional medicine amounts to medical malpractice. The absolute worst care was in a mental health ward, my 7th, took place in December 2014, this time not from psychosis but from post traumatic stress, electrolyte loss and toxicity in my own blood from failing kidneys. That the amenities were very nicest I encountered were small compensation from the physical pain from not being able

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to have a bowel movement so much so I was doing Lamaze breathing exercises every twenty minutes to cope with the pain. What I am discovering is that if I stay with conventional medicine, their advice or lack thereof will lead to my premature death. That I cannot allow!

The issues of mental health are complex for both the “inmates” (patients) and the professional gatekeepers (staff) and we have yet to add in the role of family, friends, employers, volunteers and the rest of society. What I am describing is also a reflection of life in the 21st century, that is anything but simple and yet we are looking for simple hands off answers through technology, data mining, mathematical algorithms and specialization with no coordination, hoping someone will come from the sky, wave a magic wand and make everything alright. That or we expect our leaders (however they came to power) to magically fulfill our every wish so that we can retreat and enjoy what is called the “good” life. In the colloquial: “It Ain't Gonna Happen!”. That most of us are feeling that something is wrong is correct, and in my estimation, I would call current times: “Chaos in Action” and as species, we are just a little bit lost (nay! a lot lost!).

“When we point an accusing finger, four point back at us.”
Igbo (Nigerian) Proverb)

What is mental health and what is not? BiPolar? Autism? Depression? Schizophrenia? Tourette? Panic Disorder? Obsessive Compulsion Disorder?, Being an Empath? Attention Deficit?, Disassociation? Addiction? The list keeps growing! Soon life will be declared a mental disorder and given current political, economic and social times, I am beginning to wonder if all of humanity is insane. To invite world war 3 and not deal with climate change in a world where we have so much in the way of resources and knowledge makes little sense, to me.

I was diagnosed as BiPolar in 1971, after already having two “nervous breakdowns” in 1965 and 1968. I was put on a salt, called lithium carbonate that, today, we use to charge our smart phones and other computerized products with. For a while it seemed to work but then in 1979 and 1980, that proved not to be the case. I continued with the lithium until 2008, reducing the dosage as time

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went on, but only under medical supervision, since my body was changing as I aged and the reduction became necessary to avoid death.

By 2008, my kidneys could no longer handle the stress and I stopped all medication to continue using the life skills I had learned over time. I did manage for 4 years but then I had a hiccup. I did once again go psychotic to land once again in an acute mental health ward. But with a twist. I was also showing signs of ticks, as in Tourette's. And now my battle with the modern day mental health care system and the people who were close to me, all my life, began. As of January 17, 2013, I was being medicated out of existence, dangerously so. I had help in my then Naruropathic Doctor and "God" (the good one who insists that my time on earth is not yet up). By adding a few changes to diet in addition to all the other healthy life style changes I was making over the years, I started to experience a calmer brain.

However, there was one more lesson waiting for me. In 2014, I had my first episode of explicit Post Traumatic Stress and electrolyte loss causing toxicity build up in my blood. Why? My kidneys do not work well and their function is declining rapidly. That in turn caused mania and resembled the previous 6 psychotic episodes that required hospitalization.

Today, I deal with fairly frequent episodes of gout, a painful side effect of kidney disease, myalgia in my right leg courtesy of anti psychotic/anti-seizure drugs that backfired in my case and from doing my career in computing well: sciatica, muscle knots, trigger points, arthritis in my joints ...in others words: old age and life. And yes! I am still full of trauma and jump in the air every time I hear an unexpected hello, beep of a car or a siren passing by. But I am also thankful to have undergone what it feels like to have a brain that is healing on the inside and though my feet and therefore legs to do not work as well as they used to, in essence, over the years, I moved my chemical imbalance in my brain to my feet.

"...you may forget about history, but history will not forget about you", from Chapter one of Bruce Cumings's Korea's Place In the Sun"

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Today at almost 76, I am medication free, using the life skills I have learned over the years to live on a planet as best as I can, despite a strong desire to not be here, as I watch humanity not being able to be that kinder, gentler, more caring, more empathic species I had hoped we would be by now. In other words, if humanity truly wanted peace on earth, we would have peace on earth. Too many still enjoy being bullies and having power over another and too many others have not yet found their own inner strength and inner healing. In my opinion, we, collectively, are doing a lousy job of solving our social ills where I rank racism as the number one social ill, followed by genderism (which encompasses all our issues with sexuality, sensuality and gender of which feminism is not only a misnomer, in my opinion, but is also too narrow a focus). A root cause of all our social ills is elitism in one form or another. And manifests itself in poverty, unnecessary fear and rebellion, war and lethal weapons.

So why are we here? Let me start by saying that I view all of humanity as an organism made up of individuals, each one of us in turn made up of smaller organisms, right down to the cellular and then microbe level. In turn, we can then be broken down into yet ever smaller and smaller bits, right down to the smallest known particle in the universe. And who knows how small we can still go. I have no idea but I find that pretty amazing and awe inspiring. That said, would I spend yet more trillions to find out more without solving our social ills first? Absolutely not!

BiPolar is described as a chronic disorder with unexplained wild mood swing. I would agree with the fact that my condition is "chronic" and that I have very frequent, often extreme mood swings. I can be laughing and crying almost simultaneously but not quite at the same time and see saw back and forth. Where I disagree is that my mood swings are not explainable. Today, I can explain every single one, as they happen. As I look back, I cannot even say for sure if the lithium carbonate actually did help me beyond a placebo effect. That it helps others may very well be the case but I am not sure for myself since the neither the mood swings, the depressions nor the highs ever went away. What I did end up with was failing kidneys. Plowing through the depressions was a mind over matter exercise of not giving up and recognizing that when depressions set in, I did not feel I was in the driver's seat of my own life and over time, I began to recognize that as a symptom, trace the root cause and find a

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way to get back behind my own personal wheel of life, so to speak. But just like driving in real life, the road is full of obstacles and we need rest stops. It is easy to lose control of the wheel and hence staying in control of my own life is an on going exercise of in and out and can never be taken for granted.

The other side of BiPolar are the highs. For me, that is where the danger lies in that the highs meant I was losing access to my own brain. Today, I see my these states, not only as a place of false ecstasy but also a sign of my spirit wanting to leave a world that is, at best, in a serious state of confusion, continuous wars and not solving our social issues very well. In other words, when I am caught in a situation of extreme stress that I could not resolve trying to be a member of humanity, my brain tends to shut down. So instead of panicking, I am learning better each day how to not do so, invoking skills such as anger management, assertiveness and intermittent calming exercises in much the same way we teach children to calm themselves to sleep in their own bed. The end result is a better problem solving, on my part, with greater clarity to better deal with whatever life throws at me.

This, I have discovered is a crucial difference between worrying and concern. Worrying is simply circular stress as if on a merry go round while concern is the act of breaking down issues into root causes, small manageable portions and then finding ways to problem solve. Is it not this stress, that on an individual level we can do little about and yet all feel, that today is pulling us left and right? Imagine life, where we all learned the art problem solving, in a coordinated way with a common goal of doing better for all our children. Not some of our children but all of them. I suspect if we, as people, learned to work together for this common goal, each one of us taken the piece we can each solve best, add in the necessary co-operation, co-collaboration and coordination between such endeavours, humanity will be surprised how quickly we can build a pretty nice world for us all. What we lack is the common will to care for all our children.

As I stated earlier in this introduction, what I see today is complete lunacy and idiocy, a system I call global apartheid! And to think, I fought a compulsive desire to commit suicide, one of the symptoms of being BiPolar for a good six decades, only to silence that destructive force inside me, and then wake up to a lost world where we have so much and yet are hell bent on keeping war, perceived scarcity

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and right fighting in play so that today we have more nutrition in our shampoos and hair conditioners than what we allow into Gaza, Yemen and Syria. And I am a war baby that knows famine and continues to deal with that trauma, daily.

Is there anything humanity has agreed upon, other than the direction in which to turn a screw: clockwise to tighten and anti-clockwise to loosen???

Another issue in human life is that we do not seem to like the idea that all in life does have limits with one possible exception to become more loving in spirit. And therein lies another one of our quandaries. How do we do this, make a living and not sell our soul in the process, given our current economic, social and political systems in a world that amounts to global apartheid? What we have is a race to the bottom, with people who do not have any kind of citizenship, some confined to open air prisons some in concentration camps, others in tent cities as climate, war and/or economic refugees, others in actual jail often being tortured for investigating and protesting or worse having the “wrong” skin tone! Add in passports issued with colour coded covers that give some of us (the haves) a greater degree of freedom than others, is a race without winners, in the longer term, and a lousy legacy for our children. Oh yes! Let us not forget the visa wars that further restrict freedom of movement in travel. With humanity barely agreeing on anything makes setting a common goal difficult and looking after all our children well, virtually, impossible.

And yet some folks are indeed a danger that cannot be allowed to roam free if we do not want chaos and anarchy to reign. A Perplexing Paradox!

Let us go back to my time and journey of learning to embrace BiPolar, natural highs (psychosis) and lows (deep depressions) and a few other conditions for which the overlapping field of psychiatry and psychology has found ways to bill us, be that directly or through insurance. Acknowledging that these professionals also need to make a living, please note dangerous conditions can creep in since people in these two professions are human and can have a lot of power over us when we are in a weakened mental and/or emotional state, too often ending up doing more harm than good, having experienced both sides of that equation so

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that I can confidently state that I am a product of both the positive and negative side of psychiatry and psychology:

- the therapy, that allowed me to self examine every twist and corner of myself for 40 plus years to self correct. And
- dealing with some really bad advice that I would have been better off not following and worse very unpleasant and at times, dangerous side effects from the drugs and that I still live today, a modern day miracle that does not defy science.

At 76, overall, I am healthier than most of my peers but I am dealing with not only failing kidneys and gout but also diabetes insipidus, another side effect of the lithium. I also have myalgia in my right leg, a localized form of fibromyalgia. The latter began when I was pumped full of anti psychotic and anti seizure drugs in 2012 and then again in briefly 2014. Granted that is standard protocol for someone like me who is off her meds, as I was in 2012 for four years, and psychosis had set in, again. But those drugs made me more suicidal than I ever was and I almost lost my life since I was in such a fog, it is miracle I did not drown in my bathtub or get run over by a bicycle (or possibly a car) since I could not see moving targets that were coming directly at me. While the experimenting with drug combos continued for eight months, I was also acutely aware that to go off such drugs too quickly, I also ran the risk of brain seizure. After I was safely off the anti psychotics/anti seizure drugs, other drugs I was prescribed were causing severe dizziness. I do not like standing in the middle of a traffic island on a busy road and the sky starts to spin above me. In 2014, I found myself confined in mental health yet again, but this time, from electrolyte loss, post traumatic stress and toxicity build up in my own blood. It is difficult to describe my anger at yet another attempt to drug me out of existence combined with a 13 day bout with constipation, and nine days confined inside a mental health ward.

Modern day psychiatry does not believe BiPolar is manageable without drugs and therein lies a modern day tragedy. To complicate matters further, for many the drugs may very well be necessary for some and a mistake for others mistake. What also puzzles me is why our current conventional field of psychology and

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psychiatry continues to hold onto to this notion I must be on drugs just because I cannot guarantee, with one hundred percent certainty, I will never have a mental break down again. If I break a bone, we often set it with a cast until the bone heals and then take the cast off.. We do not say, keep the cast on for the rest of your life for fear of breaking the bone again. The same with the drugs that were at times necessary to, I suspect, to bring my brain back to some normalcy though even that we do not know for sure.

I am not recommending we throw all drugs in the garbage, overnight. Some are helpful and some necessary to continue living on the planet but more importantly, I think, is to learn life skill management and that includes managing not only stress, risk and anger, all inevitable, but also pain. We all need help and aids to get us to the end of our own life but we need to learn to use them wisely, not too soon for we become overly reliant on aids but not wait too long either as that too can be fatal.

Since coming to Canada in 1951, at age 8, I saw wrong almost immediately and right too, but the wrong hit me harder, starting with racism and the inability at that time, to accept me a new comer from continental Europe as opposed to being British. That in 2018, I still feel like a stranger in my city of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada does not bode well for my society despite all the public declarations to the contrary of welcoming everyone. The reason is specific to my my own person and personal family history much more than a lack of trying by the many volunteers and hours Hamiltonians put in trying to ensure a welcoming, inclusive city. I simply have not yet found a social circle to belong to though I am welcome almost everywhere and have received many thank yous and awards from my work as both in my profession and volunteer life. On the surface all is wonderful but the depth in relationships is not available and loneliness is my number one vulnerability.

Before I close this introduction, please allow me to make one serious suggestion. When a medical professional gives me an intake form to fill in when seeking advice, the first questions should not be is there heart disease in your family or cancer or allergies, but have you experienced serious trauma in your life. In other words, are you a war survivor? A survivor of famine? Sexual abuse? Physical abuse? Verbal abuse? The upheaval of moving at a young age and at

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what age? What were the support systems in place when you lost your birth culture? What we do today in conventional medicine is treat symptoms. Even in Naturopathy, I do not recall enough emphasis being spent on such questions.

Though I cannot walk the path of another, I can learn to be a better helpmate, regardless of skin tone, gender and other attributes, by suppressing my many, many immediate wants in favour of what we need. I actually feel resentment that I cannot do more to be helpful and be more generous in this world with so much need and actually personally survive.. It has become an exercise in balancing what I can do and what I cannot do always keeping in mind that to help others and make them dependent on me is no gift nor is helping others with a hidden agenda. Am I a perfect helpmate? Not by a long shot and I have made many mistakes along the way. But I am learning better one day at a time.

We all die and return to ashes, dust, dirt and hopefully release some positive energy back to the universe on our last day here. I accept that and though that final goodbye is not easy, I see that too as a blessing. Without death, I do not think we can appreciate life and we would be even more cruel to each other than we already are. For me, the more important issue is how we die. Do we die with peace in our heart, some tears of sadness knowing we have to let go and say that final good bye or do we die with others saying: "What a relief that one is no longer here!" Can we forgive all on that last day, reconciling our differences, before our last day on earth? If not, what we leave behind is a lousy legacy for those we do leave behind rendering whatever love there was in life a painful curse for our young to deal with.

Instead of running to a lawyer and lodging a lawsuit, as happens all too often when one person or group invokes an injustice on another, in my case, I prefer we chalk up what went wrong in my life, as well as what went right, as part of the collective learning experience. For that we do need more open minds, kinder hearts and a whole new currency based on good will towards self and others, not this current system where money is not only used to make and buy ever more lethal weapons but also as a weapon itself. Let us not forget elitism, narcissism, and inequality as contributing factors to what ails us. Does good creep in as well? Yes! But in the time frame remaining, which could be less than a century before our earth becomes inhabitable, can we evolve more in the direction of true love?

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For this my first attempt at being an author, I have chosen to use the short story format for two reasons. I can be more vague and though the intent is to be open and raw about my journey from being lonely, since coming to Canada in 1951, to being alone (when I discovered that doing laundry was a better alternative to going out with just about anyone who asked) to today: solo. This is, in part, necessary to deal with my version of BiPolar to process daily what I feel and in part, I am not easy to “hang in” with others who are unable to understand that which is not visible and feel what I feel. I have no desire to embarrass or make this a revenge book and yet the book being autobiographical I do talk about others who affected me, often very negatively. I am not good at fiction else I would write my story as such. In fact, writing a book is about the last thing I thought I would ever do. What I do find interesting is that today, in my 76th year, my fictional life, the stories I tell myself to try and make sense of what has happened [and admittedly some of these stories are wild, off the wall and way out there] and my non fictional life line up in parallel, finding it hard for me to tell the difference.

I am not trying to prove anything and I hope the reader both agrees and disagrees with what I say. In the end, I do believe, we are here to find our own personal truth between the this and the that, a journey that I hope leads to inner peace for each one of us. Please keep in mind when I label people such as “men” or “women”, “black” or “white”, I am not referring to all men, all women or all people but the ones that had the most influence in my life be that influence, pleasant or unpleasant, for all in life is a blessing of sorts.

As far as I am concerned all ground on earth is sacred and needs to be a shared resource. All that I have and have learned along the way belongs to me only in the moment and then it belongs to what I call our higher collective since I am not even sure my own thoughts are purely my own nor do I feel I deserve anything other than I hope I can have consideration. To add to the complexity of life, a marathon for most, a sprint for some and a triathlon for a few, no one knows at twenty if the decisions we are making will be the right ones when we are seventy five. That makes the role of an elder, a guide, a mentor more crucial than ever in a time when the rate of change is making the role of an elder almost impossible. Planning ahead for seven generations is no longer good enough. We need to make our plans and priorities such that we look ahead at least twenty two

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generations and stop thinking about what might happen a billion or trillion years from now, at least for now. In other words, let us learn to create some order out of chaos and confusion and instead of yearning for equality, which does not exist, apply equivalency theory and sustainability, using a currency that measures only good will towards self and others. Why? To bring hope and peace to our earth and explore the heavens when we are ready, on a collective basis. Love is the answer! Forgiveness the process. Self defence tools and sharing that which we do not need for ourselves the glue. And yes we can, by facing our collective past, find ways to heal from the many wrongs we have inflicted on each other, cry many, many cathartic tears, build that truth and reconciliation process and make amends. It is possible but our window of opportunity is closing fast for us to find ways to empower one another and build bridges of friendship and trust that can only come from the grassroots, the everyday people.

