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OUT OF THE SILENCE

Memories, poems, reflections

Terry Waite

Illustrations by Jenny Coles



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*To Joan Watters, Ella, Sophie, Sam,
and in memory of Joan Harvey*

Preface

For me this is an unusual book for it is a departure from my usual style of writing. It is set mainly in New Zealand, a country that I have visited many times and have grown to love for its tranquillity and natural beauty. Having said that, the location might well be anywhere in this world for it simply provides the vehicle for an inner journey which I have attempted to express in a concise prose style.

The result is not a 'tidy' book for there is a certain amount of rambling within its pages. That is how I have found my mind works, as I have attempted to record something of the different inner pathways that I have trodden across the years.

None of the prose poems in this book has been published until now but several have been read in public and have evoked an enthusiastic response from many listeners. How they will be received by the reader I know not. All I can hope for is that they may evoke a response that will encourage some readers to reflect on their own inner journey and in so doing benefit from that reflection.

There are many people to whom I am indebted for this book. First, Jenny and Alan Coles, who were generous always with their hospitality and kindly invited me to both their home in Cornwall when I needed time to write, and to share the holiday house they were renting in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand.

Jenny must have a special mention as without her encouragement and support these poems would never

Preface

have seen the light of day. I would frequently write something on scraps of paper, or emails, and she would collect and save them as she was always convinced that they ought to be published. She typed and re-typed and never seemed to lose patience. The sketches throughout the book are also her work.

Sarah, my long-suffering secretary, dealt expertly with the myriad of requests and invitations that came to me when I was away for longish periods of time in New Zealand or elsewhere. I could not have managed all my other responsibilities without her help.

Frances, my wife, has accommodated herself to my frequent absences, which have been the pattern across a lifetime. I remain grateful to her for her patience and forbearing.

I remain deeply indebted to my good friend, Linda Brockbank, who spent many hours reading the manuscript and made many helpful suggestions regarding its design which eventually led to its publication. Our thanks must also go to Philip Law and the staff of SPCK for their enthusiasm.

Finally, the several individuals to whom I read an occasional poem and who were brave enough to give me an honest response – thank you all.

In the winter of 2012 I left England for New Zealand where I was to join a cruise ship in order to deliver a series of lectures. Friends suggested that I might care to fly out early and share their holiday house which they had rented in the Hawke's Bay area. They knew I wanted to write a book and said that this lovely part of New Zealand would be an ideal place in which to start work. I did and thus this book was born.

Over 20 years previously, when held in solitary confinement as a hostage, I had written a book in my head, *Taken on Trust*. It was written in that way as I was not allowed pencil and paper and thus it was the only way possible I could manage to write. Years later I committed it to paper at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. I had also written novels and scraps of poetry in the same way but they have long since been lost to memory.

For those readers unfamiliar with the story suffice to say that as a member of Archbishop Robert Runcie's staff I had engaged in successful negotiations for the release of hostages in Iran and Libya. In the mid-1980s, when hostage-taking was rife in Beirut, I was at first asked to be involved in seeking the release of two American clerics who had been kidnapped there. Later, I was asked by relatives to try and do something for British hostages.

Quite frankly, it was with some reluctance that I took up these cases. Alas, I fell victim to political duplicity which went by the name of Iran-Contra. This matter

Introduction

has been well documented elsewhere and this is not the place for me to go into lengthy explanations. I refused to let go of the hostages after I had established face-to-face contact with their kidnappers, and when I received a promise of safe conduct to actually visit the imprisoned men, whose health was said to be failing, I accepted knowing in my heart the acute risk I was taking. Robert was reluctant to let me return to Beirut at a time when there had been the political collapse occasioned by the Contra affair and I fully appreciated his reluctance. I would have said exactly what he said had a member of my staff wanted to continue under such adverse circumstances. However, he finally agreed to my return and I went back. The kidnappers broke their word to me which, frankly, did not come as a great surprise and I spent almost five years in captivity. I do not in any way regret taking that decision for myself, but I do regret the anguish it caused both to my family and to Robert and his wife.

I have hazy recollections of my return to the UK after spending so many years incarcerated in Beirut. It was not all plain sailing. Some in the media accused me of being deeply implicated in the Iran-Contra arms-dealing scandal when the truth was that I knew absolutely nothing at all about that matter. Others claimed that I thought myself to be invincible because I believed God would protect me from being captured! Nothing could be further from the truth. I have never believed that, because one has a faith, then one is given 'super protection' from the normal ups and downs of life. Such comments disturb me not at all now, but then, when I was feeling vulnerable and having to face the task of returning to a world that had changed in so many respects from the world I knew previously, they hurt me deeply.

I gave an extempore address after landing at RAF Lyneham. After delivering it I gave no further interviews for over a year.

Introduction

Apart from a brief verse printed in my school magazine over 60 years ago I have never published or written poetry, but as the years went by I decided that I ought to try writing myself in order to give expression to feelings and emotions common to all human beings, and also to try and describe concisely some of the events that have occupied my time since my release years ago. I wrote a considerable number. Some I shared with friends and one or two I read during the course of lectures I was giving. To my surprise they received a very positive response and I was urged to publish.

I was, and to a degree still am, somewhat reluctant to share them with a wider audience but eventually decided I would give it a try. Rather than simply publish the poems by themselves, I chose to use them to illustrate a narrative which describes something of the rambling pathway I have taken through life.

This collection, the compilation of which started in New Zealand and was completed in Cornwall, is now placed before you, the reader. As I do so I can't help but remember the admonition of Oscar Wilde when he is reputed to have said, 'All bad poetry springs from genuine feelings.' However, it is my hope that the poems printed here may resonate with you as you also tread the winding and mysterious pathway through life. You will, of course, have your individual interpretation of this book and will conjure up your own pictures of what I am trying to convey. For what they are worth, I place these words before you and in so doing place a part of my life in your hands.

It is a warm sunny day as I sit down to write. Several days ago, on a cold damp December evening, I left Heathrow Airport in London bound for Auckland, New Zealand. Now I am in a beautiful rural location surrounded by open countryside. The house, which is spacious and cool, is set at the top of a small hill. Below, one may catch sight of the Tukituki river as it meanders its way to the sea some 20 miles distant. A small farmstead lies at the foot of the hill. Occasionally someone may walk from the farm across the pasture, but throughout the day that is the only human being one may see. It is the perfect place from which to look back across the years and to reflect on events that took place long ago and that have subsequently shaped my life.

Memories, Dreams, Reflections. It was the Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung who took these three words for the title of his autobiography and to me they encapsulate what I intend this book to be. I shall not necessarily follow a chronological order in my writing. Dreams and memories which occasion reflection do not work in such a way. A dream will be experienced and then vanish as quickly as it appeared. Some will linger for many a year. Memories swirl around in the mind and as the years pass by are often distorted as though, from the unconscious, one is attempting to make them acceptable. Some refuse to change and remain to give rise to a range of conflicting emotions.

Another country

As I prepared to write this first chapter I happened by chance to come across the writings of the late Philip Rieff, one of the leading interpreters of Freud. He wrote that desire and limitation, eros and authority are intimately connected. The tension between them provides the energy for all artistic endeavours. These two sentences struck home as they put into a nutshell something of my own experience. Through the poems I have attempted to give some expression to the range of conflicting emotions that are within me, as they are within all people. On the one hand there is the limitation and authority which I have accepted because of my whole upbringing, particularly having been brought up by a very strict father. On the other there are the human emotions equally strong. It is only now, in the latter years of mortal life, that I have been able to give some expression to these powerful forces through poetic writing.

The following lines, written long before I read Rieff, followed a lengthy discussion with a close friend and partially explain why his writings so impressed me. In the discussion we had I was attempting to understand why I had the desire to express myself in what was a different way of writing for me.

The following poem may seem unduly morose to some, but the fact is that I *am* in the final quarter of life and now is the time for me to reflect on what has been, what is and what hopefully will be.

SELF EXAMINATION

Can it be
That this sudden burst
Of poetic activity
Long held back
By fear,
Or doubt:
Can it be that this is a precursor
Of a mortal life rapidly drawing to a close?
The words stream forth
Filling the page with hopes,
Desires,
They rush to find a place,
Knowing that their source
Will soon be no more;
Himself a word, a memory,
Incapable of creating,
Incapable of loving, holding, caring,
A memory;
A memory of one who tried to love,
Who needed love;
A memory of one admired by some
Who knew not his inner pain,
His inner striving for wholeness,
His deep inner conflict
With light and darkness.
'A religious man' some said.
They knew nothing.
Nothing of his inner agony.
Nothing of his agony of disbelief,
Nothing of his striving to find truth,

Nothing of his desire to live truth
And so often failing.
'A worthy man' some said.
They knew nothing of his rejection of acclaim
And his desire for it.
A desire to be known, respected
And yet
It was simply a desire to be loved.
In the past days the flood gates of emotion
Have been opened.
Now, in these last days, they are
Thrown wide.
Secretly.
Privately
There is still a deep inner terror
That love and passion will destroy
An edifice created across life.
The days shorten
And life moves on its relentless way.
I give these words to you my friend.
Guard them,
Protect them:
They are my impoverished soul,
The soul that you know
And have loved.

2 Evening

It is evening and I am sitting on a small veranda overlooking the farmstead at the foot of the hill. My two friends, husband and wife, with whom I am sharing this house, have left for an evening stroll, leaving me to my thoughts. The sun is gradually setting, filling the sky with a blaze of colour. There is a slight breeze. In the hilly meadow two longhorn cattle, Buster and Dudley, gaze curiously at me as I write. We are told that they are especially fond of apples and carrots and will come to receive these titbits from those who stay in the house. The cattle belong to the owners of this property and are kept as pets. In the distance sheep graze. It is often said that New Zealand resembles England as it was 30 or 40 years ago and there is a certain truth in that statement. The population is tiny, approximately four and a half million throughout the North and South Islands. Consequently the roads are relatively empty of traffic and life has a certain tranquillity that has been lost in many parts of the British Isles.

As I sit in the calm of the evening I am reminded yet again that I am in the final stage of mortal life. I don't feel in any way morbid about this, simply grateful that I am in good health and able to enjoy these latter years. Across the years I have brushed with death many times and in the years spent as a captive it was my daily companion. I cannot say that I was, or am, afraid of death for it is inevitable and a part of life itself. We die and the atoms that constitute our body are redistributed throughout the universe from whence we came. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. In captivity

Evening

I was afraid of the way in which I might die. On one occasion, when I was facing a mock execution and a gun was placed against my temple, my fear was of pain. Would it hurt when the bullet went through my brain? Today that fear belongs to the past and is simply a memory. Towards the end of captivity my health almost gave out when I developed a severe bronchial infection. I could not lie down for weeks and slept sitting on the floor with my back propped against the wall. As there was no medical attention whatsoever it took considerable effort to hold on to life. The intense loneliness of the experience, when I needed the care and support of another human being, is reflected in the following poem.



Buster and Dudley

ALONE

Alone,
Day follows day
With relentless monotony.
My body is wearing away.
Each hour I hold to life,
With failing strength.
My body is failing.

Year after year
I have clutched at life
As a drowning man
Would hold to a straw.
Now I see the spectre of death.
It hovers around
Taunting, mocking.
My strength ebbs away,
Ebbs from the shores of life,
Leaving me without breath.
I will not die,
Will not.
Will not . . .

Now I am lost,
Lost in the world of fitful sleep;
Respite,
Blessed respite.
Release from chains,
From beatings,
From the spectre that haunts.
I wake,
My back against the wall.
I cannot lie for I will choke,

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