

CAN YOU DRINK THE CUP?

By Sonia Blue

“As we gradually come to befriend our own reality, to look with compassion at our own sorrows and joys, and as we are able to discover the unique potential of our way of being in the world, we can move beyond our protest, put the cup of our life to our lips and drink it, slowly carefully, but fully.”

Henri J.M. Nouwen

Famed theologian Henri Nouwen in his powerful treatise on faith Can You Drink the Cup? suggests that the act of drinking is a potent metaphor for life. He purports that to “drink in” the full range of all of life’s dimensions; all of its “sorrows and joys” is not merely a single act, but a hopeful, courageous, and self-confident way of living.

The literal image of “drinking” is a constant and powerful one, it chases the dysphagic’s chronic experience of being parched. Water, the source of life, the element from which we are over 50% made of, is both our friend and foe. A spring shower finds people fashioning newspapers for hats and dashing from eave to awning so as not to be touched by nature’s tears. A harder torrential downpour will stop traffic and make friends of complete strangers committed to standing under a building’s protection so as not to be “caught” in the rain. Threatening storm clouds above bloated with water will find umbrellas below exploding like popcorn. Almost every pool and many beaches warn us of water’s unpredictability. Death by water is most always a tragic accident that finds us shaking our heads in disbelief and wondering how? After all “He was such a strong swimmer.”

And yet to a dysphagic, water, the image and memory of it, can look luscious. Waterfalls/delicious, swimming pools/sublime, even puddles left by a rainstorm are the recipients of longing. Dreams are awash with liquid themes; oceans/juicy, rivers/moist, lakes/succulent, floating on top of, diving under, frolicking in, splashing, wet, wet, wet. Drenched, soaked, dripping, all of the conditions that made our mothers run for towels mumbling “Get out of that wet suit” or “Don’t drip water on the carpet” anything to dry off, stay warm, change conditions and go from aquatic to arid before one would “catch their death.”

This coming January 7th 2008 will mark five years to the day since I have had anything to eat or drink by mouth. Diagnosed with a Cavernous Angioma on my right medulla, I underwent surgery and was given a second chance at life by resecting the haunting brain lesion that would have surely been my early demise. Brought back to life new and improved, the lesion was gone for good, but so was my swallow.

Water has become the iconic symbol of the life I've fallen into, the reality that has been dashed and the hope that continues to drive me. The thirst that eternally dogs me can no longer be quenched by a liquid, a replenishing drink, or a cooling spray, and though my new physiology constrains me, my spirit and faith have moved forth in compensatory fashion.

As I write these words today there is no literal cup to bring to my lips, yet there does exist a cup to bring to my heart...the metaphoric cup of life, which is the only one left to me now and the one that I aim to drain to its dregs.

I believe the poetry of Nouwen when he says that "True sanctity is precisely drinking our own cup and trusting that by thus fully claiming our own, irreplaceable journey, we can become a source of hope for many."

Here's to all of our journeys....cheers!