

Finding Life in a Cold Place – a Reminiscence

Leben entdecken an einem kalten Ort – eine Reminiszenz

Robin Lohmann

Times of crisis and existential threat. For a neglected child this can be everyday. Unrecognizable at the time, the results are revealed much later in life - the deformed feet from years of wearing too small shoes, the loss of hearing from repeated untreated middle-ear infections, the scribbled note of a child discovered years later in a shoe box begging the mother to „come as soon as possible“.

But also the strength of independence and the successes of adulthood. Motivated by the burning desire to be seen despite it all.

I was seven years old when my parents took me with them to a spiritual retreat – one of the many they regularly attended, the only time they took me along. This time it was not about the revelations of Gurdjieff, the religious symbolism in the work of C. G. Jung or the miracles of an Indian guru who had infiltrated the spiritual scene of Cleveland, Ohio, but held by the author of a currently popular book on God and human relating.

The retreat campus was quite beautiful, wide lawns and a spotting of large trees. I have a vague and somewhat happy memory of doing cartwheels alone among them. But that was only possible later.

We arrived around bedtime. All I remember is the cold, institutional hallway of the vacant dorm - a long corridor with our room at the end. Or I thought it was our room. „No“ my mother said, sending me away. „Your room is down the hall.“ „Where?“ I asked, thinking my room would be next to theirs. But it was very far away - five or six rooms down the empty hallway. We were the only guests staying on that floor.

Alone in the empty and sterile room, I looked around - saw a small bed, a night stand, a closet and a chest of dresser drawers - all matching and devoid of life. I put my small suitcase on the bed and began unpacking, feeling cold and utterly alone. I hung up my blouses and cardigan in the closet and put my underwear and socks in the top dresser drawer. Being a child and curious, I opened the middle drawer,

empty. Then I did the same with the bottom drawer. Much to my surprise, this drawer was not empty. Inside was a small brown stuffed fox with a bushy tail and slanted, sewn on eyes, kind of like my own. This fox was not new, but had lived a long time. What was he doing there? And then I knew. He was waiting there for me. My very own gift from God.

With Foxy hidden safely under my pillow I could not only sleep alone without fear of the dark, but could go outside alone during the day and explore the vast lawns and large trees of the campus, turning cartwheels in the fading sun.

When we left the retreat Foxy came with me and slept with me in my room at home. Then one day about six months later, he vanished from my bed. I searched everywhere, tore apart my covers and looked in all of my drawers, but he was gone.

I knew what happened. It was the witch who lived in the old house on my way to school. She had stolen Foxy to place among her knick knacks and doilies behind those yellowing lace curtains. For days I stood in front of her darkened house on my way home from school planning how I could break in and rescue him.

I told my parents that my old brown fox had been stolen by a witch and of my plans to break in and save him. Two days later he reappeared under the covers at the foot of my bed - leaving me feeling inadequate for missing him and stupid for thinking a witch had stolen him. In truth he had been miraculously retrieved from the church charity box just hours before it was carted away to the inner city on a truck. Foxy, once again, brought to me through divine intervention.

As many neglected children, I have very few memories from this period of my life - just a handful of vivid experiences shining through an otherwise opaque time of aloneness and undefined guilt. One is the moment I opened the bottom drawer in a sterile cold place and found someone I could love.

Über die Autorin / About the Author

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born 1962 in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, is a writer and social anthropologist. She completed her undergraduate work at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, received her MA from Case Western University in Cleveland and finished her studies at the University of Kiel, Germany with a PhD. In addition to her work as a freelance writer, she has researched extensively on the life review, designed and led autobiographical writing courses and published on dolls. Currently she is a member of the academic staff in the English Department at the University of Education, Karlsruhe. She holds a life-long interest in the power of autobiographical memories to heal and enrich the present. Her book *Was gestern war, hilft mir für morgen* (Kösel Verlag 21013) is available directly from the author.



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