

Title - Earthbond

Ann Palmer

email: plyons.gress@tiscali.co.uk

Author Info

I am a writer and teacher of Creative Writing. My first piece of published work in the U.S. compared the Dawn Chorus to the morning news, and decided the Dawn Chorus was better for the soul. I have a wide publishing record, marketing myself as a 'Jill of Many Writing Trades'. The two most important books I've written are, as yet, unpublished.

EARTH DREAM is a fantasy-fiction – for a family audience – set in the far future, at the time of the first attempt to re-introduce homo sapiens to Earth. With a humorous/dramatic treatment, and 17 songs, it is a commercially good prospect for a musical.

ECO – Everyone's Common Origin – is a 100,000 word non-fiction using 33 different acronyms of 'eco' as chapter headings.

Short Biog

Qualified as a teacher. First post - headteacher of an Orkney Island School. Once I started to be published regularly, I taught Creative Writing at four colleges in the Midlands England, and obtained a postgraduate Diploma – with distinction – in 'Teaching Creative Writing to Adults'.

Worked in England, Scotland, Orkney, Switzerland and Ireland. Trekked in the Himalayas. Taught horse-riding alongside Creative Writing (to all age-ranges) throughout my life. Served on the committee of the British 'Swanwick Writers Summer School'. Today I use Right Brain methods together with Accelerated Learning in my teaching of Creative Writing. (Right Brain links to natural growth models enable me to promote eco-matters in a subtextual way.)

Now I live and work in the Outer Hebrides. Besides writing and teaching Creative Writing I do occasional work as a local radio presenter.

The inspiration for the following piece - "Earthbond" - came as a result of being asked to give a talk on Ecospirituality at a U.K. Writers Conference in August 2007.

EARTHBOND

It began in earnest when I was a university student and joined LULU – Leicester University Lady Undergraduates – in the 100 mile London-to-Leicester pram race.

These sort of marathons require one gets fit. So every evening, in wintertime dark, I'd run round a certain circuit. It was while I was doing this training, the sort of mantric slog that running becomes, that a totally unrelated thought dropped into my mind and lodged there.

'We learn more from nature than any lesson I know.'

The force of this sentence landing in my mind nearly stopped me in my tracks – literally. Its power suggested it had already taken up permanent residence with no intention of leaving.

Grammatically, though, it wasn't a good sentence, so I tried to send it away. Suggest it come back in a more coherent respectable quotable form. It wouldn't. It didn't. It kept repeating itself, and popped up at intervals unexpectedly, reinstating itself by beingness -sheer presence. A kind of doggedness.

'We learn more from nature than any lesson I know.' Ten little words.

But what did it mean exactly? The 'we' makes it immediately inclusive, the start. Yet 'I' comes at the end of that sentence, indicating this is not a universal state of affairs.

I don't suppose you'll remember it. Why should anyone? It isn't memorable. It instantly strikes the clumsy note.

Little did I know then, my purpose, my drive, my centre, my heart-stopping goal, had neatly inserted itself between the myriad distractions and ever-present focus on academic achievement that is teenage life.

A gauche teenager of a phrase too; an outright, outrageous, outer-oriented statement that brooks no argument. No gentle refinement, not couched in discrete dissembling words. Instead a blast. A blast from humanity's ancient past, arising and originating from the Earth itself to any ears attuned and listening for the call to connection with all things. The deep signal, the pulse of our shared life-force, had finally landed.

What else was hidden in those ten words? Implied, if one squirrels around into its meanings, its *multi*-meanings, a little more.

In its diversity nature, after all, offers us a never-ending stream of models to encounter in any one lifetime. Then there's our relationship with nature itself – the interactive bit.

Did I reason, ponder, think this way at first? Oh no. I'd been too well schooled into what was culturally accepted and was already in trouble socially for unfeminine behaviour. So what I took from this experience was the absolute certainty of its rightness – and the feeling I had to live it. But how?

For that's what I wanted to do. Live that sentence. Make it my guiding principle in life. Explore all its possibilities, nuances, lifelong.

My life purpose was decided. The difficulty lay in translating it into a full-time

career. I succeeded a few times in my twenties, but only in vacations when I could exchange the city life I loathed for a natural environment.

Escape was how it felt. 'Escape to the country' is familiar to us. Except I preferred wilderness – the total experience. I was addicted to longing for it, obsessed by memories of what it gave me, how it made me feel. Whole. Blessed. Fulfilled. Privileged. Deeply grateful. Alive, tremendously alive. Alive beyond anything previously known. On a scale of 1 to 10 on aliveness, I was stratospheric. A sustained high, it gave me extraordinary energy. So much so, at times, that I felt my body could hardly contain it. This energy pushed the limits of my being.

First came working on a Scottish hill farm, accessible only by a rough single-track four miles long that took the exhaust off the sports car of one intrepid visitor. Nature, I learned, has no respect for our gadgets if they do not fit into her plan.

Ireland, though, the far north-west coast, took nature to a new level for me. Gone were the tight strictures – rules and regulations – that make automatons out of too many human beings who assent to the cultural code rather than one offered by the rhythms of nature.

Our eyes are said to be the windows to our souls. My mother, who hadn't seen me for several months, exclaimed at the change in colour of my eyes – from blue-grey to blue. Mothers, more than anyone, are to be relied on in these matters.

So my soul's colour changed and all because I'd honoured that sentence that arrived in my heart in the dark night where only neon lights – with their false orange glow – showed me a future.

'We learn more from nature than any lesson I know', has dogged me all my life and eventually, I let it take the lead. Though it did need a walk close to death to detonate my senses into a fuller awareness of things not talked about either because they are too ephemeral or quite unprovable.

In my twenties I fell in love with hills, particularly the hills of the Lake District with their beckoning ridges and peaks where steep ascents give heart-thumping views of sparkling lakes. Because rendered in miniature, this appeals to the human aesthetic sense. It seems encompassable. Embraceable.

As part of my training for Mountain Leadership I walked alone on the hills in mist. One day, three hours of constant mist dulled my senses. Vaguely aware that, by my calculations, I should be approaching a summit cairn and not walking downhill, I began to feel uneasy. At that moment, the clouds parted for some twenty seconds, sufficient to show me everything I needed to know right then. I was about to walk over a cliff. My intended route lay ninety degrees to my left, along a ridge-back of rock. The summit cairn lay behind me, above me. Without realising it, without seeing it even, I'd walked its northern flank five minutes previously. The life-saving vision ended. Mist swirled in again and stayed with me until I walked out of it into Kentmere at the end of the day.

The dismissive 'just coincidence' doesn't do it for me. Faced with such spot-on

timing, I felt rescued, humbled and awe-struck. It went deep. My respect for high places took on another quality for nature had been extraordinarily kind to me that day. This experience is not of the dramatic derring-do type so often associated with mountain adventure. To define it as a spiritual moment surpassing anything I'd encountered until that point is true.

'We learn more from nature than any lesson I know.'

Early this year I was asked to give a short talk on ecospirituality. Many past events suggested themselves as possible subjects, but I wanted something of the now, the present.

Today I live with my partner in the Outer Hebrides. Mid-March this year, the daffodils showed, and so did the gales. Force 11. I decided our neighbours had the best solution – miniature daffodils.

One morning I peered out to survey the overnight destruction – and thought I saw a daffodil blown high into a bush. But I was wrong. Close inspection revealed a metre high daffodil grown up through the camelia – the flower was supported and held up by the shrub.

'Now look here,' I said to this daffodil. 'You're not behaving like a daffodil should. What d'you think you're doing? You see that daffodil over there?' I indicated a respectable normal-sized daffodil at the front of the flower bed. 'That's how you're supposed to grow! You're too big for your bulb, you are!'

However, as often happens in my life, I ate my words. The next morning, the normal respectable daffodil lay flat on the ground, defeated by the last gale. While the oversized one was doing fine, not a mark or blemish on its petals. And it stayed that way for another two weeks. It survived longer than any other daffodil in our garden this Spring.

In the spirit of 'we learn more from nature than any lesson I know', I've so far come up with seven possible meanings contained within this daffodil experience. The multi-meanings of wholistic thinking fuel this search. My belief in organic growth as the supreme model for both understanding and accessing meaning never lets me down.

These seven meanings are:

- 1 Massive courage in the face of adversity.
- 2 Not doing the 'expected' thing.
- 3 Not conforming. Not letting the conforming pattern inhibit personal decisions and choices.
- 4 Opting for a crazy way that works.
- 5 Moving towards a symbiotic relationship – where the flower contributes beauty, the shrub support and protection.
- 6 Growing beyond previous limits.
- 7 Growing in the way that's right for us, as individuals.

'We learn more from nature than any lesson I know.'

But the daffodil had a rival, who also wanted to be given a mention, as having something important to offer us humans. A spider spun her web between my car's wing-mirror and door and I didn't realise it until I was driving. I expected the web to be destroyed but again I was wrong. For several weeks the spider and her web were my constant companions on the supermarket run, which gave me plenty of time to consider – and admire - her tenacity as the wind-speed of her micro-environment rocketed. Physical survival is not such an in-your-face issue for most of us. If it was, I wonder if our behaviour would change, adapt?

Yesterday we had an unexpected visitor, one that dropped in – literally. In the autumn dispersal, a young robin has come to our garden. Like all young things, he wants to explore. His exploration led him to the top of the open window in my office. Engrossed in working on my computer I knew nothing of his presence – though I'd been enjoying his singing for hours – until a thump on the carpet behind me made me jump.

Though winded, the robin quickly rallied himself and perched atop a box of discs on my desk. His bright brave stare stirred my heart - up-close and personal with wild animals does that. Their particular beingness, the character of their species comes first. On closer acquaintance, the character of any individual animal shows itself. Unless they feel threatened, so many animals display openness, curiosity, trust, boldness, a childlike innocence, natural beauty and grace. These come streaming at you in one full-on presence. My response is always to feel incredibly privileged.

Two other robins tugged at my centre, awakened by this youngster for whom our house, our home, is just an extension of his territory. One was a singer, an all-night singer, who, in our private estimation, outdid Pavarotti.

I am reliably informed by a television wildlife presenter who has the benefit of a massive research team to keep him well-informed, that scientists still cannot fully explain the volume of sound emitted by a bird. I relish those times when logic breaks down, and humans survey and are confounded by the weakness of their own limited understanding.

The third robin of close acquaintance displayed, not boldness, but anger. If we were late with food on winter mornings, he'd fly up in our faces as we opened the kitchen door. I believe this robin's rage was justified and tried to deliver on time. The robin may be a hundredth the size of a human, but if humans had half the average robin's spunk, there'd be eco-warriors round every corner.

So, to ensure we appreciate multi-meanings, that if one thing doesn't grab us another will, a rain-check alerts us. These are the areas which do it for me.

Looking to nature as a reference point for empowering patterns.
Bypassing 'surface appearances' as the first and only guide.
Looking deeper to see what's feeding the growth-patterns.

Inner guidance – ecospirituality – is the connection between HEART and EARTH. I

cannot be the first person to notice these two words are made up of the same letters. Take the 'h' from the front of 'heart' and put it on the back of the word and you get 'EARTH'. To me, 'H' is an old-fashioned television aerial, stuck on the chimneys of the roofs of houses around my childhood home. Antennae to connect distant places and people. And they needed adjusting too, for good reception.

Samewise, move your own heart-connection till clearer signals come through from the Earth.

We can always follow a trail that leads from heart to earth – or earth to heart. It's a freeway. We can do it via ancient traditions, still being lived out today through tribal beliefs world-wide. We can do it via extraordinary personages like Hamish Miller who is busy dowsing and mapping our planet's ever-changing energy lines and patterns. Or we can come closer to home, turn to gardening, walking, wildlife watching, photography, art. Indeed, any way to be in nature, or reconnect with it. Modern necessity – to create a sustainable lifestyle on earth - may finally give the planet the respect, love and care to lead millions to earthbond in their own particular way.

By taking the heart-route, you create your own personal earthbond. I can honestly say my personal earthbond is the one thing that, at difficult times in my life, gave me everything I needed – physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual. It sustained me through personal life-crises and, by so doing, won my total allegiance.

Every time nature re-presents herself to me in yet another of her myriad ways and forms, it deepens my certainty that it's us humans who are out-of-kilter with reality, Earth's reality. It's Earth's reality we must embrace - unconditionally, wholeheartedly, spiritually, physically, to our very core - if we are to continue, as a species, to live on this beautiful planet.