

CHAPTER 13

I speak somewhat lightly about things here and there. But I'm not essentially light. I wish I could be. I'm just not sure that humanity will survive much longer given the things that people do to other people, and have done to other each other, as well as to the planet that gives us life . . . and without much thought. I can't be the only one who thinks such things . . . but I have less hope about this situation than others do. It hurts my soul. I do have a regard for Beauty, however. One of the reasons for my making the guitars that I make in the way that I do is to add some beauty to a world that I see as reeeeaally lacking it. I've noticed that it's not exactly a priority for any manufacturing company. But me, I can think of myself as being a beautician of sorts. One of the things I'm most grateful for in my more-than-average topsy-turvy life is that I've had work that brings me as much quiet satisfaction as my brain can handle. And clearly, a lot of my satisfaction has been in the form of the guitar, and its music. I do love flamenco. But I'm not much in love with money or competition. I have competed. But I've done so mostly with myself. My own inner world, as you will have gathered from having read about my life, has been chronically lacking sufficient Beauty and Harmony. I've ordered some boxes of these from Amazon but they're back-ordered, and slow in shipping.

The thing about Beauty is that man is the **ONLY** life form on this planet that **needs** it, or that can appreciate it, or can produce it. Why is the supply of it ignored? I do try to add to the supply of it. Inequality, Mankind's Lack of Harmony With Itself, Poverty, Destruction, and War all = Absence of Beauty. Urban cities are insanely out of balance. They are Petri dishes for inequality, misery, violence, and destructive win-at-all-costs competitiveness (**figs. 12a and 12b**). We are taught that those who live in big houses are successes and those who live in shacks and hovels are failures. But no, not really.

Fig. 12a VISIBLE AND IN-YOUR-FACE POVERTY IN VIET-NAM: a Petri dish for inequality, misery, violence, ignorance, and shorter life-spans.

Fig. 12b VISIBLE AND IN-YOUR-FACE POVERTY IN BRAZIL: a Petri dish for inequality, misery, violence, ignorance, and shorter life-spans.

O.K., end of diatribe. But . . .well . . . I am afraid. Really. I know something about War, and I know that most adults lack the capacity to listen, think, and change their minds . . . about darn near anything. Certainly not if one attempts anything like "sensible discussion". I hope we don't get into a nuclear war . . . although if we do half the population of the U.S. will think that's a good and necessary thing to do in order to "protect our country". And I'm pretty sure that kind of war won't last very long. You know, it's really bizarre how much we are inured to the idea of war. We've had plenty of wars. And we've "moved on" from each and every one of them. Or, rather, we never have moved on. We're in walking-on-eggshells times. We hate thinking about war; we're just o.k. with doing it . . . for God and country . . . and without understanding ourselves. And it's really only good for those who reap advantages from it.

MY MOTHER'S DEATH

My sister called me one day. She told me that mom was dying. She'd had a heart attack a few months earlier -- from which she had had chest pain and/but didn't do anything about it for two days. By the time she got any medical attention there had been a lot of permanent heart damage, and she had congestive heart failure from that point on. And it had been getting worse. Now she was in hospice, and had asked the staff to let her die. She was put on intravenous fluids so as to maintain hydration, given no food, and sedated with morphine throughout -- which would leave her alternating between being somewhat alert and not being alert at all. But there was no other treatment prescribed aside from the hydration and morphine. When she entered the hospice she was examined, and expected to live for about a week. I flew down to San Diego right away, for three days, during which I visited her quite a lot. She would flipflop between being able to sort of recognize me, and then sinking into oblivion. We talked some, but slowly and not much. I did a lot of thinking about my life in relation to hers, and hers to mine, as I sat by her bedside. My thoughts were interesting. I sat with her in her hospital room throughout the afternoon of my first day there.

The next day arrived in the afternoon, and I stayed . . . through the evening . . . and through the entire night. The next morning I said good-bye to her not-conscious body and told her that we'd never see each other again. I drove back to my sister and brother-in-law's house (I'd borrowed one of their cars to get to the hospital and back) so that I could pack my bag and have my sister take me to the airport so I could fly back home. I remember that, having said goodbye to my mother, I exited the hospital. And, as I was walking toward the parking lot to get into my sister's car, I felt a vast . . . deep . . . complete . . . sensation of *E M P T I N E S S* . . . and a profound **SILENCE** . . . such as I'd never experienced before. I wasn't even aware of traffic noise. It was a bit like having been listening to some loud sounds for a long time . . . and then hearing nothing. Or walking into a sensory-deprivation chamber. I don't think I'll ever forget that. Well, I had said good-bye to someone I'd had a difficult and unsatisfying life with. And pulling the plug out of that bathtub (so to speak) and letting its water disappear gave me a sensation of vast-and-beyond-words silence and emptiness. I don't really know how else I could put it. I didn't regret or mourn the loss, as one would for having lost a friend. She wasn't a friend. My bathtub emptied out of something that it had been full of that had never been useful at making me feel clean.

A more interesting thing about what I'm telling you is that when I arrived at my sister's house she surprised me by commenting on the fact that I'd been in the hospital with mom overnight, since the day before. I'd stayed with mom in her hospital room through that night! I *do* remember arriving at the hospital the previous day, and saying good-bye to my mother that morning, and telling her that I wouldn't be coming back. And I remember walking out of the hospital right after that . . . and having that unforgettable feeling of complete nothingness. But I HAD NO MEMORY AT ALL OF HAVING BEEN THERE *SINCE THE DAY BEFORE*, between my arriving and my leaving. I still don't. I had *no memory at all* of the time span that my sister reported to me. Where would I have slept? In the chair I sat in??? I've mentioned how mom could have the effect on me of my retreating into fugue states. Well, not remembering that I'd spent the last night of her life with her was certainly one. My mother died later that day.

My sister drove me to the airport to fly back home, and then she stopped at the hospital on her way back, to visit mom. She stopped at the nursing station and asked the nursing staff about mom's condition, and was told that mom was not anywhere near imminent death yet; she wasn't showing the signs of being at that stage yet. She was tough, and she didn't want to die . . . and they thought she certainly had another two or three days to live. Nurses know about that kind of thing after they've seen it a bunch of times. But when my sister reached mom's room and sat down with her, mom was very agitated. No matter how aware or unaware of her surroundings she was, she seemed to be having an internal struggle.

My sister made an attempt to calm/soothe mom from her agitations. She said to her: "*just let go . . . just let go . . .*". And when she said that, mom took three more breaths, exhaled the last one . . . and died. Just like that. The nurses were surprised. My sister was a bit freaked out, partially because she thought that the nurses might have suspected that she had put a pillow over mom's face and asphyxiated her. No one had expected her to die just yet. Wow. As I said, mom hadn't been showing any of the near-death symptoms (like labored and irregular breathing). I guess my sister had allowed mom to feel sufficiently at peace . . . to die. Yeah. The human dimensions of things can be hugely complicated.

I remember that when I visited mom on that first afternoon, she was dipping into and out of druggedness. She'd say a few things, and then fade away, and then became aware of where she was, and talked some more, and faded away again. I remember that one of the things she told me was that she'd been having the repeated sensation? vision? of walking toward a very bright light . . . and that every time she got near it she felt afraid and backed away from it . . . I am guessing that she was experiencing that same struggle in her final prolonged agitation. But I'll never know.

AND THEN . . .

As I've repeatedly mentioned, I never got more than a little bit of information -- much less any coherent account -- of what my parents had experienced during the war. Nor about my early life. Honestly, I don't know whether my mother had ever paid enough attention to me to know anything that I experienced during that war. So there were a lot of blank spots in my mind about my early history. My brother-in-law was a bit of a history buff, though; and, as he was married to my sister, whose frame of life reference included World War II (especially as it pertained to Hungary) he had been reading up on that very subject -- I guess for simple reading interest, and also so as to understand my sister a bit better. They both knew that I lacked information about those war events. I hadn't gotten any from anyone who really knew anything . . . and I wanted to know more. So they invited me to fly to San Diego over a weekend some months after my mother died . . . and my brother-in-law would fill me in about World War II in Hungary. I was a bit nervous about going down there but I flew down anyway.

I spent the weekend with my sister and brother-in-law, talking about -- but mostly listening to -- my brother-in-law's report/narrative. I got back home late on Sunday of that weekend, ate something, and went to bed. The next morning my partner Karen asked me what the weekend visit

had been like . . . and I said “*what weekend visit?*” There was an awkward moment . . . but she and I discovered that I HAD NO MEMORY AT ALL OF ANYTHING THAT HAD HAPPENED THAT WEEKEND. Zero. Nothing. I had a total case of amnesia about it. I remember being puzzled by what Karen asked me about, and told me . . . but the entire weekend had been erased from my mind. I remembered my life from the previous week, and even planning to go to San Diego. But the weekend was a black hole except for one single momentary flashback of having sat in their living room – so I knew that I’d actually been in San Diego. But nothing else. At all. Whatever I’d seen or heard or thought about in that weekend never surfaced. Not even in therapy, which is intended to be a “safe place”.

I think that my “memories” of those early times, when I was an infant in the middle of unimaginable terrors and lack of any comforts or feelings of safety (warmth, food, being held) . . . and my biological/mental development being at the stage when EVERYTHING came in AT FULL VOLUME . . . without stopping . . . and without being able to even turn down the volume control . . . were, and remain, so blackly intolerable that I have never been able to confront them, even in therapy. Well, new minds are completely porous. My little mind shut down completely from the worst of the unbearable experiences and memories, and it is still doing that today, in that my conscious has only a dim clue about it. If I ever today could feel what I felt so intensely as an infant, I don’t think I could hold up against it. I think I’d lose my ability to speak, and withdraw into myself in a fugue state. Or with screaming convulsions. I’ve gotten more in touch with my ancient buried material from having written this narrative out than I’ve ever been able to do in a therapeutic situation. But then again, therapy is once or twice, or even three, times a week . . . while in thinking about and writing this autobiography I’ve rummaged through life for many hours each week . . . for two years.

Still, if nothing else, my formal therapeutic work has enabled me to not be terrified of women - - which I had been for many years. I’d internalized that they sucked you dry and discarded you. But . . . I was eventually able to see that most women are not monsters. They’re just “different” people who are just as confused, smart, dumb, creative, friendly, and fucked up as most men are. Just in different ways. I didn’t know that women didn’t have sharp and deadly claws until I was in my forties.

I wish my father had found someone more satisfying. But then again, he didn’t help matters given his personality and behaviors after the war. I don’t think that he had any capacity to be satisfied and relax; he was too driven and emotionally misshapen. He was mostly a brute and a rageful asshole at home, and an o.k. guy out in the world. Having massive PTSD certainly didn’t help. Neither was his lacking of some form of normal support group. My parents had no meaningful friends. Even though my father was a scary monster when I was young, I’ve learned to appreciate the things that (I imagined) he had come through . . . just to not die.

Now that I don’t have to be terrified of him I can see that aside from his deficits he was also, in a way, a giant who got through every day while pulling an awful lot of baggage . . . underneath which he still had intelligence, loyalty, and playfulness. It’s just that these things were typically underneath the lack of awareness of a short-tempered and vigilant concentration camp guard. And