



DOMESTIC HARPOON BELIES THE CALM YOGI

We can watch others who seem to have a calm balanced perspective on life and then look to ourselves and notice the ways we manage to 'mess it up' with fluster, impatience and busyness. Taking time out to reflect on ourselves and our 'incidents' with humility, patience and humour may show us a very human path to inner and universal peace.

Somewhere in the ups and downs of our family life I realised I was losing my ability to pause, linger and simply watch and enjoy these delightful people who are my 12 and 8 year old children. So I have determined to (actually and metaphorically) stop and wave them good-bye in the mornings, watching them until they disappear from view.

This Tuesday morning my partner was driving the children to school so that I could finish the morning domestics and get to the yoga class I teach by 9.30. I was out on our little front veranda in my tracksuit (my equivalent to a dressing gown) and ugh boot-slippers and waved to them as he backed his blue car down the driveway. I heard the front door close behind me. I didn't think anything of it because I had trained myself, and (I thought) all of our family, to snib the door to the unlockable position whenever we opened it.

So when my wonderful family disappeared from view, I turned around to open the door and get myself ready. I needed to shower and wash my silver curly 'locks', which were looking like an old stiff steel wool scourer - all out of shape in clumps - because they had been cut the day before and I yet again hadn't managed to tell the hairdresser not to use any 'product', because we have such engrossing conversations.

You can see it coming can't you - the door was locked.

No worry, I'll go through the gate to the courtyard and go in the kitchen/laundry door - that will remind me of the washing that needs to be hung out before I go. Now as I pass the clothes line, I see that my partner has hung it out - thank you! You were really present with us this morning and you did quite a lot to help us get ready for our day out there.

Oh! That door's locked. No problem, I'll go around the back of the house up onto the decking and in through the sliding glass doors to the family room. It's quite a bit of a trek and on the way, I recall the different approaches he and I have

always had towards keys and locking things, right from the first days we moved in together, what is it now? Nearly twenty years ago.

A niggling seed of anxiety creeps in as I unlock the big gate and make my way to the back of the house. He is quite particular about locking all of the doors. I, on the other hand, have been more focussed on opening doors and forgetting locks, unless there's a particular reason. There are times I feel quite hemmed in by the accountant's attention to 'controls' and 'checks and balances' that he can bring into daily life. Surely this is not going to be a time when I feel locked out?!

Oh dear! (On a bigger scale now) this one is locked too. Now the anxiety is being transformed by adrenalin into a surge of action as I run down the steps of the decking to the rumpus/guest room door, last connection between our inner home and the outside world. Plans are whizzing through my mind. Yes, it's no surprise to find that one locked too.

He will be parked at the school now, saying good-bye to our children as they manoeuvre themselves and their big bags out of the car. If I run, I could make it to the main road just in time to catch him as he comes back past the top of our street on his way to work.

It is quite a steep hill and ugh boots and dressing-gown style track suit don't actually enhance any image of me as a proficient runner. Even though I had enjoyed half an hour or so of stretching, opening and balancing hatha yoga out on the decking a couple of hours ago. I know *I* didn't lock *that* door when I came in.

As I run, my mind also runs through the possibilities. We all know the scenario - no keys: not to the house, not to the car; no phone; and it's been quite cold so no open windows. I could go into a neighbour's and ring him at work, but the ones I know, are usually well gone into their outer world by now and it will be ten minutes at least until he will be there. He rarely has his mobile phone switched on before work. And by then I'll be seriously late and will not be able to contact my students. Of course, their numbers and all of my yoga teaching gear are inside our lovely but very locked-up house.

This *is* a steep hill, made more so by angst and the fact that I have not kept up my pelvic floor exercises as much as I have needed, lately. It never has been my strong area. I certainly can't teach in my tracksuit now! And I would like to call myself a yoga teacher! Thank goodness, somewhere deep inside myself I know that life, yoga and any form of genuine healing, learning and growth are journeys - not destinations. My students and onlookers can be inspired by my honesty and by watching me grow from where I am and how I handle the path I am on, wherever they may be on their path.

Deep breaths now as I steady myself for the last of the climb. Timing is the essence here; a second too late and he, in his little blue car, will be gone, around the bend, unreachable. I'm nearly there, but still can't see up onto the road. Quick! Breathe! Thighs like solid bricks (a mental note to myself - stop avoiding those extra thigh stretches).

Now, finally, I can just see up onto the road. Last few steps and I'll be at the corner. Look! Here comes a blue car around the bend. Thank goodness - it IS him!! I've just made it!! Of course he'll stop. Has he seen me? He's not slowing down, surely he's seen me. Better wave, looking so great in my ugh-boot slippers and breakfast-stained tracksuit-come-dressing gown.

Good, he's seen me. Now everything will be OK.

He pulls over, on the other side of the road, right opposite me and right on the tightest part of the bend. The traffic is constant on this winding single lane highway this time of the morning. It's the only road to the two schools just back around the bend where he has come from and in the other direction it's the only route into town.

Luckily there's a break in the traffic as he winds his window down, frowning a question mark.

In retrospect, it's easy to see the moments in life when it is really important to choose your words carefully.

With hindsight and often with foresight it can be clear that our anxiety and emotions bend our vocal chords out of shape a little, tense our lips in certain ways and unbalance our tongue and thought-processes. I guess that is one of the secrets of emotional intelligence, isn't it? Being able to process your emotions and choose how you let them play on your thoughts, on your choice of words and your voice.

Well perhaps this was one time when I could have done with a little more emotional intelligence.

I thought I had chosen my words carefully in that split second - so as to light-heartedly but succinctly and quickly portray my predicament and a little of the frustration I was experiencing. I didn't intend for my words to come with a barb, a dart or an explosive harpoon. In fact, I thought I was being my usual calm and collected self.

But, then again, I guess - "YOU'VE LOCKED ALL THE DOORS ON ME!" does have an arrowhead that might hit hard. OK, now I've put it in black and white, I can see the implied attack. I didn't mean it to be, I just wanted to be quick, clear and succinct. And, after all, I was understandably, I think, a bit agitated.

Why didn't I just ask the matter-of-fact question -"SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU, BUT CAN YOU COME BACK AND LET ME IN WITH YOUR KEY, PLEASE?" Well, for a start, I thought my appearance at our corner, dressed as I was, so soon after waving them good-bye on our veranda might have inferred the question and the situation. That's Venus for you.

He, for his part sat in the car, being tooted by one of those extraordinarily long articulated buses and numerous cars that were now struggling to pass on the bend. The harpoon had exploded in his chest and he was shouting over traffic and horns that he didn't lock the front door and was only trying to help me get ready by locking all the other doors. That's Mars for you.

In the middle of this domestic scene we were creating out on our main suburban road I wonder why it is he just doesn't move on to the next side street, turn around, come back to our street and then argue with me or help me. But my harpoon has engaged his horns, the bus and car horns have immobilised him and he can't move.

I, on the other hand, am feeling very vulnerable, somewhat flustered, trying not to be self-conscious - it's such a lovely close-knit community here - you know most people you pass on the road. Time is ticking away; I should be leaving by now.

I ask quite clearly, in a tone that conveys my hurt -"Are you going to come and help me?" The damsel in distress has thrown off her independent, feminist cloak and is calling to be rescued. Only to discover that the knight in shining armour left his armour at home today, feels attacked and has frozen in defence. He responds, "What about the spare key?"

Oh! Thinks the damsel, feeling even more vulnerable - I didn't think of that. But then again it's not always in the hiding place and I was just focussed on HIM as the most likely source of help.

It seems like an eternity, but is perhaps a minute or two and he has finally been able to move and turn around, I get into the car and we argue our way back down the hill and into our drive, words of hurt and defence that don't take us very far. He unlocks the door, dismisses my agitated but appeasing words that want to sort things out between us with an oppressing wave and an equally agitated "I've got to go!"

I am now alone *in* our house, in the polar opposite state I'd like to be in to teach a peaceful, meaningful yoga class, or to even get there in time to warm the room.

And what is it I say in our yoga classes?

PAUSE, FOCUS WITHIN AND WATCH YOUR BREATH FOR A MOMENT, THEN WHATEVER YOU NEED WILL BE THERE FOR YOU.

How many opportunities did I have within this little adventure as I moved from door to door, at one stage passing the spare key in its hiding place, to pause, watch my breath and access my memory of that precious piece of metal in its secret place?

It is really that easy, isn't it? All we need to solve our problems, stop the harpoons and the hard crusty words is a simple pause; a genuine, deep breath and (I must say this to let myself off the hook), loving patience with ourselves and PRACTICE!!

Lynn Romeo, *Living Now*, Nov 2006