

ing it into the earth, they send signals of caring to the deepest part of you and your soul calms down.

This way she doesn't have to send pain anymore to show it.

" Are hands really that important?"

" Yes, my girl. Thinking of babies: they get to know the world thanks to their touches. When you look at the hands of older people, they tell more about their lives than any other part of the body. Everything that is made by hand, so is said, is made with the heart because it really is like this: hands and heart are connected. Masseuses know this: When they touch another person's body with their hands, they create a deep connection. Thinking of lovers: When their hands touch, they love each other in the most sublime way."

" My hands grandma... how long haven't I used them like that!"

" Move them my girl, start creating with them and everything in you will move. The pain will not pass away. But it will be the best masterpiece. And it won't hurt anymore. Because you managed to embroider your essence."

Elena Barnabé
Unknown source

Her wisdom leads us to find something that keeps the mind from being a slave to pain. Not drugs or chemical mind alterations. Using the senses of the hands. For as long as I can remember, my mother dueled debilitating arthritis. She always knit. I understand now it was far more than keeping her fingers nimble. It is up to me to find what works. At one time in life it was wood working, and letterpress printing. Find it and use it, not to relive that pain in the hip, but to direct the mind. It can be reading, bird watching in the early morning, long hikes into the soul of nature, or even just relaxing with no expectations. The next time the nurse asks how am I feeling, she is likely to hear, "just fine, I am finding the good things in life to focus on".

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PAIN & CHANGE

The Ink Zone

Ink Zone # 176

Summer, 2020

Countering these Creativity Thieves

Slowly slip sliding off the worn cracking green chair designed for neither comfort nor aesthetics, the nurse wraps the cuff, stuffs the buds of the stethoscope somewhere under her shoulder length hair and asks, "How are you feeling?" Perhaps she does not hear my first response; she asks again "what level from 1 to 10 is your pain?" "112 over 70 and 96.3" she mouths while typing my vitals on tablet. "Eight down from 9 yesterday" I respond. "the doctor will be in shortly to see you" while she closes the door completing the preflight check list. Nothing new or different from the 100's of times similar words fill the air in different doctors' offices. How am I feeling? Not sure I know how to answer that.

Since mid-2019 I endure 3 to 5-day periods of intense fatigue, unsettled digestive track, nausea, muscle cramps (mostly left leg and hands), and a weak and elevated voice. These events are followed by 3 to 4 days of feeling better. I do not detect any actions or events that cause or relieve what I now refer to as a cyclical series of events.

During the bad days, my enthusiasm, creativity and strength are all low to the point were few things pique my interest. I dis-

cussed these issues with my primary care doctor in May 2020, during my semiannual wellness examination. A few days later exceptional high levels of pain stab in my hip knee and lower leg, reminiscent of a staph infection I beat in 2008. Blood work does not support that guess. Pain is taking control of me again. Should I whine more?

Finally, it is clear, the 1 to 10 pain scale my body feels is not a good measure of what pain does to me. Pain is more than the searing feeling in the hip, it is also steals any other source of normal life. Others likely know this well. What is happening?

I soon started a journal where I use the traditional 1 to 10 scale for pain and my own creative index feeling scale (CI scale 1 to 5) based on my interest in doing normal activities and pushing creative pursuits. Perhaps I can document that being under the weather is not always best measured by specific pains.

Draft "creativity index" CI = 1 - 5)

1. *Normal. Active, no pains, sleep well, able to hike, active in photography, writing, chores, reading, processing and sharing. Laugh and see the positive sides.*
2. *No writing, some photography, driving ok, can take short trips, some photo processing, rare sharing. Not skeptical, but less positive. Think less of giving and more about how I feel*
3. *Some Photography, rare processing, I can do chores, but not self-starting. Elevated voice pitch and fatigue. Reading is no longer relaxing. Feel guilty at not doing activities that otherwise bring joy and good feelings*
4. *Rare photography or willing to do chores or hobbies, taking trips or going to store difficult. Feel stressed and see / think the negative. What is wrong with me approach.*
5. *Do not care about or want to do anything.*

My interest in writing and finishing my second book has disappeared since February, 2020. My Photography comes and wains. Taking photos sometimes totally vacates, and processing and sharing totally disappears during the bad days. My teaching by providing written critiques to the online classes, responding to lessons submitted, is more fun and productive if I wait for better days to be back to something more normal.

Creativity is a fragile gift often difficult to access. I visualize my brain like a bouillabaisse gumbo where memories, thoughts, feelings and stimuli all fire at once networking and bouncing off to

new feelings and ideas. A place where all ideas are good and new thoughts or visions fuel the positive feelings. Thinking on all sides of the brain. I guess an interruption severs the networks or perhaps recruits neurons to report to mind central the new vital information. The connections are gone. I cannot schedule a creative moment, it is over. It is difficult to clear the decks back to my measure of creativity when the thief is Mr. pain. Or is it?

My journal proved that my creativity nose dives when my mind is dealing with pain. Ok, so what? I am still going to the doctor to address the pain. So, it makes a little sense, perhaps if I express how I am doing in creativity terms or pain numbers, the doc is going to focus on the pain and prescribe something to remove it. Right?

Change and emotional pains appear to cause a similar loss in my creativity. I recall an informal study of the productivity of members of the American Amateur Press Association. A change of address resulted in 7 to 12 months' time lapse before that member's return to their former publication habits. My Dad participated in a Stanford Research Institute study of creative people including the cartoonist Charles Schultz and many of the early Silicon Valley innovators. I never saw the results, but Dad used to say, stay focused and open. Guess it worked for him.

When pain derails my mind, perhaps, just perhaps I can begin to reconstruct the environment by sidetracking the pain. I am in charge of starting each day trying to find the good things. The following exceptional wisdom from Elena Barnabé speaks deep truths on how to address pain.

"Grandma how do you deal with pain?"

" With your hands, dear. When you do it with your mind, the pain hardens even more."

"With your hands, grandma?"

" Yes, yes. Our hands are the antennas of our soul. When you move them by sewing, cooking, painting, touching the earth or sink-