Discovering Poetry En Route to Finding Life
by Jim Glaser

Olive Tree in Chianti, Italy, photo by Jim Glaser

Poetry—my father quoted it frequently, my grandmother collected it in scrapbooks—cards from friends, I memorized snatches of it in school. Poetry really came to me as a young father when my family and I needed to move across the country away from our best friends. It was an unsettled, lonely time and I started taking walks in the evening to relax. It was spring. Lemon blossoms. Amazingly, I felt something in me wanting to flow out and dance—and words—short poems tumbled out of me. I was surprised, encouraged, and felt happily hooked. Then one day I serendipitously discovered another poet, and then a small community of poets. For the next 25 years I shared poetry with them. Poetry is a discovery I have made on my way to finding my life.

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“Slow Road”

Last year, my partner and I spent time at an artist residency in Chianti, Italy.

A long winding road led through the countryside, past vineyards and olive groves, up into the lush foothills and past villas. The road was narrow, rutted.

Signs named it Slow Road, urged visitors to go slowly and take in one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. Each day I walked this road, saw this olive tree.

Slow Road

No road to -- no road from

    slow road

My chance
to stay with this
    one
olive tree
shimmering
in morning drizzle
light wind
Chianti, IT
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“This Knowledge:”

This is a time of scrutiny of our feelings, reactions towards those of other ethnic and gender groups. Hopefully, it is also a time of greater flexibility and compassion in our actions towards one another. What are some of the discoveries you have made in your own journey towards this understanding and compassion?

THIS KNOWLEDGE

This is the knowledge that lies right
below the surface in me and yet eludes me
This is the knowledge that I see precedes
all knowledge in me this is the silent knowledge
that I see precedes all words

This is the knowledge that lay like a seed
in me not yet opened when the world opened to me
This is the knowledge that opened and
that continues to open me
the gift that continues to open my life:
This is the knowledge in me of
your dignity my brother my sister
whoever you are

This knowledge deserves a better name
I call it bliss
This knowledge rising in me
kernel of bliss
scent of wholeness
joy in my bones

This is the primal knowing I have
of your preciousness my brother my sister to me
that I know suddenly
like a lightning bolt in my darkness
that I know in some shadowy part of myself
like a soft light half-hidden glowing
that I know in the presence of confusion and fear
in the shock of awakening
and in sadness remembering
and in hope rising

This I know
like a scent that I love again
and can not give up loving
Something missing in me
you call into being
something for both of us
something unheard of before
something beyond what this place
praises or denies

You
my brother my sister whoever you are
you are transforming fire

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“Compass”

When have you made a radical shift in the direction of your life? A change of course? Was it out of necessity? This is a poem about someone hearing a call from wild, rough looking, unlikely, but very wise sailors to change their life.

COMPASS

Sometimes we hold
the logic of our words
too wise
and they break
we break
under the immensity of these skies

And the muses
-- wind blasted ruddy sailors

standing by

sing out

“Lay that aside! Come with us mates!

Join the roaring silent sea with

your own billowing hand-sewn colors

-- the clanging music of your rigging

-- your rope rough hands

Stand

on the storm boat deck

drenched

in your own discovery!”