



SIEBENQUELL

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# Seeking a way home

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KOMMENDE LENGMOOS

I recently had to return to Canada. Upon reaching the passport and customs controls in Calgary Airport, I was asked the customary question by the agent at the desk. »What is the nature of your stay in Canada?« I was startled by my own answer. »I have come home to bury my father.«

Since I have returned from his funeral, I have been left with a sense of loss of home. The return to the daily grind has been abrupt, harsh and wearisome, but hardly a homecoming. While reading Rachel Held Evans' fine book *Inspired*, I came upon a passage that immediately spoke to this feeling of uneasiness in my heart.

»We know who we are, not from the birth certificates and Social Security numbers assigned to us by the government, but from the stories told and retold about us by our community. Should the time of birth on your birth certificate be off by a minute, or should it be lost altogether, it wouldn't change what's truest about you – that you matter and that you are loved.«

Rachel Held Evans is speaking a truth of the deep heart here. Since my father's death I have filled out many pages of documentation for banks and government agencies. The questions are straightforward, uncomplicated and utterly cold. The language of inquiry about my father is brutally antiseptic. With every disheartening page I felt my father's richly layered, complex, fascinating, puzzling and inspiring life reduced to bloodless, lifeless data. Here was an utter disinterest in the story of his life of which Rachel Held Evans speaks. They wish to bring his affairs in order, but not his life into focus.

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I have very low expectations of banks and government agencies. However, I have considerably higher expectations of my encounters with fellow sojourners. It is also an expectation I have of myself, namely, that the language of inquiry about lost lives and lost homes be couched in warm words and a tender interest in the great, awe-inspiring story of a beloved person's life. It is an expectation born of John Shea's deep insight into how God, humanity and stories mix. »We are the story God tells, our very lives are the words that come from his mouth.« Thus, disinterest in the stories of loss is disinterest in a story of God. Disinterest in a story of God is disinterest in the divine storyteller as well. We would do well to hear and heed every story God wishes to tell.

I have been blessed by moments of rich encounter in the days since I buried my father. There has been the gift of a poem of breathtaking beauty and startling sensitivity to gently touch the aching loss of his presence. I was blessed with a handcrafted candle whose very colours soothe me when I pray for my father, which bears the simple word »Papa« on its side. I have received a letter so touching that I carry it in the breast pocket of my jacket and retrieve it every time I pause to pray for my father. These have been some of the people who have asked me for a story about my father and who have graciously given answer to that story. They have touched the heart of my father's story, namely, that he mattered and was loved. These have been the wells and oases in the midst of the wilderness journey.

Yet in every story of a journey seeking home and deliverance there is a task attached. We need to name the places of rich encounter: the places where we were touched, the milestones of our journey, the wells in our deserts and our encounters with God. Not all will be our companions, but where we find them we should honour them. Not all will bear our burdens, but where we encounter such men and women, we should name their grace in our life.

I return to Rachel Held Evans once more

*»God makes a way where there seems to be no way.«*

It is the steady refrain of our narrative heritage.  
What verses will your story add to it? What wells will your journey name?

And thus I name a letter and a letter writer, a poem and a poet, a candle and a candle maker as well-springs in my personal journey through the desert, seeking a way home.

**Erik Riechers SAC**

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