

# I thought I had a masterpiece, but I guess I don't.

It all started with a crack in the head and a doctor asking if I had lost consciousness. Part of my scalp had been removed, now marking the point of impact.

I did not notice my head injury because my my elbow was bleating in agony from bracing my fall. Still, my head was quietly forming a blood rich softball under my skin adapting my forehead like it had been stuck too long in the birth canal. My co-worker was back at the scene, deciphering what happened, at the point of impact. Pieces needed to be put back together. Did what I know happened....really happen? It is all up for interpretation

affected by point of view, time and past experience, in other words.....it is all affected by perspective. Later I would learn that memory is, by virtue, imperfect.

My original perspective to the crack began behind a cement pillar. The pillar held multiple stories of stacked apartments.

Outside in the elements, the pillar provided support to a sheltered and locked glass entrance. Inclement weather and unwanted guests could go no farther than this rough surfaced perpendicular bastion, sans master key. What I did not tell you was my perspective of this centaur, just prior to the crack. You see, ... I was horizontal. My head was approximately twenty four inches off the ground, and I

was horizontal. For clarity sake, solely because I need to register this, horizontal means neither my feet nor any other part of my body was in contact with the ground. I was travelling parallel to the ground, not perpendicular, with gravity pulling in a fashion much different than what us bipeds consider normal. This was my perspective. It was my point of view. It became my point of reference and time is the only thing that has allowed this perspective to become a gift. The pieces needing to put back together needed a master storyteller.

The perspective I experienced, took something inside of me and required I make it whole again. No one else, but I.

Life went from being a glossy 4x6 print to a matte finish of all sizes. It went from a straight forward colour print to the unpredictable of cross processed images. This shift began when I saw the world from a potentially fatal twenty four inches off the ground. In the foreground was my hair attached to the concrete pillar at the twenty four inch mark. The glue between the pillar and my hair was my own skin, voided from my forehead. Life was dizzy from this perspective. I was suddenly in the wrong story where the pages were in a comic book format. Motion had no end and was marked by bubbles of onomatopoeia. The structure above was pressing down on my very existence and my working partner was about to experience a similar beating. I needed to come back to the here and now. It

was critical for all involved.

I had auditory exclusion. It was something I was told could happen under stress. The sound I was able to hear was limited to that which had a puncture and a pierce to it's delivery. For instance, I could hear the click of a radio being connected as my partner asked for help, but I could not hear voice. Another example would be the fact that there was no train on the tracks right now but somehow I could hear the train tracks themselves. As I tossed my head to regain consciousness a waft of my past trickled in and I thought about an expression I had heard as a kid. It was an expression about being born on the wrong side of the tracks. I wonder, as I write this story, fifteen years

later, is that just an old expression now or does it still have air time? Is violence what is on the “wrong side of the tracks”. That wafting thought both took and lost form as I returned to my position on all fours at the base of the pillar.

That base supported of a large apartment complex composed of geared to income housing and market rents.

The building, at the time, was surrounded by unlit green space through which the train passed regularly. Beyond the tracks was untouched land, too close to the road to have been tilled and planted. Untouched by the concept of new developments and territory defining fences that would populate the area two decades later. The thought of those buildings were not yet imagined, while the lonely streetlamp marked the end of the city’s intent. There was

a simple glow from city hub that barely kissed my back. In front of me I was looking past the last lamp into the blackness, following the talking train tracks. The track delineated what was once agricultural land, and, before that, now forgotten by most but never by our beloved First Nations. This was land honoured by them long before the “us” came along.

My grandparents came to Canada when my mother was only four years old. It was 1948, four years after the Second World War concluded. They were in Belgium ..... when she was born. Wars, plural and hope brought them here first by boat, then by train. These tracks are speaking unexpected words. What are they saying as I perch on all fours, shake off the black fuzz and know I

must go to my work partner, somewhere else.

They left for Canada when my mother was four, her older brother was five. That older brother would die on the chosen farmstead, seven years later. Just over a decade later I would be raised knowing some of the story. Prior to my birth, in my mother's family, war and death were off limits for discussion. That slowly changed as I grew and began to ask questions. You see, I was the first grandchild. Born in Canada on my Grandfather's birthday. I was named after him and somehow he found a gentleness with me. A gentleness that was previously buried deep behind ally lines. Somehow his past would weave into my present.



Was that related to a shared birthday? Did the power of that shared birthday go back as far as his older brother, Jules? You see, his older brother was born on our birthday? It was a birthday his older brother did not share as he had died in the home country before my grandfather was born. My grandfather was born on January 4th, his older brother's birthday, and named Jules. They were both named Jules. They were both born on January 4th. I arrived later and was Julie, short for Julianna, also born on January 4th. As I write I now answer to a different name. I answer to "J". Today I am JM. Today I will write you the story and share who I am, for I too ended up being buried deep behind lines. The other names I had over the years, were not ready for this story. They still wore old minted perfumes.

Today I am JM, I don't wear those old perfumed names any longer. I am a little lost without the predictability of the proper rules to follow. I realize I am a gift and am looking to hold happiness with an open hand. I see that hand open, and a wounded bird may to rest or choose to fly. My open hand holds me, the wounded bird scared to fly but must in order to live. I am the wounded bird and the life I now live is with a woman whom a Native named "Blue Silk in the Wind". She is my love. The man I married refused the Catholic Church and later refused children. We parted ways. The man I had children with refused marriage in the house of god but accepted children in order to keep me, we too parted ways. Blue Silk in the Wind listened to Rumi and ran toward the allure of our love, oblivious to the

PTSD I would bring. She holds me with an open hand and I have reprieve from the blinding light bouncing off of the glossy print of life. She asks me why the masque of perfume and I let the masque go. She meets her own fears, without reserve, and listens to the wind allowing herself to be held by the current as she adjusts to our life together, lives so intimately affected by the past.

The winds are, at times, strong enough for her to lean into it and almost be horizontal. She listens and feels the pulse of the wind. She knows when the current is strong enough to hold her and she leans into it, supported.

Myself, I lean on man made lines of judgement with the authority to remove rights, particularly the right to freedom of movement. Somehow my partner, she is able to be

synonymous with the wind and find a peaceful, strong and gentle way of leaning on the current. Me however, I have this authority that is dependant upon interpretation before, during and after an incident. In this particular case I engaged my authority, with just cause, only to find opposition and my body catapulted into a most treacherous horizontal trajectory. The two concepts are so far apart yet here I write to you that there is a similarity. They depart from each other when one trusts in being connected with the earth, and others, while the other trusts in authority given by others....not the earth. It is the human interpretation of justice, rules, enforcement and repercussions. What is the embedded intent to the lines in the sand called rules?

That trajectory I was sent on was arrested when I melded into to the concrete body of a man made structure, a concrete pillar holding up multiple stories of stories. That was when the world got quiet, my entire world. Sounds went distant but still existed. My experience melded with the sights and sounds of the earth around me and I found, I was human, terminal and subject to my own decisions. This point in time became a marker for what not to do. It also became a place where I learned that by following what I believe others are asking of me I may fail to ask what I need of myself. Just prior to the arrest I felt I needed help but I didn't ask for it because I did not want to be viewed as a weak woman. I was a police officer, just as capable as anyone else and those that had gone before me were men....I was just as capable as any man.

I ended up lost, that thought process is a perfume I call “lost by the me”. I ended up lost because I chose to measure myself by others - not by my standards. I needed help and I did not ask. I had asked a year earlier for help negotiating a tough working relationship but that was never resolved hence it was, in my mind, best to just avoid any conflict with my working partner and arrest the offender without asking for help.

It is fifteen years later and I cannot hold the misery of the past and lay blame without spinning a time shift. I recognize that time shift, as body response including symptoms of nausea, dizziness, paranoia and an illogical response to any number of piercing sounds. Even as I write a sound pierces my concentration and the other

reactions wait anxiously to have their time to show off. I start shaking and I know I can run away or I can stand tall while the reaction runs its course through my body. I take example from the woman I love, Blue Silk in the Wind. I think of how her scarf dances in the wind yet still remains warming her neck. While shaking and dizzy I must feel the wind, find my way back to who I am and look for the train track, the path of iron and wood. It is the road many of my ancestors have followed and I now join the following, with hope of a better future. I know I am shaking - back at the scene of the incident. I also know there is light at my back and I can see the first few wooden cross ties kept in place by a gravel base and an iron top. The tracks will guide me, they have made their auditory call and I am gaining my sight back, and can now see their

pieces.

Time skewers and I am back at the incident. I am pointing my gun with the intent to kill. My Smith and Wesson handgun has a hollow tip point in the barrel and I know I have had my life almost extinguished and I have witnessed my partner's life be narrowly saved. I point, I yell a command! The target listens, follows and fortunately the series of events do not include me issuing lethal force. I remain intact as a police officer, still willing to issue lethal force, if necessary. Today I can say I have neither been carried by six nor judged by twelve. I can continue on, except there is a change. I have become a crime scene. I am now defined as both the arresting officer and the victim. Less than thirty minutes ago the clock changed



dates and I was the responding officer and investigator. I retain my titles except that of “Investigating Officer”.

These changes are so subtle and something many people have experienced in the process of building our legal system. It is a system that comes from Europe and is tied to historical claims to the now titled Quebec and Ontario.

The same claims that introduced ownership and titled Canada and even the United States. The story of those two have their own fissures, for myself, I am here in the multi-cultural country called Canada. The system I represent was not the system of the First Peoples here on this land. The accountability was now to the Queen of England and could only be forced if guilt was proven beyond any reasonable doubt. Where was my

accountability, in my blue uniform sporting red stripe, to the history of what I wore and how it was enforced?

Somehow the ability to be responsive to the wind and the trees, the people and the communities around “the incident” or the “site of investigation” were no longer part of the process. This incident was early on in my career and caused my mind to probe into how our system functions. I now had more than one title in the stories I started to ponder. My consequent understanding that was uniquely informed by titles of victim, officer, first generation Canadian...and so on. Unique or not, I now worked in a paramilitary organization and there were pedantic rules to follow. I was already used to scrupulous, precise, exact, perfectionist and fussy rules so this was nothing new. My unique position in the workplace was as unique as my

blue soaked red lined uniform. Realistically I was never unique in the paramilitary format, for I was just another person, another follower, another officer, all with a presumed common human experience. So I continued my career, hyperfocussed on some of the meticulous minutia. I found my peace with the people on the street for they were real and they showed me love, unconditional love. After the showing of love I would return to meticulous minutia, for repose and order to reconvene.

That meticulousness slowly became akin to a train gaining speed, speed at a dangerous level. Years later the brakes are found by setting pen and ink to yesterday. My goal was to be as gentle as I was strong and as strong as I was gentle. Neither characteristic to be greater or lesser than

the other. In hindsight, that balance of gentle and strong was a quest I was looking to fulfill near that concrete pillar. You see I was just doing my job, clad in clothing that made me one of a very large preconceived pack. The person that hurt me likely only saw the clothing, possibly a woman in the clothing, and attacked the clothing....not me. That person had no idea I was looking to be both gentle and strong. The balance in that person was tipped, an interconnectedness in life extinguished and an animal individuality raged. The intersection of our two stories resulted in labels including, victim, offender, investigator, crime scene, evidence and partner. Each label an old stagnant perfume embedded in a mink coat bought at a used clothing store. They never go away until their story is heard, or the vestment is redefined.

My quest for an official title took official form when I articulated the oath to keep the peace. That same quest had trouble existing beside the investigator on night shift needing help. Even the clock was confused as it shifted from one date to the next uncomfortably foreshadowing a new beginning. The date changed and it quietly became another day.....I was going to get very badly hurt, and not even know how bad. I was a woman, working in an old world infused with patriarchy and heterosexuality. It was a world that created labels to justify an illusion of what was right. I had been brought up seeing women who made amazing pie, create seven course meals, keep immaculate homes and if they diverted their path, however briefly, they paused as teachers or nurses. Those that

diverted permanently could choose a life wrapped in the cloth. Regardless, all three roles were positions of service and somehow, in hindsight, synchronous with the blue veil I was working behind. It was also known as a blue wall. That was then, just like the train tracks and the search for a new life. My life circumstances brought me to a different shade of blue. It was still oddly a shade of service and it was deeply tied to my determination to live a peaceful life. Shade of service was now also the blues of bruising as my body worked to send emergency blood to the point of impact.

As I write I oscillate between the past, the future and currently my pen is stuck in the present. I have to remember I am JM or I will fall into that pit again, the one

with the four letter acronym, the one that justified the diagnosis of PTSD. I vibrate wanting to cry the tears that never come. As the vibration increases its sign wave I wonder if I will be catapulted somewhere else, yet again.

Today I believe I have found peace between the the gentle and the strong that place became in a manner unpredicted and wished on no other person.

Today yoga has been cancelled and I use my time to write in a common coffee shop. The sounds are increasing and I wrap my blue scarf around my head, covering my neck.

Only the skin of my face shows along with my typing hands. The rest of me is covered, hidden and unbidden to pre-sent in public. I am dizzy with the world around me while I try to be of the world. If unsuccessful, I cannot

remain here. The softly wrapped cloth allows me the illusion of safety and separation while putting pen to paper my story. It allows me to find that balance between being in and being of. As I settle the pierce of the espresso machine goes and the voices of around clatter. A child calls for their mom in this common coffee shop and I find some peace between being present and disassociating. I allow a window to write and release. The phonetics alone of what you read release the tats while manoeuvring from one connected phrase to another. Will you join me? I return to thinking about my Mom travelling to Canada. She road the train from east to west and back again only to settle two hours east of where I was assaulted. Did that train cross this point? Of the four on that train in her journey, only one remains....the one the family feared



wouldn't live.

My Mom, her brother and her parents may have travelled this cross country portion when they were looking for land and a better life. They crossed the entire country going westbound. Once in Vancouver the mountains in became a permanent obstacle visually blocking Grandma's hope of ever returning to the Home Country. So they journeyed east, back across the country only to find their forever home in Central Ontario near St.Mary's. The soil there was rich, deep and ready to be worked once the efforts of clearing were executed. It had been noted as a possible location on the first crossing westward and it was where they would return. Where I was on my knees shaking in black spots behind mine eyes it was about one hour and

forty six minutes, by car from of St. Mary's. It was also one day and seventeen hours, by car, from Vancouver, British Columbia. They travelled by train and the train tracks were right there, to my left and the multi story building to my right. Realistically that building wasn't there in 1948 when my grandparents travelled looking for their new home. Realistically they may have crossed these tracks right here, twice. During the entire trip Grandpa was looking for land to till. He was a lifetime occupant of the land he tilled in Belgium, but the land was not his. He turned down the schooling to be a Pharmacist and identified himself as a farmer. As a farmer he wanted land to call his own, something I understand the First Nations did not have in their lexicon, for the land was of her own. This Canadian land had a lure, she had not been tilled by

detonated mines nor seeded with metal balls packed and perched for future detonation. Come to think about it, one of the undetonated bombs was the size of that hard blood filled injury on my forehead. As I write I realize this is the first time I connect the bomb and the blood.

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Grandpa may have been looking out the train window at this very place, back in the date of 1948. Oddly enough, the building I was standing in front of held an aura of similar stories, all laced with the same hope contained in Grandpa's train car. The search was for arable land, away from the memories of war, in his case, World War II.

Pieces of my family were left behind in the home country forever intertwined with the wounded memories brought

over the ocean. Some family members were still alive and chose to stay where they were born, some were dead; such as my mother's infant brother, buried back in Belgium. There was hope and a complex history for the occupants of this building, the same kind of hope and complex history with which my family came to Canada. That hope and history also had stories of their past. Hints of those stories were delicately woven in scent and sound for I knew this building, and each floor had a tincture of other places wafting in the hallway. The scent of spices were combined and mingling in the hallways in a way no 8th generation Canadian could fathom. There were languages spoken, music made by tongues, each having its own cadence and historical conductor. It was a building of hope for a better life on this side of the ocean. The old

lives left were carved by border disputes, religion, righteousness and the Third Reich. Somehow, even as the years pass the memories can still pick cut flowers for a bouquet, or an occasion. At what point, if ever, do those memories shift from memorial bouquets to the gratitude of celebration wrapped in a petal of scent still undisturbed by the process of being captured and labelled perfume?

For the last fifteen years I had been told forgiveness was the only way to wash myself clean of the bouquet of trauma. Visually I was informed that forgiveness was found in the lines of sculpture. The lines were of a lean muscular man wearing a conservative rippled cloth around his waist. He was obviously wounded by someone other than himself and attached, with forged iron nails, via his

hands and feet. In script, above the sculpture ,were the four letters, INRI. Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum was the latin explanation of those four letters. He was called a king, a king that forgave. After he died the stories of forgiveness were wrapped in a cerulean blue cloth around his mother's image. That cerulean blue cloth would wrap her sculpted figure and be permanently housed in church. Her location would be at the front, to the left of that wounded man attached to a cross. If one were to look at the structure of this church one would realize that heaven above would see the form of the building.

From above the perspective needed to be horizontal to see the building print was that of a cross. At the intersection of the two pieces of wood is the location

where the sacrament of communion would be executed. It would also be the visual centre for the entire congregation. The eyes of the public could see beyond the altar and the sculpture but their bodies were never to enter the sacred area. It was the crux of the building, that central point where all eyes focussed, formally titled the Apse. At this location the priest would stand, perform the sacrament of the holy host and offer this man's transformed body for communion. His mother would be nearby, visually to the congregation's left. If looking from above, horizontally, his mother's location was at the point where a nail secured the king's right hand to the cross. Behind the celebrant, or priest, would be the sculpture of that lean muscular dying, pending his last breath. Some sculptures behind the celebrant were much more focused on the detail of the

nails and wounds than others, all of them were at the crux, or apse, of the building. This location in the church was for the men. The rules made it so. The woman in blue would stand by, watch and forgive the murder of the man that came from between her thighs, thighs which never felt the tension nor extasy of penetration and procreation.

The birds in heaven would look down from above at the building it would be evident that the sacred building of worship was constructed in the form of a cross. The birds would never know the location of his mother and her blue robe was in the same spot as the nail driving his right hand to the wooden cross. Nor would they know the baptismal font was located where his left hand was secured and nailed. Heaven was not available to the



unbaptized and baptism required one to acknowledge us humans and we were made in the image of the murdered man. The same humans that were born with sin.

Somehow his mother's story became very important in the Catholic strain of Christianity. She would be the only woman to stand at the front of the church. She was all women needed, according to the catholic coaching I would receive. Motherhood was the greatest gift of love. It could be found by any woman, within wedlock, and was not to be found elsewhere, certainly not leading a congregation.

This coaching appeared to be deeply tied to the home country and would be a serious crutch in times of further crisis. No bombs would be turned over on the land my grandfather chose but his oldest son would die on this side of the ocean, while working land.

I was not yet a mother when the perfume I call “The Incident” happened. Of note, the person that catapulted me into the pillar did so with his own mother in view.

When it came to the end of the incident this mother heard my skull shift and almost heard the crack of my gun, at point blank range. It was too dark down the train tracks to see the flight and struggle continue but I am forever grateful she never heard the crack of my gun. I write years later, now also a mother. The role of mother I was brought up to emulate was based on The Virgin Mother, Mary. She was without sin. She was a mother and a virgin. Biologically I could only be a mother if I sinned and had sex which produced a child. Having sex was in itself a sin unless it was within wedlock and had the intent of

producing a child. The ultimate act of service, give of my body, give of my life. I could not fit in this prescribed bottle, I needed someone that could control me well enough to allow my opportunity to fulfill my role. As a woman I could neither lead the faithful nor live without sin but I could offer up my body to be either miraculously impregnated or sinfully penetrated and produce a child for the church. Then the faith would continue on the other side of the ocean on the land first footprinted by the First Nations.

The icon I would be taught to follow was the woman wrapped in blue - she was a mother and forgiveness was hers to share. I wondered if there was a scent called forgiveness? I decided that if I could find the source to

that scent I would bottle it and drip cerulean blue on my bare virgin skin. I would infuse and become one with the scent of forgiveness. I have tarried with poetry and metaphor as I guide you through the the hidden agony of being forcefully changed. Know that I stand there, in another shade of blue, the blue of a police officer. The liquid scents in my personal apothecary were from my past. They were beautifully complex designed to keep a distance and fuel my insides. Most often I chose to wear the unique scent of Broken Dreams, Betrayed Rage, Simple Anger or You are a Woman. There was also a vintage perfume, crafted long before the incident, where my head found a violent communion with a structural supporting pillar of a multi-story building. That hand crafted scent was a unique blend titled, "Per-Apse, Lost by

the Me". What happened? What really happened at that site of impact? Somehow I became tied to him, his mother, my partner and my job. Somehow I became a story. Something changed as I tried to stay the same.

Even with the change my perfumes sold me their salving power. I wore them, continued to feel pain and that pain became quietly familiar. It was chronic and once something is chronic it is in your fibre. This is true for any person, place or institution - once chronic it is in the fibre of your being. The quiet chronic pain resulted in a persistent call upon my joints and muscles to move from the past and arrive in the present. If they were successful then maybe I could release the infused chronic pain and allow the temporary stage of acute pain as I grow. The

thing is the present moment kept moving so it was always just a few paces away from the past. That meant the chronic could never metamorph into acute and move on. The chronic pain would continue to move, imbued in agony and appear. The chronic wandered alone, never to partner, never to own a date of union or communion. With such a solo story the chronic would never be allowed to firmly pass into the past.

The pain I felt was all over my life and I did not understand how to set it free. The Virgin Mother would stand there quietly and I would have years of being told she had the answer, be still, listen and all will be well. Specifically, I did not know how to be still without tumbling back in a deep unlit pit of worthlessness. Regardless of the never ending

cycle of falling and trying, feeling and crying, each attempt did transform pieces of the worthlessness. You see the worthlessness could neither have a date as it too kept moving but if I could genuinely listen to one of the echoes it left it could change. The shifting was so simple and so terrifying. It moved from being something of choice to being essential to my existence in the human form.

I moved from that bastion and, with years of professional help, sought reprieve from the onslaught of nightmares and senseless fears. Slowly I came to understand the complexity of this pain and stitch the pieces together again. The injury is titled a disorder, it is that four letter acronym and it is as profound as the human condition. The injury has also been red misted by a multitude of

officers, war vets and 911 responders committing suicide. One committed suicide very publicly the weekend before my last shift at work. That suicide, and the others, likely helped a liability conscious rule bound blue robed white shirted supervisor require I be given some time off. You see....that last shift had another assault on my person....it was one of a number.....I didn't think it was too bad, just vile. That last assault was the last shift I worked. It was also poetically a few months after I had chosen to be public about the four letter acronym assigned my mental state. My choice to be public is another story.

The epilogue to the management request to take some time off resulted in a deeper pit than worthlessness, deeply attached to the official four letter acronym. My



choice had been removed. Something I had done with people over my career, remove their choice. In the end it was pretty simple. I cannot tell whether or not "it" is the injury, the diagnosis, the removal of choice or even the ocean of worthlessness is "it" What I can say is "it" contained the concept of past trauma, current stress and the permanence of a diagnosis coined a "Disorder". Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD for short. My naming of "It" a "Four Letter Acronym" encapsulated a slight tinge of my sardonic sense of humour we, in English Canada, bond to another popular "four letter word".

I could see "it's" contents, distilled, condensed and diluted with precision. I could see them decanted into a beautiful blown glass bottle two inches high with a weighted bottom

filling a gentle pear shaped curve. The top was corked as the original screw cap had been lost somewhere, sometime ago. What I did find out is "it" was Unscented Perfume.