



A Memoir: Movement, Breakdown and the Body

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Duncan Alldridge is working to serve men exploring their masculine energy and ‘maleness’ while providing a platform for a creative inquiry into the male path. The work uses movement practice and contact to manifest film and live performance and is evolving from his roots in theatre and sport, as well as his experience through depressive breakdown and ongoing spiritual path. The memoir snapshots his own experience and is a reflection on personal transformation.

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Where Did It Begin?

I'm uncertain when the pain first started, the distressing nag of anxiety in my gut that signalled a dissatisfaction with my place in the world, but it was sometime after the age of 35. I'd worked flat-out as a drama teacher, all hours, and developed a system of overriding myself that served my largely institutionalised life. I kept going, coping under considerable pressure as most teachers will, and rode a wave of material achievement and external validation I'd been taught was necessary to prove myself a man in the world. The work was creative, often spontaneous and offered huge emotional highs and lows. As I sat watching, and letting go of, the wealth of creative work I'd guided every year, I'd harness my tears, never allowing myself to be with the moments of beauty we'd created together. That wasn't what a man did. Cry. Even a passionate, talented and crazy drama teacher.

My place in the work become edgier as the chasm of dissatisfaction grew. I became less while the students became more. I disassociated with the gnawing anxiety, projecting it onto my environment, my work and relationships. I sought causes external to myself. I yearned for external validation. A huge output of creative work was never honoured or witnessed outside an educational frame. I think I began to disappear. At times it felt like one enormous undiscovered secret: my false self was a man who walked on water just to get by.

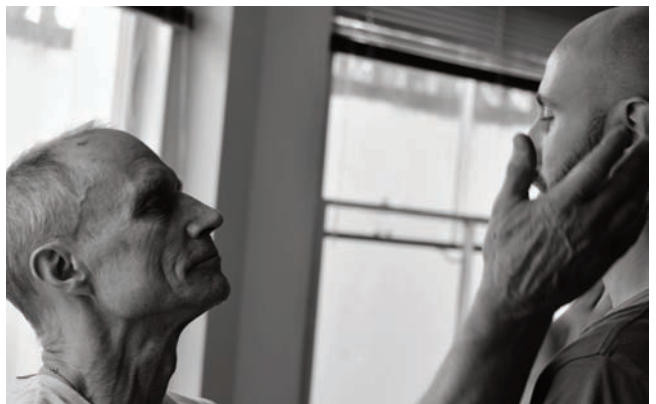
I longed to fall into vulnerability and be seen underneath it all. The 'creative' in me offset my professional output with even more movement: music albums, collaborations, theatre-companies and performances of my own. There was no space to stop, no time to listen.

But where did it begin?

My Father

My relationship with the most important man in my life, my father, was healthy and positive. A PE teacher and keen sportsman, I experienced a balanced physical intimacy with him. I knew his male friends similarly, largely present and physical, playing, wrestling and 'doing'. Although this was a solid grounding in maleness - testing physical strength, creating self-discipline and an awareness of boundaries - I never witnessed any emotional vulnerability in any of them. Similarly, I had no experience of my father vulnerable or struggling, but learned that to be a man meant accepting responsibility, getting on with things, being purposeful at work and being a positive force in the world.

He was kind and physically strong, and I learned that good men are gentle, caring and self-disciplined; he unconsciously introduced the male Lover¹ archetype to me, introducing me to poetry, different styles of music, reli-



gions, politics and an awareness of a 'bigger picture' outside mine. I experienced a sensitised, poetic world through him.

Yet like many boys, I learnt that to survive I needed to shroud my feelings. Over emotive-men depicted a negative image of masculinity for me, one of softness, freely running emotions and conversation, qualities I traditionally associated with being female. To compete within the male jungle, would these feminine qualities then serve me in a career and 'getting on' in life? There were other reasons why I disguised myself, but I learned from my father that women had permission to appear 'emotional', and men, largely, did not.

Deeper Questions

It was 2007. I was 42 and longing for a sustained relationship with a woman. When a relationship broke up I experienced deep physical pain. I was confused about what this was and why this had happened. Why was I frightened of being vulnerable? Where did my longing come from? What journey did I actually long to undertake? Was it a spiritual question? What bearing did the complex psychological outcome of parenting and the relationship and problematic early bonding I'd had with my Mother have? What were the important questions to ask?

I wanted to keep control and I wanted a handle on my story. What right had I to this? Somehow I was still the centre of my Universe. Life, as I saw it then, was about *my* story. I had a rough idea of a personal God, but had never taken any time to seek out the many questions that lay unasked, so therefore, unanswered. Being a man was about being secure in what *I* knew, my *own* truth and experience. It wasn't about following anybody else's and it certainly didn't involve anything about surrendering control. Faith wasn't a mystery back then, it was a weakness.

I'd been waiting for *her*, Bly's 'Woman with the Golden Hair'². A whole spiritual tapestry began to open for me, more choices, and a whole bundle of seemingly secular confusion.

What was true?

Looking back, many things came together simultaneously. A storm was brewing, a deep destructive storm of despair. I was arriving at the end of the line of my first half of life 'career' yet still looking for a place to call my own, somewhere I 'belonged' in the world. I'd been swimming in a tiny dark pond for years. What might happen if I ever had the courage to let go?

So when I arrived in Greece the following year I was standing on the edge. I'd often cried myself to sleep that year. Despairingly alone. There was a growing desperation. I still needed to hold up the world. What a responsibility! Hospitalisations, enquiries into my professional practice, collapses and an acknowledgement



of a relationship with this unholy and altogether unhelpful term 'depression' were all lining up waiting to be counted.

I was unprepared for real manhood. I was unprepared for suffering. Life was difficult.

Embodiment

I've thought it strange, but how could a physical theatre practitioner become so detached from the feeling centre in his body? I'd heard it said many times that men think with their head and their penis, yet we remain detached from the rest of our bodies, and for me it was largely true. I'd had a physical upbringing, education and work-life: gymnastics, rugby, football, sports, performing - yet I began to be conscious that even though I possessed a wide variety of skill-sets, I still lived largely 'in my head'. Yes, I was an expressive teacher, performer and artist and I'd developed a wide theatre-making repertoire, yet I remained 'unbalanced' in myself.

It is more than merely a physical question. And it had happened over a number of years. It was a gradual de-sensitisation to living fully.

Many men learn to do this. It's a social DNA we unconsciously adopt that helps us to achieve at work, do the physical grind, fight wars, sacrifice for family and defend territory. All the emotional journeys that I made professionally and artistically were never processed by my body, they stayed upstairs. In 2008-9, when I began movement practice in the 5Rhythms, and alongside the spiritual enquiry I was bound on, I began to excavate the places, the cells, that still held these old patterns. After 3-4 years of extensive practice, into and through experiences that, without a qualified voice of psychoanalysis, I might call 'nervous breakdowns', I began to experience firework-displays of feelings that had lain unexpressed. While deepening this practice, I found myself offering men a physical intimacy that had remained uncharted territory for me. Years of facilitating theatre practice with students had given me opportunity to model this, I'd been a guide and example to many young men, yet I'd been demonstrating an essence that I hadn't fully experienced myself.

And so my body became broken, dismembered. Organs malfunctioned. The usual lights got turned off. There is no sleep. The body, a once strong container, becomes a disorientated, whimpering mess of anxiety lurching from extreme fear to extreme fear. My reptilian brain³, the survival gene, fought to hold on, to move, to go to work, to anywhere away from the endless, ruminating spirals of catastrophic thinking.

When we are underground, we cannot breathe. Movement begins with the first new breath.

As things very gradually began to settle, these extreme experiences became the platform upon which my identity was re-drawn into a purposeful and more holistic cycle of being. I was not who I thought I was. I wasn't the real me. I'd been taken on deep dives into *liminal space*⁴. What kind of man would come up from these ashes?

It was September 2008 that I began two practices that underpin a grounding aesthetic of what I am

offering now: Yoga and 5Rhythms movement. These personal practices ground the Deep Diving Men enquiry and one of the questions asked in the opening Lab-theatre, “*How do I learn to live in a man’s body?*”

Being in the body is vital. Many men are out of touch with the incredible potential for living that our bodies are designed for. It’s been deprogrammed over generations, perhaps since we left and fell out of relationship with the land. The dehumanisation of the masculine soul; sitting in front of computers, Facebook, working committees; stifled in suits and trousers among all the trappings of a



voyeuristic, heady, pampering media market designed to lure in the Esquire-style young working male, is deeply toxic. Men need to feel the earth beneath their feet again. If we listen deeply, I suggest we long to be back together in our bodies, remembering our ancestry and lost rites of passage, repairing the wounds, and getting in touch again with a basic need to fully feel our experience of safely being boys and men together.

Gathering Men

In 2008 I had an important experience with another man. It’s important for me to mark largely what had happened prior to this, in that this was a first step in intimacy for me: I began to make myself vulnerable. We were on a ‘self-development’ holiday camp in Greece and were invited to undertake a co-listening exercise with each other each day. I’d met Rashi on the boat. We’d had a drink in the bar and had spent some time alone together. There was a gentle intuition in his manner and it intrigued me that he was training to be a psychotherapist, something I knew nothing about. He also reflected back to me qualities of the ‘mask of masculinity’ that I wore. I’d spent a lot of time with men, often one to one, drinking alcohol and playing sport, but had never really shared much of my internal world with any of them. So to sit down and talk about myself, the unmasked man? It was a shocking delight. How did I *do* that? The structure offered allowed each of us to be heard without judgement, and he would paraphrase back to me what he had heard me say. Above anything else, it was learning to deeply listen to another.

Over those fourteen days I discovered, not unsurprisingly now I look back, that my fears in allowing myself to be vulnerable were reflected in his. As our friendship grew and level of trust deepened, I began to hear more of my own voice when he spoke. I began to deeply *trust* him. This was a relationship where the conditions for trust were created by allowing myself to open and become vulnerable. It was a strange relief to begin to hear my true voice. I was learning to speak about my feelings and connect with them in my body. I was beginning to speak from my heart.

During the following year he and I met regularly with two other men we’d met on the trip. I felt safe within the similar cultural demographic we offered each other and we became more comfortable. These talks weren’t really intense though the ease we felt allowed laughter and a general dropping

down. I was beginning to experience that other men were similar to me. I'd recognised this previously, but culture, sport, alcohol and historical patterns had limited the boundaries of the relationships I was able to initiate. I began to acknowledge this as a central part of my life, the experience of another man's interior world.

It seemed many men longed to feel the unboundaried playground of being together again as boys, and that there was a deeper, more fruitful, less guarded way of relating and being with each other than the affirmation-seeking neediness, yet seemingly confident exteriors we wore to survive, and that we were conventionally modelled and taught. We wanted each other's love. A seed had been planted.

How is it to learn to love another male? Surely every man needs this to feel this feeling, that all men long to earn the unconditional love of the father⁵.

Observing the Radar

So what was so liberating about being in the company of men only? What is so revealing to us about the absence of women and why is this important?

I thought myself heterosexual, yet the word came sharply into focus when I began to experience movement practice as a dance of different energies. Back then, I was a man at the back of the yoga class for two reasons, firstly I didn't want to be shown up not making the mark, to be not good enough, to look unimpressive in front of women, so it made sense not to be in focus, and secondly, as the class was full of women, I got a better view from the back! Similarly, when on the floor of a dance practice, the same radar starts to operate. If you put males in a hall with a lot of females, a dance of procreation will inevitably come into play: a search for the most fertile hips to bare his child, alongside the strongest, safest provider for her children. The males will compete. This must play out. Alongside this dynamic are the energies of different bodies, and the uniqueness of each regardless of gender. When I first went to an all male dance, as part of my research and practice, I was sweetly challenged. Would it be a gay dance? Did that matter?

What would happen between men in the space in the absence of woman?

It is a unique experience, to be a pack of men in movement together, without female energy. The experience of encountering another man, without that 'radar' switching on, was a liberation for me. Being given permission to dance the hip-grinding staccato of my raw masculinity with other men, as well as my circling, more intuitively flowing feminine, opened new doors. What was I discovering during these practices? One thing was my *father* energy. Gabrielle Roth: 'Father is the masculine consciousness of your body and soul, the active, practical, protective part; the part of you that sets goals, plans for the future, pays bills... .. the world of beginnings and endings, lines and boundaries, answers and authority.'

I saw this energy in the male and female teachers who led the movement classes, and in the different authority figures I'd met in my life. It was an energy I knew I already had, but in the dance it was

finding a new path, flowing a different stream. I was beginning to embody a new authority, one which did firmly ground me in my body, one which gradually reconfigured the physical theatre soul in me. Embodied movement. I felt it in my heart and in my breath.

I was realising an important gift within me. How could I offer a physical, bounded space where we are free to get physical with each other, re-test our strength and ego-boundaries, relax with each other's bodies, trust, gently fight, challenge and play. The opportunity to offer the physical conditions for a healthy masculinity, those that my father gently rooted in me, was this gift. It was this energy, though it took some more time to percolate in me, that I took into offering an opening workshop with men, which then flowed into the first steps of the Lab-theatre process in 2014.



Working Through Depressive Breakdown

Around April 2012 I became aware that this prolonged period of internal crisis in my life was a body of research. What kind of man was I? Was I living the kind of life I had hoped for? Was I any closer to unlocking the meaning of being alive? A year previously I'd fallen from my first half of life career path, and the nervous breakdown plunged me onto a path of descent I'd never imagined.

Prosaic summary won't do justice to that experience of suffering. Of being alone with it. The confusion, the chaos, the slow realisation in the rare moments of sanity that something cataclysmic is going on over which I have no control. It's a whole book, it's a sacred personal text, a bible. But it was a revolution, an overthrowing of power, a titanic struggle with fear, and my mind, body and ultimately spirit, were the battleground. When I first read Bly's *Iron John*, perhaps a year later, it became clearer that a mythical and psychological battle had, and was still, taking place, and that the courage to descend, to fall and to let go and to go down, was my part. David's biblical journey in the deserts of Judah⁶ highlighted this. Aloneness. Learning to be a man for me (and in that I mean learning what it means to be fully human, as I am male not female) was concerned with a prolonged experience of, and encounter with, suffering, and thus a gradual re-mapping of my place in the cosmos. I wasn't creating this, it was being created for me. I began for the first time to acknowledge a personal, loving God.

The acute anxiety of mental breakdown left me in a broken body, a body that needed to relearn how to gradually put one foot in front of the other again. My encounters with men, the sex who understood the hard-wired male in me, became important in that they signposted a gradual return to strength, yet with an awareness that the old paradigms of competition and mistrust were dead, and that an altogether different playing field was possible.

So my research began to be both conscious inquiry; the reading, the body practices, the therapy and

gradual processing; and experiential, in that my mind fell apart and a terrifying shadow called fear stepped out up from the darkness. I'd fallen, I was struggling to let go and take the journey to finally land at the bottom. Katabasis. Bly calls this the 'mark of descent' or 'lowliness'. He suggests this is more acute in men who are 'high, lucky and elevated.'

In May 2012 I started to make small steps and started to write a blog.

My Life is not About Me

From the age of around 22 I was of the mindset that other men didn't have much to teach me. I'd learnt what I needed to learn; I was particularly inspired by and drawn to my education tutor on my post graduate course, and as a young teacher I was now in a position of social responsibility myself. It was rare to encounter men in positions of authority whom I looked up to. Most men are not modelling from their hearts. Are we simply 'living lives of quiet desperation' from the neck upwards? We are the most comfortable within our peer-groups, yet they have virtually nothing to teach us. We yearn for connections with a man's internal landscape. We fail to see ourselves reflected and therefore miss our own suffering⁶.

In Autumn 2008 I took a flight and a risk, to Switzerland, and visited a new male friend. This man had affected me. He was a revered yoga practitioner, older than me by 10-15 years, and in the midst of my seeking and ongoing crisis I sensed I had something to learn from him. On reflection, I think I was drawn because he was prepared to unmask and share with me his inner life. I saw his pain, his humour, his longing. He inspired in me a quest for adventure on my own path; he invited me to reach out for knowledge beyond my own. I saw he was on a journey and was practising his passion; a spiritual man living in his head, heart *and* body. Despite all the distractions women had offered me, here was an authentic man, struggling with his genuine offering to the world. An elder.

Deida's *The Way of the Superior Man* was one of the gifts he offered. It opened an exciting door to further research, and I returned from the trip with it. I became more aware that I was researching, and was living research for, *something*. Earlier that year I'd sought out a therapist, then another, both, by my own choice, women. (It wasn't until 2011, after my first breakdown, that I took steps to ensure I was working with a man) On reflection, they saw a man so locked up in his own pain and unaware that it was actually himself he needed to see clearly; so at the time the sessions felt fruitless. I felt a disturbing reality underlying these encounters: that there was a long way to go. At the time I wanted out, I felt I'd been through enough pain; I really didn't want 'in'. I didn't want to go 'down'⁷.

On reflection, perhaps I didn't trust them.

What does a woman know of a man's pain? Could she have any empathetic connection to how I was feeling? When I terminated the second relationship receiving the gentle parting challenge of "Who is Duncan?" and my scrawled reference to Scott Peck's *The Road Less Travelled* in my notebook, I was troubled.

By the time I got to Greece and my lover there compassionately pointed out to me 'You're not the

finished article', I actually heard her. I was putting pieces together; suffering is an opportunity, and I was journeying through it. I read the *Power of Now*. I learnt to 'own' my experience, and use what felt terribly vulnerable at the time, the 'I' to express myself. My research ultimately led me, a couple of years later, to Richard Rohr and then the famous first line of Scott Peck's sat significantly anew. 'Life is difficult'.

Spiritual Lessons: Driving My Car

A thing about being human is recognising and being in relationship with our own suffering. Is a man's suffering any different to a woman's? I became more aware of being inside the body of a male. This body had been created, and evolved to be set up in a certain way. It is very different to the female body physically and chemically. To use Bly's metaphor, if my body is a car, I need to learn how to drive it from someone who knows how to drive their own. Biddulph also, 'With no deep training in masculinity, boy's bodies still turn into men's bodies, but they are not given the software, the inner knowledge and skills, to live in a male body with its unique hormonal and neurological traits.'

Looking around me at the world through my keyhole of privilege and social advantage and seeing the impact of an imbalance of power in which men have held the keys for thousands of years, and then more closely at my own choices and actions in my relationships with women, it seems that men crash the car, and I was regularly crashing mine. Even with my eyes fixed on what I thought might be a road, I was still driving into the hedge.

I began then, to be more attentive to books written by men about men; the people who had learnt to drive a body like mine. I felt my journey become more focussed around men and the body as a way into my heart and expansion of spirit.

Male Leadership

I had been a role model for boys during 20 years teaching drama and theatre practice. The tiny windows of one-to-one that emerged with them I knew (as a result of my own desire for positive modelling when I was young) were moments of gold, but in the wind of the institutionalised pressure cookers of creative outpouring, they were fleetingly few. I could only model who I was. In my more intimate moments with my older classes, classes who'd made profound and intimate journeys together, and there were many, I might share something of my personal life. Yet to the young men I was modelling a man who had yet to come to terms with acknowledging his own neediness. Slowly, I began to see the need for a wider picture and to take responsibility for myself. For those boys I'd been more important than a teacher, director, magician - I'd been a man.

Will he notice me? I'd felt a deep masculine longing for affirmation from those elders around me when younger: PE teachers, drama lecturers, sports leaders - it was the men in the positions of responsibility I wanted this from, those that seemed in 'purpose', that offered a positive energy about living and modelled a comfort in their own bodies. I was fortunate to have time with older men, PE teachers and Drama specialists, yet I longed to know more about them. I enjoyed the rare moments

when I saw flashes of the real man beneath the role. On reflection, I wanted to see surrender, a struggle at the bottom of things, *katabasis* in action. I'd seen plenty of the suffering of women, but the



suffering of men? It remained shrouded, hidden from me. Despite their positive, individual male influences, perhaps these men merely modelled a continuation of the shoulder of patriarchal responsibility; in that men had taken responsibility ancestrally; so now we are prepared to sacrifice our freedom too easily in the face of conflict, yet keep running at all costs to support our families, and simply run out of gas; we flounder in the absence of a spiritual rite of passage that teaches us of pain; we are not of the mind-set that it's acceptable to know anything of our inner lives. Biddulph again, 'Most men don't have a life, what they have is an act'.

There's a male leader at my church who models inspired and purposeful leadership within a frame of authentic struggle and suffering. A powerful intellect and with a compassionate heart, he's a gifted orator. His strength in authority is that he is not afraid to show absolute vulnerability as part of who he is. He stands embodied in his own voice. It's very powerful for me to see a man stand in his authentic self, emotionally present to the moment, and to witness his pain. To see this in the action of leadership is inspiring. Once, in talking of his Christian faith, my father quietly said "It's very difficult for a man to completely surrender". It is something of this spirit and strength in surrender, something that my father tried to show me, that I find compelling in the heart of another man.

Spiritual Lessons: Adam's Return

I knew that the path to faith (which is such a key pivotal word in all this) lay buried for me for many years. The longing we all feel for the other is about our journey of faith. Beneath everything that was going on on the surface in my forties, I was 'lost' because I still wanted answers, control, and for things to come to me on my terms. Unconsciously though, I was somehow longing to surrender to the mystery of things, yet was waiting for this opportunity to land on my doorstep. Ultimately my opportunity to engage with mystery came through painful and rehabilitating experience of mental breakdown and, eventually, a willingness to experience and surrender to the deep pain of what living had been like. A dive down into not knowing. The ashes. A whimpering child. 'A bundle of nerves' doesn't even scratch the surface. My 'ashes' experiences were as wormholes from a lived solar system into a terrifying chaos.

The letting go of all I understood and was helped me to ask deeper questions, questions perhaps that become harder to face as we get older, because if we are privileged we must give up such a lot. This prising open of a closed heart, if you like, was a cataclysmic wrestle with shadows. How could I have been so 'blind' for so long? Why couldn't I see myself clearly? So I fought to hold on, and that fruitless state gave the oppor-



tunity for two further prolonged experiences of mental breakdown.

It's a frightening and gradual discovery, realising it was my false self that had been the voice of wisdom 'driving my car' for so long. In the film *Birdman* I see this clearly. Keaton, as Riggan Thomson, plunges to and fro, from creative triumph to abyss, through no end of internal chaos, while constantly buying into a script that he has to 'to keep everything going'. The ultimate realisation and confrontation with his egoic false self brings him crashing down, with tragically hilarious consequences, after years of buying into an illusory narrative about himself as a miracle-maker. I see my old self clearly in him. To an extent, I had become a dangerous man, weaving my path of creative chaos, unable to see a bigger picture than my own blindly self-destructive purposes, and trapped within a story that unfolded forever towards an inevitable spiritual desert.

So this book, when I landed with it and the key signposts Rohr teaches, not only underpins a springboard for my new journey in Christian faith (I understand them also as cornerstones of all mature religious experience) but provide a framework for learning invaluable lessons about being human, and more specifically for me, about being a man, simply as that is my sex. The five spiritual lessons became footprints for me before the first breath of this new work, and firmly root the spiritual corridor of where I am coming from in my offering and creative enquiry with men.

In Service to Others

When I was younger I often dreamed two things, that I was immortal and would live for ever, and that I could fly. These are the dreams of a Peter Pan, of someone who is not coming down and perhaps these early dreams became imprints or beliefs for me.

Yet the firm yet gentle physical relationship I had with my father did create some foundations for a bridge from boyhood to manhood, a bridge that can only be guided by a man. I also received some mentoring in the spiritual disciplines that I believe are the foundations of being a male today. These disciplines provide the foundations for spiritual sustenance equipping a boy for living in the world. Rohr describes them 1) *Life is hard* 2) *I am not important* 3) *My life is not about me* 4) *I am not in control* 5) *I am going to die*.

Relationship with suffering has forced my hand. I was led into a series of mini-deaths; interweaving strands of experience had come together to create conditions for transformation. *Adam's Return* was a game-changing encounter. It clarified a newly emerging ball-park, and laid a new gauntlet down. Experience in my body now became points within a new compass. Not just a map alongside others, but a new landscape for living. Richard Rohr, 'Authentic God experience always "burns" you, yet does not destroy you.'

Ancient rites of passage would teach a young man how service to his tribe was important. It would be modelled by his elders and he would learn that to work for a greater good, other than himself, would be a step closer to manhood. Thus he would learn about ego boundaries, and that living on the planet would not be all about him. Rohr again, 'The privileges of manhood are given only to those who have paid some dues to the common good, and therefore can be trusted not to abuse the common good. Otherwise we merely empower selfishness.' In the mentoring of a young tribesman

this would be something the older men would pass down. Our culture of the individual teaches us that it is all about *me*. Is there any active modelling of unconditional service to others in the male elders among us? This question was one on which I wanted to travel. It would be about loving another man.

A Men's Group

In the summers of 2009 and 2010 I met two other significant men on my journey, both on 5Rhythms community camps. Experiences together as men, and with women, provided the ground to begin a group together which began in Autumn 2010.

I shared personal and profound experience in the group. It became an exciting, radical education. While an enquiry into being men together and falling deeper into experiencing each other, it's also been an observation and study in how men think and behave. I spent six months managing and leading the group forward to a place where we now facilitate ourselves. Among many things, the group reveals to me the cultural challenges men face concerning leadership, status, accountability and communication.

Importantly it also shows me that men need each other's love. We need to learn how to feel it and create conditions where it can take place. As Rohr points out, it does not seem to work for men if this is given away too easily, but grounds best when it is earned. Men have learned to love me slowly, and I them. I am now close friends with men that previously I would have actively chosen not to spend time with. 'The male need for the male is in men's hardwiring, and most do not understand its depth or meaning, especially since it has taken so many unhealthy forms.'

The group has been ever-present in my life since. As I was diving deeper into more intimate contact and movement practice with men, it was a foundation for me to be still. It became the roots and a bedrock for where I can now evidence a body of research, and signposted a new, emerging purpose. Poignantly, my first half of life came crashing down, and so the group was a place I held on, a worm-hole the other side of mental illness, and the men in it became lifelines in a strange kind of way.

By summer 2013 I felt well enough to step gently forward. I began to 'operate' again. I began to feel flow. Everything moves. God loved me, and wants to be in personal relationship with me, however messy I am, and the cycles of birth, death and renewal call forward our humanity in their omniscience. Suffering is necessary. The sun will rise.

Perhaps it had been seven years. This deep dive.

Deep Diving Men

I might define: men who are on a journey to find out who they are, and what they can offer, as males. I would also suggest that the growing community exists to support men getting together creatively and freely in different ways, and that this work aims to serve men and boys in taking themselves into relationships with each other, with woman and in the world. There are different aspects of the work emerging constantly. For me there is a specific artistic energy to the Deep Diving Men flow, and so an emphasis in the work is to use mediums of creative expression, rooted in the body and voice, to create form within which the male voice can be witnessed. This brings the work into a public, socio-political frame.



It was in my mind to stimulate the possibility of an artistic collective of men. It was, initially, less clear why. A performer, teacher and theatre director in my first half of life, what grew in me over a period of time was the idea to try and hold and develop spaces where a company or collective of men could evolve. It became slowly clear, that in its flow, where this stream was headed in terms of its form, yet it did not need a fixed destination. The *intention* to create the flow was the vision, not to *control* the flow.

It's important that the enquiry continues to be moving and co-creating with what it meets energetically and have it's own journey: it is a dive down and will encounter what it encounters. In this way it will have a life-death-rebirth cycle as is reflected in the journeys we all might make.

In 2012 I took on a job to direct a large youth theatre production of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. It was a triumphant return to work after the breakdown the previous year. 'Triumphant' was of course the key word. Nearing end of the rehearsal process, and as we began to move into the theatre, I began to feel the irrepressible storm clouds of depressive breakdown slowly form and, piece by piece, unravel me again. But I was guiding the ship into the harbour. That's what I'd always done, it was what I'd been designed for. Wasn't it? To provide, take responsibility, weather the storm, lead from the front, gather the young. That's what my father did. That's what I saw some *good* men doing.

An ex-student of mine and friend, a talented and capable young man, was working with me. I'd asked him to. Somehow, I was already prepared. It was, in this microcosm of theatre production, as if a metaphor for all my professional life was here to be reckoned, one final time. Having led the whole exciting and exhausting process for eight weeks, and led a close-knit younger staff mentorship team for the young people, around me as support, I was ready. When deep in the desert, in a moment of lucidity and courage I called him. "Here. It's yours. I want you to take it and take care of it. I have to

let go.”

Man to man. Across the generations. Across all the survival masks of my former self. Guide the ship into the harbour.

I'll never forget the joy and the relief of secretly attending the first night, being smuggled backstage and sitting to watch what I'd started, happen. It had been *difficult*, I was not in *control*, it was not about *me*, I wasn't important and I was going to die.



So, two years later, I invited men to join together in a short series of explorative workshops. Here I shared a vision for the Labtheatre work. I knew I wanted the process to create its own flow and to plant seeds inviting an ongoing collaborative vision. It was unfortunate I'd used well-worn emotional muscles too soon after the initial breakdown, but it came with many blessings.

So we began a dive: into a physical language, into allowing each other to be the men we were, into vulnerability and intimacy. After eight weeks work together, and having researched various texts concerning the male path, we had the seeds of an ensemble. Physical theatre was the medium. We began to explore what it was to be a male and as men together explored questions arising for us as a group. I found the men open to receive research of mine that I offered. So the words of Bly, Rohr and Biddulph became the performance text. While this created an intense yet unfocussed tapestry, we offered an authentic energy, physicality and vulnerability that impacted the audiences. We shared the work in small theatre-spaces. This is from one of the female observers.

One of the things that pulled me into the longer performances I've seen was the opening. Silence. Movement. Authentic and yet non-confrontational eye contact. There was something special in this opening. Something scared that resonated through the entire piece. Hypnotic, lyrical. It was an invitation with clear boundaries and a taste of the intensity, and creative vulnerability to come. The gaze from the men performing felt pure, intimate, and safe. A kind of deepening. A kind of homecoming through the courage to meet another, through the courage to meet a man.



The film Where Are We Going? evidences slices of the process.

Since 2012 I'd been blogging, gently navigating the energy of this new purpose. As I recovered slowly that year, I gained confidence that there was a new offering being created for me as a result of these dives. I made a website and began, at the beginning, to slowly post my story. It felt a very vulnerable invitation into pieces of my world.

As a result of connections that were being made, I ran a series of workshops for young men at a summer camp in August 2014. International Men's Day in November then presented an opportunity to

move the work forward again. I gathered a generationally diverse group of men, a film crew, wrote some text, gathered everyone together for just one rehearsal and then guided a group of men through a street theatre pop-up 'event' on London's SouthBank. You can read [their reflections on the day](#) and also see the docu-film of the event.

Running

Running away, running towards, running fast, slow, for and against. Running to win, to keep up, running to fit in - running because they are, just running along. Running to move, to get away, to escape,



to be still. Running with and without you, running somewhere, anywhere, running with the men, running my mask; running questions and answers, towards my father, my brother, my son - running as sacrifice, running a hero, running for life, death, freedom, security, love - running for my family, my community - so I'm running my edge, my gift, running the race - I'm running to come home. (Deep Diving Men)

The physical image is a gauntlet thrown down. Where are we going? The question invites different suppositions. One focus is physical endurance. Running reminds men of our DNA, of 200,000 years evolving as hunter-gatherer, of the need to be grounded in the body and of the sense of undertaking a purposeful community sustaining activity together. Running reminds us that our bodies, physical strength and testosterone were fundamentally essential to the sustenance of the tribe. We ran to survive; reacting quickly, avoiding danger, killing animal and protecting family. A few years of liberal thinking and gender debate doesn't alter this blueprint. In speaking of how father-love, unlike the love of the mother, is conditional, Groth suggests, 'Perhaps all active initiation of affection for others by a male is modelled on his way of loving his father. None of this, I maintain, has changed in an era of fractured families, the promotion of single-parent "families," the promotion of same-sex "parents." These social changes have highlighted deep-lying prototypes of experience that are still very much in play in our bodies and psyches. We cannot controvert thousands of years of collective, embodied experience with a few decades of socio-political innovation.'

When I drop into a purposeful 'staccato' in a 5Rhythms movement session - straight lines, forward movement, a disciplined, focused energy - it comes from the roots of my body and grounds a maleness for me when I feel it. Gabrielle Roth teaches me this movement is also a wild *masculine* offering. It's a 'wild son'⁸: it can be angry, it can be unpredictable. This embodied feeling can't be discussed, or organised in my head, but only expressed in my body. 'To be truly wild and free you have to follow

your heart, not your head.' My staccato movement actions things, speaks my truth, fights for freedom, steps forward into vulnerability.

Deep Diving Men is about taking action. It's about having the courage to be seen untamed, raw and unbridled. It's an expression of freedom.

Running is an active image. It's going somewhere. A group of men, unknown to each other, stepping forward to publicly show themselves is a very masculine act. It's edgy, slightly dangerous and invites unpredictability; it puts men together outside existing comfort zones in a way they would not usually find themselves. It fuels our sense of humour, a laughter of the heart. It's standing up shoulder to shoulder. It's forward motion into the world. It's provocative debate. It's embodying questions about who men are today.

Notes

¹ *Moore and Gillette, 'King Warrior Magician Lover'.* 'The Lover archetype is primary to the psyche also because it is the energy of sensitivity to the outer environment. It expresses what Jungians call "sensation function," the function of the psyche that is trained in on all the details of sensory experience, the function that notices colors and forms, sounds, tactile sensations, and smells. The Lover also monitors the changing textures of the inner psychological world as it responds to incoming sensory impressions.'

² *Robert Bly, 'Iron John'.* 'We are looking at the source of a lot of desperation in certain men here, and a lot of suffering in certain woman. A man may repeat the courting and disappointment over and over. One man about thirty-five told me that confusion about the layers had ruined his life. His life had gone like this: he sees a woman across the room, knows immediately that it is "She." He drops the relationship he has, pursues her, feels wild excitement, passion, beating heart, obsession. After a few months everything collapses; she becomes an ordinary woman. He is confused and puzzled. Then he sees once more a radiant face across the room, and the old certainty comes again. Her face seems to give out a whisper: "All those who love the Woman with Golden Hair come to me." She doesn't seem to realise she is sending out that whisper. Of course the whisper gives her great power because men offer to rearrange their lives for her. But it isn't real power, and when men leave her she feels insignificant and small, abandoned, powerless. A generation ago millions of Western men gave their longing for the Golden-haired Woman to Marilyn Monroe. She offered to take it and she died from it.'

³ *Karen Armstrong, 'Fields of Blood'.* 'Each of us has three brains which coexist uneasily. In the deepest recess of our grey matter we have an 'old brain' that we inherited from the reptiles that struggled out of the potential slime 500 million years ago. Intent on their own survival with absolutely no altruistic impulses, these creatures were solely motivated by mechanisms urging them to feed, fight, flee (where necessary) and reproduce. Those best equipped to compete mercilessly for food, ward off any threat, dominate territory and seek safety naturally passed along their genes passed along their genes, so these self-centred impulses could only intensify.'

⁴ Richard Rohr, *Adam's Return*. 'Liminal space is a concept refined by Victor Turner in his classic study on initiation and ritual. The latin word *limen* means "threshold." Liminality is an inner state and sometimes an outer situation where people can begin to think and act in genuinely new ways. it is when we are betwixt and between, have left one room but not yet entered the next room, any hiatus between stages of life, stages of faith, jobs, loves, or relationships. It is that graced time when we are not certain or in control, when something genuinely new can happen. We are empty, receptive, an erased tablet waiting for new words. Nothing fresh or creative will normally happen when we are inside our self-constructed comfort zones, only more of the same. Nothing original emerges from business as usual. It seems we need some anti-structure to give direction, depth, and purpose to our regular structure. Otherwise structure, which is needed in the first half of life, tends to become a prison as we grow older.

⁵ Miles Groth, *We Men Must Love Our Boys*. 'It is important to add at this point my observation that it is in his relationship with his father that a boy's outlook on and way of loving others is established. Let me explain briefly. A male infant learns from his mother that he is lovable. It is thought that male (or female) infants return mother-love with love, when what they express, in fact, is gratitude—not love. On the other hand, a boy first learns how to *initiate* love with someone in his relationship with his father. He also now learns what it means to be loved *in return*, of requited love in this relationship. He is now loved, not unconditionally, as was the case with his mother, but conditionally—conditional on his act of loving in a relationship in which he has first initiated the love. His first opportunity to do this occurs in boyhood and for the purposes of identifying with the father, the person he wants to be like. Much depends on whether he has been made into a son and much that follows depends on this. Freud—who had a very troubled relationship with own father—left this out of his theory. He could see only the rivalry that occurs between father and son.

Without hesitation and without thinking about it, a father will love his son in return— unless the situation is chaotic and he is not there emotionally, or he has gone away. The father's response is critical. If he does not love his son in return, the boy's bridge from boyhood to manhood cannot be built. Since for a boy, his father is the model of all men, his attitude toward other men will depend on what his father does in this situation. I would add here my belief that a man's feelings of love for a woman are modelled on this way of relating. Perhaps all active initiation of affection for others by a male is modelled on his way of loving his father. None of this, I maintain, has changed in an era of fractured families, the promotion of single-parent "families," the promotion of same-sex "parents." These social changes have highlighted deep-lying prototypes of experience that are still very much in play in our bodies and psyches. We cannot controvert thousands of years of collective, embodied experience with a few decades of socio-political innovation.'

⁶ Bible: *Psalm 63* 1-4. My soul thirsts for you; My flesh longs for You/ In a dry and thirsty land where there is no water/ So I have looked for You in the sanctuary/ To see Your Power and Your glory/ Because Your loving kindness is better than life/ My lips shall praise You/ Thus I will bless you while I live/ I will lift up my hands in Your name.

⁷ Bly triggers this thought for me, that as a result of feminism and negative images of male authority, men had been squeezed into the inability to create a voice for themselves. Patriarchy negates the

need for a male voice, they say. So while 19th Century men were unaware of the suffering of women, yet became aware, men have only recently become aware of the great suffering caused to ourselves. It isn't a suffering inflicted by power imbalance, but one of grief and a generational father-wound.

⁸ Robert Bly, 'Iron John'. 'One has the sense that some power in the psyche arranges a severe katabasis if the man does not know enough to go down on his own. Depression is a small katabasis, and something other than us arranges it. Depression usually surprises us by its arrival and its departure. In depression, we refuse to go down, and so a hand comes up and pulls him down. In grief we choose to go down.'

⁹ Gabrielle Roth describes a 'wild son' archetype in the staccato rhythm. 'Look for the part of you that wants to shake things up, the part of you that takes risks and makes changes. Look for the wild child everyone told to sit down and shut up; the part of you that cannot be hemmed in, that knows lies are dangerous, nice is death, and pretending is just bad acting.

It saddens me to see so many people running from this part of themselves. I understand the threat—it's dangerous territory for anyone who has an investment in a specific self-image, like being the polite one, the do-gooder, the old fart, or even the rebel. Why protect a self-image that limits and even harms you? Go for the anger and find out what it has to teach you.'

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Duncan is working collaboratively on creative projects with both men and women and is passionate about the potential of gathering men together. A theatre practitioner, performer and experienced teacher, Duncan recently founded Deep Diving Men, a evolving community platform in service to exploring the male journey, and is using theatre and film as mediums to document the evolving process. Duncan mentors younger artists, is Creative Consultant at TheSpaceUK and has worked extensively as a Drama teacher in schools and colleges.

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