

Exile...

... Wow.....what a word. Exile. I left my home and my country of birth. I have been back, many times, but I do not want to ever live there again. Each time I return, I feel more and more a stranger in a foreign country.

When I was a child I could never work out in my head how other children made so many friends. I felt lost. I felt that no-one was interested in me. But I was part of a family with a brother and sister, both younger than me. My parents loved me. I always knew that. My younger sister adored me and I adored her. My brother... well... we were brothers. I was older than him, but the eighteen months between our ages was a lifetime of difference. He knew what he wanted to study in life when he was only fourteen. He did it and succeeded. His world was practical. He made many friends, but I could never understand him and share good or bad times with him. We did meet again in life. Many times. Had a meal together. Had a drink together. Had small talk. But he was still a stranger to me until the day he died. I have always felt sad about our inability to share values and interests. I was an "exile" from his values. I wept when he died.

I was a mere six years old small boy when World War two began and we lived near London. Our family broke up as the bombs arrived. I was sent with my brother to rural Scotland for safety. My parents were busy. The war was to dominate their lives. Dad was in the army, it was his career. Mum was a trained nurse.

I seldom saw them... but ... I saw and lived in boarding schools. Harsh brutal places. Strange places. With hard people. Abusive people. Teachers... some were priests. Marist Brothers. Some military men who were too old to fight. I got my share of sexual abuse. It terrified me. Abusers blame the abused. You made me do it, they say. As a small child I believed that awful lie for a long time. But then I started to rebel. I was punished. Caned with a stick and a leather strap. Locked up in rooms in the dark. Deprived of some meals. Expelled from two schools. I ran away from a boarding school, got onto a train, lied and avoided paying a fare. I had no money. I found my way home to arrive at an empty house. I had no key either. So I broke in. A short time later I heard a knock on the door. It was a policeman.

School was hard. I was left-handed and tried to write with my left hand. I was persuaded not to do that, then I was punished for it and told it was evil too. I used to dream about a country where everyone was left handed. But, I did learn to use my right hand for writing and I still do. I can still use either hand, but now my right hands dominate my hand behaviour. I sometimes think of my hands now as one... being OK ... and the other being in “exile”, my left one!!!!!!

I don't recall having school-friends, but I must of had some friends. My head and memory is blank. Their names, faces and our experiences together have gone from my head as if they never existed. So I grew up not caring much about friends and relatives. I learned that I could manage my own company and be content. I read books and enjoyed walking and watching clouds move. I listened for hours to the radio each day plays, stories, music. Still do. My thoughts took me to a new universe every day. Did that past form my adult character? I sound and am self-indulgent, I know. But the mood of being in “Exile” is still a deep feeling inside me. Why...Exile? Self-created?.

During the five years of war I seldom saw my parents for more than a few days at a time. Dad went to Africa for two years. He came back sick. Mum worked as a nurse in military hospitals. She also sang on the BBC and travelled with ENSA colleagues for the entertainment side of the war. She sang to troops in military camps and on ships taking them to war or returning from war. This life continued after the war ended.... for another four long years. It was not until I was nearly sixteen years old, that the family finally got together... to live everyday... and every night as a family. This was in Hong Kong. My Dad was there for a three year military posting . For those three unique years, Mum was at home everyday. Dad came home each day after work. We ate together, talked. Mum played the piano. I sat and listened. There was talk, music, trips to the beach, to the cinema. I completed my education at the International School in Kowloon, Hong Kong where I began to get a new sense of being with my family and enjoying college. My “exile mood” was in full retreat. I read so many books. I explored the city of Hong Kong by myself. I met people from other countries and other cultures. We talked. Life was good. I wanted it to last longer.

Three years later we went back to the UK. I was now a nineteen year old. Crisis. I had to complete two years of military conscription although the war had long since gone. But there were plenty of small ones. Malaysia, Korea, Cyprus andgawd knows where else.

Always... there is and was war to shed the blood of young people. This return to England was strange and painful. After living in Hong Kong , Malaysia and Singapore, I now saw my own country in a different light. My sense of unsteadiness in life became worse. After a disastrous two years in the RAF, I tried to make a living in London, but felt utterly alien to life. I made a poor attempt at becoming an “exile” by trying to commit suicide and obviously failed.

My head still brimmed with anguish night and day. I was aware now, that on coming back from Hong Kong I could see that the world was even more different and strange than I had even thought it was. Strange “thoughts” tormented me ... day after day.

In London I worked for a travel firm. Disaster. I worked in a factory. Horrible. I worked in a bookstore. Enjoyed it for a short time. My brother came home for a visit. He told me about New Zealand and how he had travelled there while employed in the Merchant Navy. He thought I might like it. With no information apart from his comments, I applied to go to NZ. The embassy was five minutes walk from where I was working in Shaftesbury Avenue in the West End of London. I was accepted and arrived in NZ about six months later. As my Uncle Roland put it, “ You’re going as far away in this world as you can go. Any further and you’ll be coming back.”

My brother said that people in NZ were mainly English migrants. He said nothing about Maori, the indigenous people. So I migrated to New Zealand. I worked on buses, read gas meters, cleaned offices, got a job on the waterfront, married a good woman, trained as a school teacher, moved to radio broadcasting and studied at university. I had constant contact with the public when I was making radio programs. I travelled around NZ with a tape recorder and sat in homes, shops, institutions, sports grounds etc chatting with people from young to old to make radio programs. But, I still felt...alone.

With my wife I had three children. I love them. But I still felt an exile? Is it my personality or events that made me. I had made a big decision to leave England, but I had not thought through about how I might adapt or re-act to this new country. Even now, many years later, I feel at odds with New Zealand and many of its values. But. I live here. It is my home. I call it home. My task is still to make it feel like home. I have worked here. I married, had children. Trained as a teacher. Worked in broadcasting. My marriage fell apart. I met another woman. That relationship fell apart too. Left the country. Met another

woman. I love her. We have now been together for many years and she has kept me from self-destruction on numerous occasions. But, she knows I am still alone in my head and often depressed. My head is still my only real friend. I populate it with people of the imagination. Some of these people talk with me and then they move onto paper and get stuck there forever.

When I think about being an exile, different thoughts come to mind. I see the sad heroes and heroines in the novels of Anita Desai, who are migrants who leave their home to seek their fortune for themselves and their families. They still remain Indian in a foreign culture. Have I become stuck in my first culture and I am unable to see it?

I am an exile still on the run from what?????? I was never a murderer, a bank robber, a forger, a gun runner. I have never had dreams of becoming a billionaire. I was just a young man, most unhappy. I wanted to get away to become “me” whatever that might mean.

In NZ I worked hard. At one time I had three jobs each day and sent home money to my parents. Dad was ill. He has health problems related to his military time in Sierra Leone and Nigeria in World War Two. I loved and hated him at the same time. He had wanted me to become an officer in the British Armed Forces. I detested the military. I never ever saw Dad again. He died in the UK. I was in NZ. I sobbed and sobbed as I tried to reconcile my conflicted views. My Mum said he was kind and understood about me and wished he had come to NZ. I felt I had “exiled” my Dad from myself. I have never forgotten that thought. Families know much about each other. They have been together for so long. They live in the same house, together, play together, often are educated together and all are full of the rituals and values of the family.

Ironically, one of my first identity positives in NZ was to join a small theatre group. They asked me to play the boy in “Waiting for Godot”, a stage play on the absurdity of life. I knew the play and had seen it twice in London. It has two tramps in it who say each day ... we go on living ... but why.. to try to understand life. But life is absurd. A cosmic joke.

Samuel Beckett's play fits into Existentialism, which has soaked into my being. It led me twice...close to suicide. This world is so cruel. So, why not leave it behind? Now, in old age, I will possibly not commit suicide. But, the world is still a multi-layered joke. It

can be cruel and barbaric and it laughs at the pain of people in Gaza. It makes cruel fools into kings i.e. Trump with millions of followers. But each day there is also the sound of singing birds and children and the flowers grow and give us sweetness.

I have made some good friends. They are still with me and they live all over the world. Last year a couple came from Sydney, stayed with us for two days and we ate, drank and talked as if we had lived next door to each other for all our lives. We became friends in Suva in the early 90s. I have a similar story about friends who live in Africa. And another about a friend in Sweden who is from India. And Canada, Norway and Finland too.

If I had never left Britain, I am sure I would have friends. But, with being an exile...a voluntary one...I have met friends I do not think I could have met in Britain. Their lives and background are all so varied. We like each other because of mutual interest in arts, politics, values and that odd phrase "common philosophies." I think too that by being away from a family in the UK and starting again in another country, I have assumed a new identity while still retaining some of my old identity. NZ is different to England. So is Fiji. I taught journalism at a university there and enjoyed the experience of trying to open the minds of students to see the world more critically than they had before. Exciting. So was Africa. I have felt comfortable in those countries. I guess I am saying that I am two persons - Patrick and Patrick plus. Often in those countries and being with those friends I did not feel like an "exile".

I get depressed, but I am sometimes happy too... much of the time I do not know what I should do in life to make it meaningful and to create calmness within me. I write. That helps. I find in writing that an agony within me ... that hurts me through and through....so I want to put it somewhere.... into my writing. Happiness, sadness, dilemma. I now see them as part of me and my personality. It is possibly a myth, but then life is a myth...it is absurd. The meaning is what we create. It is our personal story.

Death is certain. And perhaps the end of the absurdness of life? Who knows? I don't!!!! I am alive now. But I will die and then start a journey as extremely small scientific atoms and particles which begin to wander through a universe that is so much larger than earth and I will become a different type of "exile"... maybe for eternity.