

What is love....

... So I'll start with Cupid to postpone me talking about myself. Cupid, God of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection and son of the Goddess Venus and Mars, the God of War. Love and war. Love and conflict. What a pair they make... mirroring my life...with love and conflict even to old age.

Cupid is sometimes blindfolded and blind, but not so much in the sense of sightless —since the sight of the beloved can be a spur to love. In Botticelli's painting *La Primavera* Cupid is blindfolded and shooting his arrows. He has wings too, probably because lovers are flighty and likely to change their minds, and boyish because so much love is irrational. His symbols... the arrow and torch and as we all know love both wounds and inflames the heart".

Time for me to talk now. You won't be surprised to know I messed up love affairs, have been hurt by love, hurt others. In my youth I blundered into what I thought was perfect love and became confused. Nothing new there.

I planned to commit suicide as a way out of this love dilemma. But did nothing and then my suicide plan evaporated as I met another girl who liked me. She made the first move and I snapped out of my depression. Crazy. Afterwards I thought about my suicide plan to resolve my life by substituting it with death. I showed no sense of love to those around who loved me father, mother, brother sister. But, I loved them all.

I was a turbulent teenager and realised early in my life that I was so different compared to people around me. I saw it first when I went to the library with my brother. He was only a year or so younger, but he enjoyed action and things he could hold in his hands, and needed people around him who shared this vision. So normal!!!! He became a successful engineer. Had a family. Lived well. In later life as adults never had much in common except our parents. When we met it was cordial, but it was not love. It was there in name only, but not with a depth of feeling. What did love mean?

At sixteen I read Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus on Existentialism and suicide seemed to me to be a question of importance to answer. Their thinking soaked into me and has never left, so I always feel alone in the world. I define my own existence and now accept it. Existentialism.

I realised that I had no pre-installed purpose, no built-in blueprint. I believe I began to exist first, as a blank slate, pushed by nature into a world without a pre-written instruction manual. I learned about that I had to make my character, to decide on my values. Life's meaning is built through choices and actions over a lifetime. I still feel am a lump of clay that has to continually shape itself. How the hell did I get that strange "love" at such a young age? I was sent to schools full of Christian dogma

and I certainly did not meet Existentialism there. It met me. But it has served. I have seldom sought help from anyone even when I feel down and out. But, I have been helped when the need arose. I don't seek friends, although I have a few.

Existentialism is a strange love. For me, it means being alone. In a positive way, I have found out I am seldom bored with being alone. My second suicide attempt obviously failed. It had links with my entry into the head of poor Hamlet with his thoughts on existence and suicide. I still think....like Hamlet...even today....what is life's meaning? Like Sartre and Camus, after death there is silence. The real answer is that life is absurd, but we are here. It is our dilemma to face it....if we can!!!!

As a young man I did enforced military conscription in the UK and afterwards I ran away to New Zealand. I married and have three children I love. But I did not love life. Never did. I searched for meaning in life. After a long time I left my wife and children and met another woman who I loved so intensely that it hurt. Damn Cupid and his arrows. The relationship collapsed. I was confused and wanted to run, I was so scared by this love.

I was already on the public stage and working in media. I ran overseas to join the Theatre of Foreign Aid Development. I have spent the rest of my working life there and travelling around the world. I have a gold painted medal in a box to prove I did the job well. Theatre has been a love all my life. I know how to use lights and sound to create magic and help actors interpret their parts. As a Director/ Producer of plays I sense that I have all the parts of all the actors inside me. I can write for theatre and for film too. In my existential philosophy life, I now say, I know my work. But was it a conscious choice? Not entirely, but eventually I could say that I consciously made a choice to stay with Aid and Development. I became a good Existentialist!!!! Is there such a person or is it a personal myth?

I have a woman in my life who I believe will love me until I die. I love her and I always will. We have been together for over 40 years. I cannot explain this love. It is about sharing time together and being separated at times, of having similar interests and a similar anger at the world and its cruelty. It is love by tolerance of the differences in our two personalities. But, I admire and want the freedom to create original creative material that frequently emerges from my dark thoughts that reside in chaos. My partner admires order. She has a love and knowledge of nature which I sense and admire. I do share some of the visual side of it with her. But it is her world. I want to enter more.....but I lack the wisdom on how to get there!!!!

In old age I find daily love in my activities. I still write, without knowing why. I am in love with the multiple voices inside my head. I love music more than I did in my younger life. I love reading drama and poetry that leads me to another dimension

of thought. Greek mythology tales still entrap me, but also I am learning through my partner about nature and:

*I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight.*

I still read Existentialism..... damn, damn damn.... it is a drug in the head, but I now know that each day of time is a new lifetime too. I see in each young face a potential for good and bad and indifference too. The world is still absurd.

I still rant and rave about the old men and women in power who have a philosophy of becoming masters of the universe. But I know those who climb this slippery slope won't stay there for many years and I love that thought too. As Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*.

All that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity.