



Unfinished sketch of Kierkegaard (1813-1855) by his cousin Niels Christian Kierkegaard, c. 1840

“The self is a relationship, which in relating itself to itself, and willing itself to be itself, is grounded transparently in the power which posited it.” - Søren Kierkegaard

“With this ring I thee wed. With my body I thee worship:”
Book of Common Prayer: Solemnization of Matrimony 1552

Much of the following, I have pondered for most of my adult life. Yet, I would never have gotten to express this except in partnership with my beloved Mary Farrar. One way to read this reflection is to start with the last page.

Ken's Kierkegaard Pilgrimage

Prologue - Being in My Body

When I was two, my father was killed liberating the port of Antwerp, Belgium. My brother was 8 months old. Whether she wished it or not, I grew into being my mother's protector. She was an intellectual and perhaps became even more emotionally remote. Subliminally, I became 'her man', so much so, that my sexuality did not appear until I was in my early twenties. As her protector and 'partner' I never let her touch me. We did not hug until I was in my early 40s.

Most all of us have experienced the desire for both pleasure and connection in sex. That is the fundamental driver in partnering. I married the first woman with whom I made love. I was her first partner too. After eleven years, two children, living communally, working globally, our marriage was winding down. Unknown to me, she was in a process of coming out, and no longer interested in sex with me. With my travelling extensively for work I chose to have several one-night stands. I began to experience myself as being attractive. I began to 'warm'. After 16 years we left the Order: Ecumenical and divorced.

Though slowly diminishing, being distant was also part of how my second somewhat satisfying marriage worked. Also enduring sixteen years, we co-parented my children and had careers. Nevertheless, we were sexually bored. She wanted me to 'talk dirty' and I wanted spirit intensity. After a major depression, I was opening to depth.

Starting at age 58, my third partnership was with a highly experienced younger woman, was long-distance, and endured almost five years. To my amazement, through her, I began to experience orgasm drawing me into the awesome presence of being-itself. She taught me about the universe of sensuality and bodily pleasure. For a time, I was in love. In the end, my partner was more in love with security.

My fourth partnership was brief but allowed me to know what I didn't want. During it I retired, left rural Quebec, and moved to rural Eastern Ontario. With considerable despair at failing again, I arrived at another level of owning my life.

In September of '08, I moved to the small village of Sharbot Lake. There I had my last marriage of twelve years. It had many wonderful aspects. For a time, we were very much in love. In the end, as we were turning 80, she left me, to return to the city of her family, and her social life. In that time, my anger over choosing to give myself away, imagining that I had to 'look after', significantly diminished. Our deep seated traumas that initially gave us an exciting fit became irresolvable challenges.

Recognizing this tragic ending as great opportunity, in December '21 I began nine months of somatic (body-centred) therapy, which to my most profound gratitude, allowed me to appropriate many of my life-long resistances. Part of that exploration was watching Love, Sex & Goop, five erotic types – mine being Energetic where some really get into the spiritual aspect of sexuality. There's this sense of reaching or attaining enlightenment through our sexual energy. Here I was, in my 80th year still living the despair and hope of wanting to at least finish my life on the shore of great romance, if not its very depths. Once more, I went looking, and was found.

At the end of April '22, out of nowhere, by virtue of an algorithm, Mary Farrar friended me on Facebook. As she describes it, her unconscious immediately acknowledged the spirit expressed in my face.

Who is this woman? Google provided lots of information - protector of turtles and Kingston heritage buildings, her 55-year marriage and her husband's obituary, her 4 children, a PhD, and much more. Two weeks later, on Friday, May 13, we went for a walk near her condo at the mouth of the Cataraqui River and Lake Ontario. She told me of her decade-long mission for the historic Kingston Inner Harbour. After a mere 2 hours and 40 minutes, before we had touched, before we had looked into each other's eyes, Mary turned to me and said, "I have two things left on my bucket list. Write my memoirs and experience tantric sex. What about sex?" I took a deep breath, took one short step back, and said, "I'm your man". We hugged and were awestruck. Moments later I said, "I love you." She replied, "You can't say that." "Well, yes, I can. That's my business." Back on her patio, sitting in silence, we could not move. What had happened? Five days later, Mary came to Sharbot Lake and within two minutes we were naked,

lying in bed together. For the first few weeks, we dismantled her default setting of hating her body image.

1. We Live with Awe

The pathways into a state of awe are infinite. It is ever in our midst.

My initial experiences of being humbled in awe came in sixteen years (10 hours a week) (age 8 to 24) of singing in a highly disciplined choir of men and boys at St. Matthew's Anglican Church in Ottawa. Our English organist and choir master yearned to evoke awe. There were a handful of occasions, usually with the introduction of post war choral music, where time stopped, both for the choir and the congregation. I was captivated.

In the summer of '66, prior to becoming sexually active, while being a part of the Student Christian Movement and the Student Union for Peace Action's North Kingston Community Project, I experienced an event of immense separation - surprisingly disrupted by cosmic union. Despite immeasurable despair, I was able to receive an event of infinite love and a three-day experience of awe.

I was entrenched in opposition to a young member of our community team. I was in a Quaker-style consensus meeting in a dingy basement at night, where I was about to confront Stephen with his irresponsible use of our resources, money I had raised for our project. Out of nowhere, a deep voice within me said, "Well, you can love him too." I shuddered. Instead of speaking I collapsed and wept. I wanted to bow at his feet. Instead, I went outside, lay down on the grass and looked at the immensity of the cosmos, a cosmos that had just personally addressed me. In silence I rested for an hour or so.

I have lived my life as an outlier, chasing the awe of our era. In 40 years 'working,' only 4 of those were under a 'boss'. Since the 50s, I have been drawn to taking on racism, community development with poor whites, opposing the Vietnam War, waking up Christian congregations to parish care, supporting ghettoized American blacks, strategic planning with a 3rd world hi-tech company, awakening public participation in hundreds of communities and neighbourhoods, challenging institutional workplace sexism and homophobia, and facilitating men's (mostly white) support groups. Now, here I am partnered with Mary Farrar, addressing 'sex in our 80s'.

In the first few weeks, I shared with her my transposition of a portion of the *Song of Songs*. This poetry came to haunt me a few years before the end of my last marriage.

Angelic in Delirium

At night in my bed, I longed for you. I longed for you, but I found you not.
I called out to you. I called out to you, but you did not answer. You did not answer.

I got up and walked the town looking for you. I looked for you, but I found you not.
I ran into the police, and I asked, "Have you seen whom I love with my whole being?"

Moments later, I found you. I found you and would not let you go.
I would not let you go until I brought you into the chamber of my very being.

I tell you all – do not disturb! Until my soul's beloved pleases me, do-not-disturb!

Your left hand is under my head. Your right hand caresses me.
Your left hand is under my head. Your right hand caresses me.

Wear me as a pendant over your heart. Wear me as a tattoo round your arm.
Wear me as a pendant over your heart. Wear me as a tattoo round your arm.

Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away,
I will be with your mountain of myrrh, your hill of frankincense.

Awake, O north wind, and come, O south.
I sleep, but my heart wakes. I sleep, but my heart wakes.

And lips of my love drop as the honeycomb.
Honey and milk are under your tongue.

For love is strong as death. Defensiveness, cruel as the grave.
It blazes up like an explosion, fiercer than any flame.
Its rage is volcanic, with a most vehement flame.

Many waters cannot quench love. Neither can the floods drown it.
Many waters cannot quench love. Neither can the floods drown it.

I will rise now. The winter past. The rain is over and gone.

Transposed from the *Song of Songs* written in Aramaic at least 2300 years ago.

We immediately identified with this poetry.

Your left hand is under my head. Your right hand caresses me.
Your left hand is under my head. Your right hand caresses me.

2. A Context for Eroticism – Bodies Embracing the Eternal, with Death as our Friend.

With me 79 and Mary 81, we were keenly aware of mortality, our mortality. After about eight weeks, Mary and I were looking for context. Our heightened consciousness fast-tracked us to looking for intellectual frameworks that informed our never-ending awesome state of intense love.

On the one hand, in all our life experience, the passion of our partnering was unparalleled. We knew no precedents. We were in a stage of life, beyond careers, beyond raising children, beyond having to prove ourselves. We we're free to engage with each other.

On the other hand, with a world-wide aging humanity, there must be thousands upon thousands of seniors falling in love and welcoming eroticism into this final phase. Mary began reading several books and articles. Some family and friends sent us others. We were experiencing the bliss of the eternal in the context of the immediacy of our temporality, our deaths.

Appearing at that moment was a posting by Maria Popova in *The Marginalian*. "That transcendent turbulence of mutual truth-refinement is a centerpiece of the altogether fantastic *In Praise of Love* by French philosopher Alain Badiou (b. January 17, 1937) — an impassioned and immensely insightful defense of both love as a human faculty and love as a worthwhile philosophical pursuit."

Excerpts from *In Praise of Love* by Alain Badiou

"Love... is a quest for truth... truth in relation to something quite precise: what kind of world does one see when one experiences it from the point of view of two and not one? What is the world like when it is experienced, developed and lived from the point of view of difference and not identity? That is what I believe love to be.

"Love isn't simply about two people meeting and their inward-looking relationship: it is a construction, a life that is being made, no longer from the perspective of One but from the perspective of Two.

"Love cannot be reduced to the first encounter, because it is a construction. The enigma in thinking about love is the duration of time necessary for it to flourish. **In fact, it isn't the ecstasy of those beginnings that is remarkable. The latter are clearly ecstatic, but love is above all a construction that lasts.** We could say that love is a tenacious adventure. The adventurous side is necessary, but equally so is the need for tenacity. To give up at the first hurdle, the first serious disagreement, the first quarrel, is only to distort love. Real love is one that triumphs lastingly, sometimes painfully, over the hurdles erected by time, space, and the world.

"To make a declaration of love is to move on from the event-encounter to embark on a construction of truth. The chance nature of the encounter morphs into the assumption of a beginning. And often what starts there lasts so long, is so charged with novelty and experience of the world that in retrospect it doesn't seem at all random and contingent, as it appeared initially, but almost a necessity. **That is how chance is curbed: the absolute contingency of the encounter with someone I didn't know finally takes on the appearance of destiny.** The declaration of love marks the transition from chance to destiny, and that's why it is so perilous and so burdened with a kind of horrifying stage fright. (Later, through Michael May, I discovered he was quoting Kierkegaard. "Necessity is the unity of possibility and actuality.")

"The locking in of chance is an anticipation of eternity. ... The problem then resides in inscribing this eternity within time. Because, **basically, that is what love is: a declaration of eternity to be fulfilled or unfurled as best it can be within time: eternity descending into time.**

“Happiness in love is the proof that time can accommodate eternity. And you can also find proof ... in the pleasure given by works of art and the almost supernatural joy you experience when you at last grasp in depth the meaning of a scientific theory.

For the next four months, Mary and I poured over this book. Although Badiou was a self-declared Marxist, intriguingly for me, he embraced the phenomenon of their being an ‘event’ - that took on meaning through ‘construction’. This process is identical to the emergence of Christianity, a reality that Badiou wrote about earlier in his life.

Early in Chapter II, entitled PHILOSOPHERS AND LOVE, he writes:

“On the one hand, there is the “anti-love” philosophy. e.g., Schopenhauer. On the other, you find philosophers who transform love into one of the highest levels of subjective experience. That is the case with Søren Kierkegaard, for example. For Kierkegaard there are three levels of existence. At the aesthetic level, the experience of love is one of vain seduction and repetition. The selfishness of pleasure and the very selfishness of that pleasure drive individuals on, the archetype being Mozart’s Don Juan. At the ethical level, love is genuine and demonstrates its own seriousness. It is an eternal commitment, turned towards the absolute, something Kierkegaard himself experienced in his long courtship with the young Regine. The ethical level can lead the way to the highest level, the religious level, if the absolute value of the commitment endorsed is marriage. Marriage is thus conceived not as a strengthening of the social bond against the perils of wayward love, but as the institution that channels genuine love towards its fundamental destination. **The final transfiguration of love becomes possible when “the Ego plunges through its own transparency to meet the power that has created it”: that is, when thanks to the experience of love, the Ego roots itself in its divine source.** Love then moves beyond seduction and, through the serious mediation of marriage, becomes a way to accede to the super-human. [I would now say, ‘the profoundly human’. kf]

“As you can see, philosophy struggles with a huge tension. On the one hand, love seen as a natural extravagance of sex arouses a kind of rational suspicion. Conversely, we see an apology for love that borders on religious epiphany. Christianity hovers in the background, a religion of love after all. And the tension is almost unbearable. Thus, when Kierkegaard was finally unable to contemplate the idea of marrying Regine, he broke with her. In the end, he represented the aesthete seducer of the first level, lived the ethical promise of the second and failed to make the transition, via the real-life seriousness of marriage, to the third level. Nonetheless, he visited the whole gamut of forms of philosophical love.

Badiou was referencing Kierkegaard, the father of existentialism, the writer of *The Sickness unto Death*, as his primary philosophical archetype for where “the Ego plunges through its own transparency to meet the power that has created it”. I was enthralled. Along with Bultmann, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, and Niebuhr, Kierkegaard was at the very core of the philosophical foundations of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago, and the Institute of Cultural Affairs. For sixteen years I was a dedicated member of its supporting community, the Order: Ecumenical. This experience has guided the rest of my life. It provided my core formation.

3. A Kierkegaard Pilgrimage

Back in the fall of '22, when Mary proposed a visit to her Danish family in Copenhagen, I recalled the 'send-outs' of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago staff to other countries. In the late '60s, in an early morning Collegium, we would gather to hear and reflect on the intentions of the 'Penetration Team'. We were never tourists. We travelled intentionally. Alongside of visiting Mary's family, how could we make Søren Kierkegaard a part of our eight-day visit to Denmark? Again, how could I make the 'event' of going to Kierkegaard's birthplace an opportunity to explore his life and metaphor as a meaningful vehicle for expressing my own willingness in the act of making love with Mary, to be transparently grounded in that which posits me?

I began by consulting with the following:

- Michael May – Interior Mythos Journeys

“As a teenager I regularly traveled to the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago to take weekend courses after my initial exposure to Religious Studies 1 at age 14. An unfamiliar name I often encountered and heard uttered with a certain aura of reverence from the pedagogues I idolized, was “Søren Kierkegaard.”

Michael is a lifetime devoté of Kierkegaard. Michael has absorbed hundreds of Kierkegaard phrases, expressing them in CMT - Contemporary Mythic Translation, a process also used by Kierkegaard.

From Michael's *One Second to Choose – The Freedom of No Choice* – Søren Kierkegaard, 1850

“A human being is flow, but what is flow? Flow is the self. But what is the self?”

The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relations' relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the forever, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis.

The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.”

- Beret Griffith – Order: Ecumenical Archives

Beret connected us with Dr. Gordon Marino, who taught philosophy at St. Olaf College, Minnesota, and was the curator of the Kierkegaard Library. He recommended we visit the north coast town of Gilleleje. Parts of it are the same as when Kierkegaard summered there and walked its coastal paths nearly two hundred years ago. I now have Marino's book, *Kierkegaard*

in the Present Age. Marino's Foreword begins with a quote from the first paragraph of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*:

"If it were true – as conceited shrewdness, proud of not being deceived, thinks – that one should believe nothing which he can not see by means of his physical eyes, then first and foremost one ought to give up believing in love. If one did it out of fear of being deceived, would not one then be deceived? ... To cheat oneself out of love is the most terrible deception; it is an eternal loss for which there is no reparation, either in time or in eternity."

Marino continues... 'Kierkegaard convinced me that serious, and for that matter, scholarly writing need not be synonymous with being objective and impersonal. ... For Kierkegaard, a serious author is a concerned person who strives to speak to his reader in a meaningful way about meaningful issues.' **'The opposite of objectivity is self-concern. The highest expression of self-concern is a concern for ones' God relationship.'**

- Jo Nelson led me back to hers and Wayne's book, *Getting to the Bottom of ToP*.

"Kierkegaard attempts to describe the process of becoming what we may call a realized self. We don't just run out and become a realized "self" right away. There is no instant spirit in a box, just add water, here. For Kierkegaard it is like a play with two acts. He uses *spirit* and *self* as active words because they represent activities of the self. **Our deepest self is not a noun, but a verb. It is not a "being" like a certain thing or a certain person, but "be-ing" like a dynamic ongoing activity or process. It has two aspects, attentionality and intentionality.**"

For sure these words are intimate.

- Gene Marshall – Realistic Living – from Chapter 11 of his book, *The Thinking Christian*.

"Furthermore, faith comes as an actual possibility to one of us only when our despair of our ongoing life appears to us as a doorway through which we can walk back to a more realistic mode of living. **As persons of faith, each of us, all by ourselves, must choose to walk through that doorway of despair to a new life of greater realism. This is the Kierkegaardian optimism: our spirit sickness (despair) shows us the doorway to our spirit health.** When we see how we are creating our own despair, we can also see the possibility of faith—that trust in Profound Reality that heals our despair over the Profound Reality that we are confronting."

- Hannah Carlsen – Mary's daughter, Hannah lives in Christiana, Copenhagen. Her friend Jeppe Strøbech is a Kierkegaardian scholar. It was her plan that we should meet.
- David Dunn – David introduced me to *Jung and Kierkegaard – Researching a Kindred Spirit in the Shadows* by Amy Cook. From Jung's *The Undiscovered Self* (1957). From Cook's chapter one:

"The individual who is not anchored in God can offer no resistance on his own resources to the physical and moral blandishments of the world.' **What Jung describes as being**

anchored in God, Kierkegaard with a greater sense of poetry describes as ‘resting transparently’. At the heart of Jung’s psychological treatment and Kierkegaard’s existential synthesis is the shared belief that man has the capacity through the discovery of his unconscious life to heal himself.”

“... I believe the strongest link between Kierkegaard and Jung is to be found: namely that journey towards the self is a religious one. **In the works of Kierkegaard and Jung, immediate experience is the defining quality of religion; it is a very direct, personal encounter that emanates from within, and by the same token, one’s religious experience of the encounter – which Jung refers to in direct allusion to Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) as a *numinous* encounter, is individual and personal.** That is to say, authentic religious experience is not something that is taught or passed down by religious authorities. Individuation (the painful journey of integrating one’s shadow) then is understood as our relation with the God within:

‘The seat of faith, however, is not consciousness but spontaneous religious experience, which brings the individual’s faith into immediate relation with God. Here we must ask: Have I any religious experience and immediate relation to God, and hence that certainty which will keep me, as an individual, from dissolving in the crowd?’

Inherent in the works of Jung and Kierkegaard is the ethereal sense that when wholeness is attained, God is found. ... What is required is the submission to one’s calling as a person, an act of humility that allows the deeper mysteries of personality to be engaged with – those that exist beyond the ego’s everyday awareness.”

From Cook’s chapter four:

“The religious spirit is our capacity for and urge towards a conscious relationship to a personal deity. A disorder in our relationship to this religious instinct can lead to illness, just as we can fall ill from disorder in our relation to any other instinct. **Repression of one’s sexuality can lead to the development of pathological symptoms, and so too the religious instinct – which, when thwarted, will also lead to the outbreak of pathology.** The task of selfhood, a task that Jung and Kierkegaard share, is to unify opposing and incongruous elements through a synthesis that results in the self becoming itself before God.”

Next, I went online and ordered a recent biography entitled:

- *Philosopher of the Heart – The Restless Life of Søren Kierkegaard* by Clare Carlisle.

“Writing in the wake of his broken love affair and seeking, however indirectly, to explain his change of heart to Regine, Kierkegaard has found a new way of doing philosophy. In addressing one particular human being in a singular situation, he has tapped into something universal – for the idea that ‘every human being is the single individual’ is becoming more powerful in his work. He is creating a philosophy anchored in experience, in those questions made vivid by life’s uncertainties and decisions; his concepts and arguments arise from the compelling drama of being human that unfolds

within every person. A century later, his insight into the philosophical significance of ‘the single individual’ will inspire an entire generation of ‘existentialists’ to argue that human nature is not a fixed, timeless essence, nor a biological necessity, but a creative task for each individual life.”

- Alan Richard - Realistic Living

After returning from Denmark, in the July 2023 issue of Realistic Living, Alan reviewed *James Baldwin’s Collected Essays*, and writes this deeply informative reflection.

“It was an expression of his own sense of religion to sense love as sensual, organic, and not in our control, but vulnerable to our refusal of it, as an affirmation of and joy of life as it is, not in general, but as each one’s life full of limits and unimaginable suffering, is.

Love’s mystery is for Baldwin buried deep in our body, rather than hidden in the mind, and our society’s pathological mistrust of the body, the war of spirit and flesh, is for him our culture’s original sin and the original sin of its form of Christianity. It must give way to a respect for joy in the flesh if we are ever to recover the power of love as the ‘greatest’ of the familiar trinity of human responses to the divine. And this recovery, he reminds us, is our only hope.”

4. My Question

My Kierkegaard pilgrimage began by consulting colleagues and reading a variety of authors. Each one provided a ‘station’ from which to experience him. No doubt there could be a thousand more. With these excerpts, my wish is to put my lifelong yearnings into a coherent, poetic narrative, a witness, an assertion.

In that ... “The self is a relationship, which in relating itself to itself, and willing itself to be itself, is grounded transparently in the power which posited it,”... **what is the context in which one can experience orgasm - my partner’s and mine - as ‘a profound willingness to be grounded transparently in the power which posited it’?** In orgasm one is helpless, without ego, yet utterly connected.

How can I authentically use Kierkegaard’s experience ‘that divine truth could be embodied within the world, in a human body’, and at the same moment make a worship of one’s partners’ body-spirit? Of course, it can be experienced as sacred. How can Mary and I contribute to making this aspiration more accessible? Part of the challenge is overcoming centuries of body-fear and hatred, body-spirit dualism, the objectification of sexual pleasure, and the premise that old folks don’t have ecstatic sexual intimacy.

5. Finding Kierkegaard in Gilleleje and Copenhagen

We arrived in Copenhagen on the afternoon of Friday, July 7th and were greeted by Hannah Carlsen. In 1961, Mary was pregnant and went to Copenhagen for an abortion, however her pregnancy was too advanced. There, she had her baby, named her Hannah – ‘favoured by god’. That was her name in her Canadian passport. It was retained by her adoptive parents in

Denmark. 27 years ago, Hannah contacted Mary. This is their 9th reunion. 19 months ago, Hannah's daughter Mika and partner Egil, had Alvina, Mary's great-granddaughter. We came to celebrate Alvina. We are bathed in the warmth of family.

On Sunday, July 9th, we began our Kierkegaard Pilgrimage, as recommended by Gordon Marino, with a trip to Gilleleje, still a fishing town and seaside resort on the shores of the Kattegat, within sight of Sweden, 15 km away. With thatched roofs and narrow cobblestone roads, some parts were the same as when Kierkegaard was there 188 years before. That was certainly true of the coastal walking path we took 80' above the shoreline. While signage for Kierkegaard pilgrims was sparse, there was a monument to him.



After a long walk along this same path, the 22-year-old student, yet to fall in love with Regine, wrote his philosophical manifesto. From Claire Carlisle's *Philosopher of the Heart*:

“Still in character as a Romantic poet, Kierkegaard took an evening walk on the northernmost cliffs of the Gilleleje coast and looked out to sea. Oceanic feelings should come naturally to a Danish soul; listening to ‘the deep but quietly earnest song of the sea’ and to the ‘evening prayers’ of the birds, he imagined himself ‘empowered to see things differently’. On August 1, 1835, he wrote:

‘As I stood there, free from the depression and despondency that would make me see myself excluded from the men who usually surround me, or free of the pride that would make me the constituting principle of a little circle – as I stood there alone and forsaken and the brute force of the sea and the battle of the elements reminded me of my nothingness, and on the other hand the sure flight of the birds reminded me of Christ’s words: ‘Not a sparrow will fall to earth

without your heavenly Father's will', I felt at one and the same how great and insignificant I am.'

'What I really need is to get clear about *what I must do*, not what I must know, except insofar as knowledge must precede every act. **What matters is to find a purpose, to see what it is that God wills I shall do: the crucial thing is to find a truth that is true for me, to find 'the idea for which I am willing to live or die.** Of what use would it be to me to discover a so-called objective truth, to work through the philosophical systems so that I could, if asked, make critical judgements about them; of what use would it be to develop a theory about the state, getting details from various sources and combining them into a whole, and constructing a world I did not live in but merely held up for others to see; of what use would it be to be able to formulate the meaning of Christianity, to be able to explain many specific points – if it had no deeper meaning *for me and my life*? I certainly do not deny that I still accept an *imperative of knowledge* and that through it men may be influenced, but *then it must come alive in me*, and *this is what I now recognize as the most important of all. This is what my soul searches for as the African deserts thirst for water. This is what I need to live, a completely human life and not merely one of knowledge*, so that I can base the development of my thought not on – yes, not on something called objective – something which in any case is not my own, but upon **something which is bound up with the deepest roots of my existence, through which I am, so to speak, grafted into the divine, to which I cling fast even though the whole world may collapse.** *This is what I need, and this is what I strive for.* A man must first learn to know himself before knowing anything else. Not until he has inwardly understood *himself* and then sees the course he has to take does his life gain peace and meaning: only then is he free of that irksome, sinister travelling companion – that irony of life which manifests itself in the sphere of knowledge.'

By this time Kierkegaard had spent five years at university and seemed to be nowhere near completing his theology degree: when he doubted the value of theoretical knowledge, he was questioning the meaning of his own existence."

[I would add that it would be everyone's good fortune to have this experience. In the 60s we asked: 'Who am I?' 'What do I?' and, 'How be I?' I am still answering these questions pioneered by the father of existentialism.]

In the middle of this walk, I was having a conversation with granddaughter Mika about the pronunciation of the Danish word *hygge*, meaning cozy contentment, undoubtedly a word unknown to Kierkegaard. Despite my discouraging her, Mary insisted on interrupting. This led to our most serious conflict in our entire time of partnership. While it was about her respecting my boundaries, it was also about me appreciating her sense of genuine confusion. It took us four months of careful encounter, and an essay on *Love: An Interpretation* by Alan Richard, to absorb and embrace this moment.

We celebrated our time on the coast with delicious seafood and walnut beer, made with a recipe dating back to the 16th century.

On Wednesday, July 11th, with Hannah as our guide, we took a second walking tour of the downtown. On our way out of Christiania, we stopped to chat with Jeppe Strøbech, a local Kierkegaard scholar. While he is a full member of a long-time Kierkegaard study group associated with the University of Copenhagen, he was once a successful drug dealer and a drug addict. When he withdrew from the drug culture, he so missed the ongoing contact with street culture, he became a hot dog vender. His truck sits in his laneway. In that role he is never short of community contact.

When he came out to chat with us, I told him of our interest. Immediately he asked if I spoke Danish. That revealed how close I could get to his hero. I didn't speak any. He went back into his home and came out with 16"/40cm replica of a statue of Christ. The original is in the downtown Lutheran Church of our Lady, where the Kierkegaard family once worshipped. Jeppe was blissfully consumed with this miniature in his arms, the original of which was the meditative centre of Kierkegaard's gaze, when attending his local church.

Next, he told us of a member of his group that has been devotedly studying the same twelve paragraphs of Kierkegaard's writings for two decades. Finally, he went back and got his copy of *Kierkegaard's Concept of Despair* by Michael Theunissen, a 2005 book translated from German into English. I ordered it immediately. Meeting such a devoté gave us the sense that unlike tourism signage, Kierkegaard was alive and well in Copenhagen! This book arrived before I got home. I have begun to read it.

An hour later, we were there. At the high altar, Jesus is portrayed as bowing ever so slightly, with his arms open and hands turned a bit downwards. The caption in Danish is KOMMER TIL MIG, 'come unto me'. Yet in the church, the English translation reads 'come *into* me'. A typo? Or a nuance? For Mary, 'into' was much more meaningful than 'unto'. This conveyed a truly bodily sense of communion, of being in-christ.

Hannah is sitting in Kierkegaard's pew near the back.





In the centre, the corner brown brick building, this side of the green copper spire, was once the home of the Kierkegaard family. There is no plaque. On the right is where Kierkegaard lived from 1848 to 1850. There he wrote *The Sickness unto Death* – one is in despair if one is not struggling to discern the will of God for oneself; and *Practice in Christianity* – experiencing God is a leap of faith, an indirect communication, and cannot be experienced rationally. There is a small plaque in Danish.

6. My Kierkegaard Pilgrimage Souvenirs

First of course, is that in the context of affirming our grounding in that which posits us, we are always free to choose our relationship to ourselves. Where is our attention? What is our intent? There is never a moment when our ego is ultimately in charge. While suffering is inescapable, am I open to being with Ultimate Reality?

Kierkegaard's style of writing to Regine, informed him that revelation occurs one person at a time. Each person exists on their own unique journey. His writing shifted to address each person's heart – one person at a time. I too am invited to reflect, not with ideas, but with my existence.

Kierkegaard invites us to live simultaneously in the flow of the temporal and the eternal. 'Eternal rest' once meant death. Now 'eternal rest' is an invitation to surrender to endlessness in each moment of our lives, in our suffering and in our joy. Can I say 'yes' to each particular that shows up? Can I trust everything as forever love?

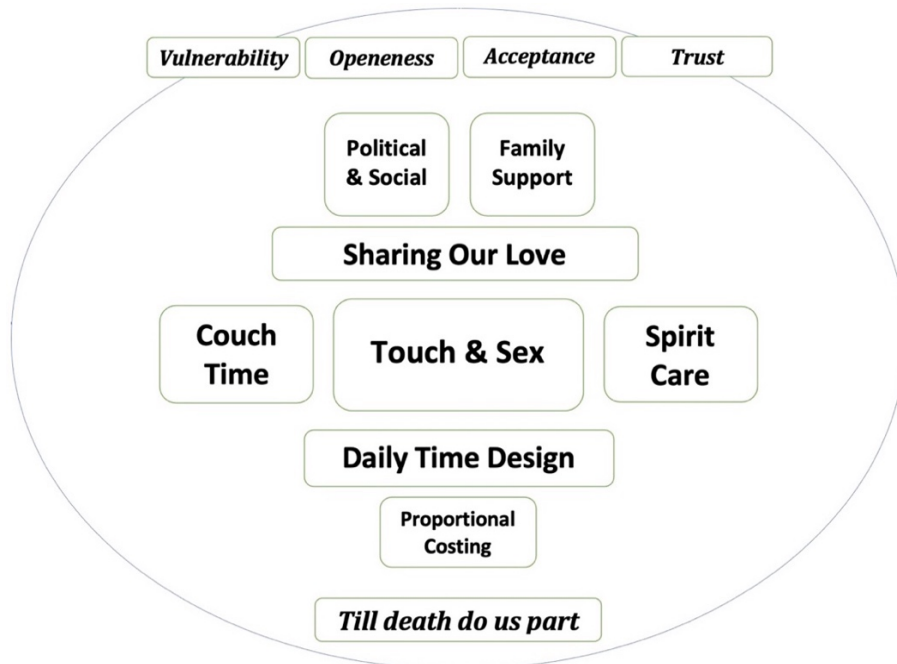
7. "With this ring I thee wed. With my body I thee worship."

In our eighties, we are old, writing the final chapters of our lives. In meeting we were astounded as to our similarities. We both are Enneagram #8 – Reformers, first-borns, respected community activists, enjoy being fit, culturally Anglican, white, educated, dance, financially autonomous, Virgos, and family oriented.

Almost immediately we began to develop two practices. One was contemplative. Both of us had a daily contemplative time which we now share at the beginning of each day. The other was sexual. While Mary had a fifty-five-year marriage with children, world travels, and career satisfaction, her erotic life was made up of long-ago memories. It is beyond words to grasp our immediate affinity and willingness to explore and share our personal depths of ecstasy. With eros as our guide, ever deeper, we continue to journey.

In both practices, my prayerful mantra is, 'Let me be with you.'

Eight months after meeting, while never legally marrying, we 'honeymooned' in Costa Rica where we created an image of our covenant. We continue to live separately, sharing each other's space about four days a week.



The utterly startling bodily love that we share has become our primary communication. Within this naked, unpretentious, and vulnerable state, we have grown in love and understanding. On our first anniversary, we shared rings.



Our struggle with our 'Copenhagen stand-off' continued into mid-November. Alongside our ecstatic times, we were also in deep pain. To be? Or not to be? We kept looking for a context that would support transformation. Once again, wisdom came from Alan Richard in the form of his essay, *Love: An Interpretation*, in the November 2023 issue of Realistic Living.

Alan writes:

My recent experience with erotic love has shown me that grand-daddy Kierkegaard rightly identified neighbor-love as what love qua love essentially is, with erotic and other particular expressions of love being what love does with our drives and inclinations, transforming them into its expressions. Erotic love only seems to contradict love qua love when we forget that subtracting neighbor-love from erotic love leaves only an imaginary satisfaction of drives and inclinations. But my ongoing experience also shows me how erotic love inevitably shows us the neighbor and even, sometimes, the enemy *in* the beloved, challenging us to love the real person in front of us rather than the object of desire our brain circuits have composed from our memories of mother, father, siblings, and other figures we took to be loving without thinking about it. When the beloved shatters the image I have projected on to him or her, it is only the affirmation that Reality is good, when Reality gives me the other and not just a being with a will bound entirely to my wants, that enables me to abide in love with the beloved rather than abiding resentfully or seeking to escape from the connection.

With that affirmation, the aspects of erotic love rooted in drives and inclinations are re-evaluated. Drives and inclinations are on an equal footing with external factors that I have determined when and where I show up and every being I will encounter, meaning every neighbor. Not only is the beloved my neighbor through the distance from the image projected on to him (or her) by these unconscious forces in my brain, but even through his (or her) *resemblance* to that image since it is not I but God behind those drives and inclinations and behind the series of encounters that have shaped them since I was in the womb. Loving Reality means that every event within me and every event outside of me is affirmed, that every encounter is first and foremost Reality loving me by placing my neighbor in my path, and secondly my response to a particular neighbor with a particular relationship to me. Loving my beloveds and my neighbors, then means loving them precisely as the erotic beloveds they are to me and not generically or abstractly. Before this, however, it means loving Reality for both the drives and inclinations that led me to them, and for the frustration of these drives resulting from their existence as free others with their own agency and thus as neighbors instead of embodied wish-dreams.

... When we say "yes" to Reality, we make it our God. ... We affirm that all this is not the fickle and untrustworthy hand of fate, but the mighty work done for us by a loving God. ... The experience of bodily love, in each and every instance, teaches us one lesson that saves. That lesson is contained in three words. God. Is. Love.

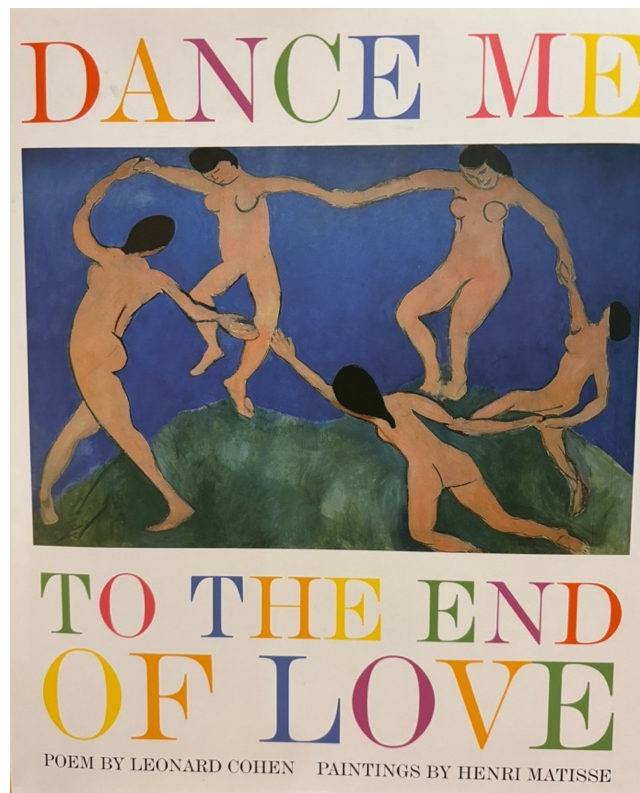
Surprisingly, at 81, I no longer take Viagra. With Mary, I can be erect for minutes. I reach orgasm only with loving stimulation. At 83, Mary remains ever moist and aroused.

From October 30th Mary writes:

And then the wonderful sex I had been longing for. First, he tantalizes me by touching my nipple while we are lying side-by-side. Then he kneels on a pillow on the floor beside the bed while I lie on the edge of the bed with my legs open and he mouths my clitoris while rubbing his two-day stubble against the entry to my vagina. His fingers are touching my nipples. Eventually satiated, I collapse. This is followed by us lying on the bed side-by-side with him reaching around my back to massage my clitoris and vagina so softly with coconut oil while I do the same with his penis, until he is fully aroused enough for me to mount him. Again, his fingers are touching my nipples. This followed by what is our usual – me inserting my coconut-oil-covered index finger into his anus to touch his prostate. With his right thumb and middle finger, he then clasps g-spot in my vagina and clitoris. His penis is in my mouth, and I am holding his shaft with my hand. I feel like I am holding and massaging his very essence. I like his taste. And on and on, until he comes screaming loudly and then laughs hysterically. There we are. Fulfilled. Connected to one another and beyond.

She then leaves the bed, washes her hands, returns, and jumps on me, still laughing, straddling her naked body on top of mine. Bliss!

Your left hand is under my head. Your right hand caresses me.
Your left hand is under my head. Your right hand caresses me.



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