

Legacy Tips & Tools

Context:

Shaping our Lives and Legacies

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**“Perhaps we are like stones;
our own history and the history of the world
embedded in us....” - Susan Griffin**

Susan Griffin’s astonishing and perception changing *A Chorus of Stones* clarifies the unavoidable and stark reality of how world events shape our personal values and lives.

I get it that in a moment everything I love and value can disappear in a cyclone, an earthquake, a tornado, a flood or fire. But Griffin’s book is not about natural disasters. It is a powerful treatise illuminating the interplay between private suffering and public tragedy, the violence in families and in world wars. She writes:

“I have come to believe that every life bears in some way on every other. The motion of cause and effect is like the motion of a wave in water, continuous... so that all consequences, whether we know them or not, are intimately embedded in our experience.”

An example from my own life: It’s November, 1963. I’m a young married woman, an English teacher in a New Jersey high school. It’s 4th period, and I head to the teachers’ lounge for coffee, thinking about the weekend ahead. The room is deserted except for a history teacher who tells me that President Kennedy has been shot. We leave the building to listen to her car radio. We return silently after hearing Walter Cronkite announce to the nation that the President is dead, assassinated in Dallas.

My story, indelible in my psyche, is neither unusual nor particularly dramatic -- everyone of a certain age remembers where they were when they heard about JFK, just as we are still telling the story of where we were on 9-11, the day the World Trade Center was attacked.



But Griffin’s point is that the impact of world events radically transforms

our personal lives. I couldn’t agree more.

JFK’s death changed my life. My grieving for the loss of JFK resulted in a vow that I would “do for my country” and I served two years in the Peace Corps, in Tunisia in the mid-60s. Who I became and how my values evolved were significantly different from the high school English teacher I was before November 22, 1963.

Reflection, Writing & Practice: Exploring ways your private life has been shaped by public events:

1. First make a list of events that come to your mind as being significant. Begin with the events of your own family: immigration, marriages, births, divorces, diseases, abuses, alcoholism, job losses, deaths. Then expand your list to world events: industrialization, scientific and technologic development, elections, wars, revolutions, civil rights, etc. ... you get the idea.
2. With this new recognition about the inseparable relationship between public events and private life, reflect and journal about specific influences on your life and values.
3. Write a legacy letter (or several, about different insights and for different people) sharing your insights and vignettes of your life path’s twists and turns...a letter communicating who you are and what you value in relation to the larger world of which we are all integral parts. (Editing Tip! Ask yourself: has what I have written accurately conveyed how my stories and the larger human story blend? Have I communicated my truth and deep human yearning for belonging, integrity, and how we are related to the fate of others.

May your reflections and writings expand your consciousness and compassion for yourself and for all others inhabiting our planet.

Rachael Freed

REGISTER for Temecula, California Legacy Writing Retreats, February 2009

www.WomensLegacies.com/programs.htm

CANCELLED: East Coast Retreat...Sept 21-26, 2008