

CONTROL THE PAIN- by Amy Lloyd

The United States is the most medicated country in the world. In 2003, 27 billion dollars was spent on Prozac alone, more than for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer combined.

“There is a pill for everything,” my dermatologist told me last week when I was in for my yearly mole check. One third of elementary school children are taking some form of anti-anxiety medicine, a whopping 20 million prescriptions were written for ADD medicine, with sales bringing in about \$758 million. People would rather pop a pill than examine their own psyche. Are we really a country so anguished that the need for these meds has justifiably reached epidemic proportions or are we just lazy? *Why don't people want to deal with the pain*

Time is a cultural obsession. How to get more of it, make the most of it, find the best of it, get through the bad of it. We don't want to be here and now- ever. If we did we'd have to confront our true selves. Perhaps sorrow and anger wouldn't be muted by a substance- instead, it would be allowed. The true depth and range of our feelings would be given an invitation, honoring the very ripe moment it was born into. We are afraid of the quiet moments, the in between, the expired medicine and expired memories. If we dull the pain, we are dulling everything else. It is actually possible to live a life without ever experiencing it.

“I don't have time,” is a favorite excuse. How can we not have time for our own self-nurturing? We'd rather go to the dentist than take time to investigate our inner workings, probe around a little and find the emotional source of our pain.

“You have to control the pain before the healing can begin otherwise the body is concentrating too much on the pain,” doctors explain when dispensing pain medicine. *Control* the pain, but not *examine* it.

Why do people medicate so much and so cavalierly? When I polled a group of men and women their answers included “a need for control,” “to feel less stressed out,” and “a lack of joy.” When I asked if they felt this was achieved by the meds, they all agreed there was marked improvement. When asked about the *side effects* of these same meds, the responses were: “a diminished sex drive,” “less creativity,” and “a loss of

memory.” People were willing to give up the highs along with the lows just to feel, I guess, less of it all. As an experiment I made an appointment with a well-known Los Angeles psychiatrist. I fabricated a recent break up with a boyfriend, a few sleepless night and before 12 minutes were up (I know- I clocked it) this doctor had written prescriptions for Klonopin for my anxiety, Lorazapan, and Busipro. I wasn’t even required to make another appointment. Apparently even psychiatrists don’t have time to deal with pain.

I am not suggesting that medicine isn’t appropriate for certain psychological/emotional traumas. I fully support the pursuit of balance in one’s life; However, I do find it interesting that Prozac is dispensed without mandatory therapeutic observation. It is after all, a drug; medicine is only a bridge to deal with the pain.

There is a group of people who truly live in the moment largely because they have no other choice. In the small fishing town of Phuket lives the Moken tribe. These people relocate their wood boat whenever they need food and can hold their breath longer underwater than any other humans. Instead of working against their environment, they work with it, respecting nature and honoring the land. They live purely in the moment- the future doesn’t exist. Even their language reflects this: there are no words for “when,” or “how old.” These people are too unobtrusively living in the now to care about anything that comes before or after each moment. They are without judgement of their own lives, too busy living it.

Eckhart Tolle, a Dutch spiritual teacher best known for [The Power of Now](#), suggests real healing can only occur when we direct our thoughts right through the barrel of pain. Breathe it, speak it, and feel it till the moment it is done and moves out of us, like a parasite.

Two years ago I experienced an almost suicidal depression that lasted about six weeks. I couldn’t stand how sad I felt, but I chose to remain with it. I honored what I felt until it, like all things, drifted through me and became another thread in my soul’s lining. I didn’t want to rush through it, regardless of how awful it was because I knew if I just let it live inside me, soon it would be processed and I would heal. And I did. It was, after all, wholly my experience and I wanted to have it completely.

If we continue to numb ourselves, the experience of life in all its dimensions grows smaller and grayer. How then will this affect our ability to be intimate with each other? Doesn't all this avoidance eclipse our authentic selves from being expressed?

We as a nation, as a society are all too quickly reaching for a pill rather than using these moments to communicate, to stop and listen. I don't want to cheat myself out of the highs and lows and I don't want to look back on my life, as a series of vague moments with no defined edges.

My father has been dealing with cancer for 21 years now. In spite of our incredibly fractured relationship, we have come together these last few years as his disease has progressed. I was not in denial of his condition nor was he. There was a particularly shattering day when I accompanied him and my mother to the cancer ward. He had become so fatigued from dehydration that it was critical to get him with an i.v.

I sat with them both in the tiny cancer room while they pumped saline into his veins. He moaned often and my mother wept in the chair, looking more like crumpled, unfolded laundry than a person. She fell asleep, he fell asleep and I watched over them gripped by the acute reality of all of it. I wanted to run; to gallop the hell out of that horrible stench filled hospital and my writhing dying father. I could not bear it. But I could not bear to deny it either. I made the choice, the conscious choice to be present and witness to it all. Four or so hours later, I got dad to eat a small cardboard container of vanilla ice cream, his face bloated from medicine, his eyes watery with mucous. It wasn't up to me to control his pain and it wasn't really even up to me to control mine. It was here and the thing to do it was just be with it.

Still in pain and agony, we hobbled our way back to the car and back home by midnight. Mom and I managed to get him into bed, teddy bear in his left hand, and vomit bucket in his right. Several days later, Dad called. He thanked me for being with him.

“ Amy, I was remembering the adventure we had in the cancer ward.” *Adventure*. Even as a grown woman, I was moved by father's very need to somehow make light of an event he just assume shield from his daughter's eyes.

“Of course, Dad.” I replied noticing the faintness, the weakness in his voice, the same voice that for most of my life could crush me with a scathing criticism.

“Well what do you think we should put on our special wheelchair?” Always the writer my father began to weave the fine fantastical details.

“What about a potato gun, or sirens?” I offered. He agreed those would be a nice addition. Turkey sandwiches, ice cream, of course, and a whistle were also included in our special transport. “I think it should be painted, dad,” I said.

“Of course, of course. Yellow and siren red.” Primary colors were indestructible, he told me. And everyone liked them. Finishing touches included me wearing an Indian Chief hat and attaching special wheels to the chair, so it could roll up flights of stairs.

“Where are we going on this magical wheelchair?” Expecting him to say something like Treasure Island or Italy or an interstellar planet only special people know about, his response surprised me.

“To find the doctor who can fix me, of course.” Of course.

Was this his dealing with the pain? Was it mine? Does it matter?

Love, like pain, is not in the general- love is very specific. And by the way, when you see someone’s heart, when you actually see the little thumbprints, the caves and valleys, the tangles and threads and softness and color, when you see their heart and their pain, do not, I repeat- pretend you didn’t. For that is the opposite of love, which is denial. No one wants pain, but it does tend to get our attention. And if not now, when? At the far end of a fully experienced experience is grace. I do believe that the depths match the heights and I would rather fly up in a magical wheelchair, bumps and bruises, eyes wide open any day.