

Detours: The Terror of Life's Plans Gone Awry, by Sheila Rae 3/22/09,
Wildflower Church, a Unitarian Universalist congregation, Austin, Texas

Responsive Reading:

We need one another when we
mourn and would be comforted.

*We need one another when we
are in trouble and afraid.*

We need one another when we are
in despair, in temptations, and need
to be recalled to our best selves
again.

*We need one another when we
would accomplish some great
purpose, and cannot do it alone.*

We need one another in the hour of success,
when we look for someone
to share our triumphs.

*We need one another in the hour
of defeat, when with encouragement
we might endure, and stand again.*

We need one another when we
come to die and would have gentle
hands prepare us for the journey.

*All our lives we are in need and
others are in need of us.*

--George E. Odell

Prayer to Live With Grace, by Rabbi Rami Shapiro

May we discover through pain and torment,

The strength to live

With grace and humor.

May we discover through doubt and anguish,

The strength to live with dignity and holiness.

May we discover through suffering and fear,

The strength to move toward healing.

May it come to pass that we be restored to health

And to vigor.

May life grant us wellness of body, spirit, and mind.

And if this cannot be so, may we find in this

Transformation and passage

Moments of meaning, opportunities for love

And the deep and gracious calm that comes

when we allow ourselves to move on.

(before the silence please whisper forth the names of those in need of our
love and support.)

Readings: Mary Ester Young quote by Dag Hammarskjold, and "Web", by
Denise Levertov

Reading: *Speed Dream*, [performed by Jeff Hampton in the def poetry style]

--written by Sheila Rae

Go on home, boy.

You know the way, don't you?

What are you waiting for?

It's a straight shot

And you hot!

So why not?

Why not?

Why not start?

It's the only way

Put one foot down then fall on it

Get up get up

Now move

This ain't no Route 66

So don't be lookin' to get no kicks

What could possibly go wrong, right?

Don't go on the road less traveled by--

You got *goals*, and your *soul* is so pure

And so sure of the way, Dawg

Go on go on home

It's just around the bend

Past the fork in the road
Over the mountain
Look out for the pot holes
Look out for the one-way streets
Look out for the dead ends
Look out for the u-turns
Get on with it
Dawdle not, my boy
It is sooner than you think
And later too
And louder than the silence of your own mind
and softer
Than the thump of your heart
And the speed bump you did not see coming---
Oh me, oh my

Too fast too fast
Don't look back [scream] Ayyyyyyyyyyyyyahhhhhhhh!!!
This must be the place.
[whispered] This must be the place.

Detours: The Terror of Life's Plans Gone Awry

I open my sermon today with the scripture according to soul singer, Etta James

I'm gonna tell you, so you'll understand,
About how it all got started, how it all began.
God made the heavens, God made the earth.
Made a man and a woman out of blood, sweat and dirt.
And he looked around the neighborhood.
And he said to himself: This is good.

God made the rivers, and the mountains with his hands.
God made the wind to blow the shifting sands.
He put the fishes in the deep blue sea.
Filled up the garden with flowers and the trees.
And he looked around the neighborhood.
And he said to himself: This is Good.

But the devil, he was jealous,
Took the apple in his hand.
The devil tempted woman, and woman tempted man.
God he mourned, and the tears rolled down his face.
It broke his heart to see his children fall from grace.
And on the 7th day, they say God rested, but you know that ain't the truth.
Cause on the 7th day, God made the blues.

So Adam and Eve are leaving Paradise fully dressed and in shame, carrying
baggage both literal and metaphorical, when they come to a sign on the
road. It reads "This is where things start to get interesting!"

So, you see, our theme of Detours goes way back.

The ideal working plan for anything is linear. I use this Karla Jones poem as
an example:

HOW TO DO SOMETHING

First, begin.

That's the first thing.

You begin and then you proceed.

Proceed is next.

Proceed for quite a while.

This is the main part:

The proceeding.

The proceeding is actually the meat of doing something.

If something gets done,

Credit the proceeding.

After awhile the proceeding gives way to the wind-up --

The finishing.

This transition is delicate.

Too soon is bad,

Too late expends needless energy.

At the very instant something is at last done,

Fade the proceeding and move directly to finishing.

Finish instantly. -Karla Jones.

God, I wish I could work that way! I go in spirals, collect parts unconnected and abundant, and well, maybe it is best you do not really know how I do this. Though her way is logical and efficient, I know that is not how life or detours —or sermons work. But I do have a way of starting.

I started as I always start---in the dictionary.

The word **detour** means an alternate path of travel used while a regular path of travel is temporarily closed. The original French meaning is a change of direction.

To put it more alliteratively, detour is a *roundabout road*.

A road to what? A road to where? Not all roads are rocky and awry. Winning the Lottery, Landing a great new job (or better yet being named "Employee of The Year") finding the love of your life, unexpectedly getting pregnant with who turns out to be the perfect child, moving to San Diego (or whatever city you would move to if you could), landing the lead in a long-running play on Broadway, winning the Heisman Trophy, clinching the Pillsbury Bake-off, topping the charts with a soon-to-be-an-all-time- classic, on so on.... Those are the kinds of detours which fit the part of the Dr. Seuss story Bobby read this morning. However envious we may be of these happy detours, psychologists remind us that even success brings stress. I looked up some Lottery stories on the Internet and they were rife with woeful tales of winners who lost it all in just a year or 2 for various reasons---so be careful what you wish for. Every silver lining can have its clouds.

This is the other side of "Oh the Places You'll Go, by Dr. Seuss

You will come to a place where the streets are not marked.

Some windows are lighted. But mostly they're darked.

A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin!

Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?

How much can you lose? How much can you win?

And IF you go in, should you turn left or right...

or right-and-three-quarters? Or, maybe, not quite?

Or go around back and sneak in from behind?

Simple it's not, I'm afraid you will find,

for a mind-maker-upper to make up his mind.

You can get so confused

that you'll start in to race

down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace

and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space,

headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.
The Waiting Place.....

I'm afraid that some times
you'll play lonely games too.
Games you can't win
'cause you'll play against you.

All Alone!
Whether you like it or not,
Alone will be something
you'll be quite a lot.

And when you're alone, there's a very good chance
you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants.
There are some, down the road between hither and yon,
that can scare you so much you won't want to go on.

The American Psychological Association lists the following "detours" as the most catastrophic and/or stressful. Where do you put your personal checkmarks? On which of these roundabout roads have you traveled so far?

Death of a child

Death of a partner

Death of a parent

Death of another close family member or a close friend—made, of course more horrible if the death was a suicide.

Divorce or end of committed relationship

Separation from a partner

Loss of child custody in a break-up

Felony arrest

Jail term

Parole

Drug or alcohol addiction

Major personal injury or illness [including mental illness]

Marriage

A new job or career change

Being fired from work

Marital reconciliation

Retirement

Change in residence

Prolonged depression

Change or loss of religious affiliation

Change in health of a family member

Pregnancy, especially unplanned

Birth or adoption of a child

Sexual difficulties

Sexual orientation issues

Gain of new family member such as in-law or step children or step parent

Job loss due to circumstances beyond your control—such as the current recession—or is it

A depression?

Sudden Change in your financial status-- either up or down

A Major (relative to your status), financial purchase, such as a mortgaged home

Foreclosure of a mortgage or loan

Son or daughter leaving home

Outstanding personal achievement bringing you or your partner fame or renown

Committed partner beginning or stopping work

Beginning or ending formal education

Change in living conditions and so on...

[sing] Slip slidin' away, slip slidin' away.

You know the nearer your destination

The more you're slip slidin' away

I hate these systems by which each event is assigned a rating and you add them up to see who is the most stressed to the point of breaking. Human emotions are not linear and calculable with formulas. I have had a break-up that was more like a death to me. I still, and probably ever shall grieve for its loss. Some events have consequences which never end, while others

allow for some light at the end of the long tunnel. I sometimes even have trouble with the now fairly universally accepted so-called stages of grief: The first, denial, is where we try to reject what has happened. In the second, we accept it, but still feel angry about it. In the third stage we acknowledge our sadness, and when we reach the fourth we have accepted our loss and are able to look back and enjoy the happy memories we have. This is sometimes called moving on. It is that fourth one that is the hardest hurdle, I think—at least for me. **I have been so stuck on that road---have you?**

In *Lion in Winter*, Richard the Lion-hearted is reminding the French King, Phillip, of what was probably a brief homosexual experience they had once had. He is chastising Phillip for not ever contacting him or mentioning their earlier connection. Philip replies, "I searched every in street in Hell for you!" "Strange," Richard replied, "Strange, but I never saw you there."

I am not here to dwell on grief, but to help us see the roads back from Hell. But to put all the earlier list of detours in perspective, I will elaborate a bit on one we all know about and grieve about to greater or lesser degrees. I can think of nothing so poignant as the phone calls and voice mails from the victims of 9/11 ON 9/11.

Garth Feeney called his mother, Judy, in Florida. She began with a breezy hello, she later recalled.

"Mom," he responded, "I'm not calling to chat. I'm in the World Trade Center and it's been hit by a plane."

Edmund McNally, director of technology for a financial management company, called his wife, Liz, as the floor began buckling. He hastily recited his life insurance policies and employee bonus programs. "He said that she meant the world to him and he loved her," and they exchanged what they thought were their last goodbyes.

Then her phone rang again. Her husband sheepishly reported that he had booked them on a surprise trip to Rome for her 40th birthday. "He said, 'Liz, you have to cancel that.'"

'Mom,' asked Jeffrey Nussbaum. "What was that explosion?"

Twenty miles away in Oceanside, N.Y., Arline Nussbaum could see on television what her son could not from 50 yards away. She recalls their last words:

"The other tower just went down," she told him.

"Oh my God," her son said. "I love you."

Then the phone went dead.

At death's door people pass on a responsibility-'Tell Billy I never stopped loving him and forgave him long ago.' 'Take care of Mom.' 'Pray for me, Father. Pray for me, I haven't been very good.' " They address what needs doing.

This is what we can get from the last messages. People are often stronger than they know, bigger, more gallant than they'd guess. And this: We're all lucky to be here today and able to say what deserves saying, and if we say it a lot, it won't make it common, and so unheard, but known and absorbed. I think the sound of the last messages, of what was said, will live as long in human history as the attacks themselves.

It has been noted that there is no record of anyone calling to say, "I never liked you," or, "You hurt my feelings." No one negotiated past grievances or said, "Vote for Smith." Amazingly -or not-there is no record of anyone damning the terrorists or saying "I hate them."

Here are 5 ways of laying down new tracks along unfamiliar paths. based my readings and experimentations , my observations of others, and what I believe to be true from my own life. Maybe some of them are true for you too.

First, Make a little altar to your pain. Collect or make pictures or symbols which you can look at just yourself or share with others. Write a poem or make a song or a dance or a mask or letter to God . Celebrate the lessons learned. Cry or laugh when you are before that altar. Or rage and rend your clothes. If there IS rage, lay it down there to be seen. Whatever gets it out.

In the words of the UU poet, Mary Oliver,

**I wanted the past to go away, I wanted
to leave it, like another country; I wanted
my life to close, and open
like a hinge, like a wing, like the part of the song
where it falls
down over the rocks: an explosion, a discovery;
I wanted
to hurry into the work of my life; I wanted to know,

whoever I was, I was

alive
for a little while.**

Remember to Laugh---Yes, I said Laugh. About a year and a half ago at a memorial service for Robin, one of our members who had died suddenly , her family and friends began to tell funny stories about her and soon people were laughing while tears rolled down their faces.

Maybe you're one of those who doesn't believe that laughter can be the best medicine. Well, just consider the physiological effects of a good laugh. After a slight rise in heart rate and blood pressure, there's an immediate recoil. Muscles relax, blood pressure drops below pre-laugh levels, and the brain releases endorphins (the body's natural pain killers and the same stress-reducing chemicals that are triggered by exercise). More oxygen is pumped into your blood and thus your brain. All this can help your body cope with difficult situations that typically stress the heart, not to mention the soul.

I want your help with a call and respond reading. You must remember your line because you will be saying it 33 times! Try not to laugh because you might mess the whole thing up. And be expressive---work with me people---EMOTE! OK, ready? Your line is "I'm Afraid So!" Let's go.

Afraid So , by Jeanne Marie Beaumont [audience refrain after every line is "I'm afraid so."]

Is it starting to rain?
Did the check bounce?
Are we out of coffee?
Is this going to hurt?
Could you lose your job?
Did the glass break?
Was the baggage misrouted?
Will this go on my record?
Are you missing much money?
Was anyone injured?
Is the traffic heavy?
Do I have to remove my clothes?
Will it leave a scar?
Must you go?
Will this be in the papers?
Is my time up already?
Are we seeing the understudy?
Will it affect my eyesight?
Did all the books burn?
Are you still smoking?
Is the bone broken?
Will I have to put him to sleep?
Was the car totaled?
Am I responsible for these charges?
Are you contagious?
Will we have to wait long?
Is the runway icy?
Was the gun loaded?
Could this cause side effects?

Do you know who betrayed you?
Is the wound infected?
Are we lost?
Will it get any worse?

The very idea of humor during the Holocaust may at first seem jarring—incongruous but not funny! In Western culture there is a long tradition of prejudice against humor, especially in connection with anything as tragic as the Holocaust. Tragedy, on stage or in real life, is serious, even sublime, while humor and comedy are "light." In drama, when comedy appears within tragedy, it is usually discounted as mere "comic relief."

But the ancient Greeks, Shakespeare, and other dramatists took their comedy more seriously than that. They realized that comedy is not "time out" from the real world; rather it provides another perspective on that world. And that *other* perspective is no less valuable than the tragic perspective. As Conrad Hyers has suggested, comedy expresses a "stubborn refusal to give tragedy . . . the final say."

In the camps there was laughter. Hannelore Eisinger remembers toiling in the potato field at Westerbork, in Holland. She and her friends invented elaborate recipes or told jokes; it was laugh or cry, she says. They put on humorous shows to entertain the other prisoners.

Steve Lipman spent 20 years collecting stories like Eisinger's and Jewish war jokes for his book, **Laughter in Hell** (Jason Aronson, 1993). "No target, including God himself and his prophets, was immune. Starvation, disease, beatings, murder, propaganda, and every form of persecution were grist for the victims' joke mill," Lipman writes. Even the walk to the gas chamber: Two Jews are about to enter the Auschwitz gas chamber. One turns to the SS guard to make a last request for a glass of water. "Sha, Moshe," says his friend. "Don't make a fuss."

During the Holocaust, humor served three main functions. First was its critical function: humor focused attention on what was wrong and sparked resistance to it. Second was its cohesive function: it created solidarity in

those laughing together at the oppressors. And third was its coping function: it helped the oppressed get through their suffering without going insane.

A woman went to an attorney to ask about a divorce.

"What grounds do you have, ma'am?"

"About six acres."

"No, I don't think you quite understand. Let me rephrase the question. do you have a grudge?"

"No, just a parking space."

"I'll try again. does your husband beat you?"

"No, I always get up at least an hour before he does."

The attorney could see he was fighting a losing battle. "Madam, are you sure you want a divorce?"

"I'm not the one who wants a divorce," she said. "My husband does. He claims we don't communicate."

My own ex-husband and I continue to love each other---for the connections to our children and grand-children. But also to confuse and piss people off for our humor about the whole thing. Our shared memories and in-jokes sustain us. We laugh----not that we have not cried and cried some more, and still cry and will cry,----but now we also laugh and laugh some more and will laugh.

I believe that when God designed us he included a built-in safety valve for dealing with stress: our sense of humor. For good health, laugh ten times a day and five of those should be at yourself.

Next, Make our "roundabout roads" a thread in the tapestry of what is our personal religion. In the words of D.H. Lawrence, "A person has no religion who has not slowly and painfully gathered one together, adding to it, shaping it; and one's religion is never complete and final, it seems, but must always be undergoing modification."

Road repairs, I call them. All Praise, all praise, to the great Web.

For me, one of the most healing ways I build my religion is to find the holy in the ordinary. Yeats called it the "deep heart's core."

Poem on a Line by Anne Sexton, 'We are All Writing God's Poem' Today,

By Barbara Crooker

Today, the sky's the soft blue of a work shirt washed
a thousand times. The journey of a thousand miles
begins with a single step. On the interstate listening
to NPR, I heard a Hubble scientist
say, "The universe is not only stranger than we
think, it's stranger than we can think." I think
I've driven into spring, as the woods revive
with a loud shout, redbud trees, their gaudy
scarves flung over bark's bare limbs. Barely doing
sixty, I pass a tractor trailer called *Glory Bound*,
and aren't we just? Just yesterday,
I read Li Po: "There is no end of things
in the heart," but it seems like things
are always ending—vacation or childhood,
relationships, stores going out of business,
like the one that sold jeans that really fit—
And where do we fit in? How can we get up
in the morning, knowing what we do? But we do,
put one foot after the other, open the window,
make coffee, watch the steam curl up
and disappear. At night, the scent of phlox curls
in the open window, while the sky turns red violet,
lavender, thistle, a box of spilled crayons.
The moon spills its milk on the black tabletop
for the thousandth time.

And then, Do not succumb to the desire to avoid risk----staying at the roadside rest stop is not living.

Remember what Bilbo used to say: it's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.

Well, I celebrate the stepping back onto the road. In the words of Denis Waitley,

Failure should be our **teacher**, **not** our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead end. Failure is something we can avoid only by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing."

Again, hear the gospel of Mary Oliver, in Journey:

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice - - -
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
'Mend my life!'
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.

You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations - - -
though their melancholy
was terrible. It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.

But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice,
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,

determined to do
the only thing you could do - - - determined to save
the only life you could save.

[sing] It will be hard, we know, and the road will be muddy and rough, but we'll get there, heaven knows how we will get there, but we know we will." Wo-ya-ya yi-ya-ya.

Wo-ya-ya yi-ya-ya. Wo-ya-ya. Yaaaaaaa." [1020 Singing the Journey]

Finally, surround yourself with love. This is a tough one because when we feel most alone is when we most need the help of others who have traveled rough roads. How dare we assume we are alone in our PAIN? This is one of the places where I am sustained by the love and support of others. Many of you know that last Sunday I was in an accident which totaled my car. Worse than the purple bruises and the pain of a cracked sternum has been the knowledge that the wreck was my fault and I could have hurt or killed someone. I cannot even count the phone calls, flowers, and prayers sent my way. My Wildflower friends have surrounded me with love and healing energy. I know there are others among us who come here because they have leaned on others in sorrow and need. We also come here to travel the road with others who need the company of an experienced traveler. Receiving is giving is receiving is giving...

Remember: "love is a force of nature." It's not a result, reward, or trophy. We experience love as a naturally occurring element like wind or rain. You can seal the roof and avoid the rain. You can batten down the windows and evade the wind. You can shutter your heart and block the sensation. But good living and true loving is exposure to the elements.

The gospel of the poet, Rumi asserts that "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."

Closing words from T.S. Eliot : "We shall not cease from exploration,
and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and
know the place for the first time."