

“Hiding In The Bushes“

By: Catherine E. Carmody

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Some time ago, a very good friend of mine used the phrase “hiding in the bushes” as a way to describe those who choose to keep their deepest and most authentic thoughts, yearnings, desires and passions, to themselves. Her reference didn’t mean that these individuals didn’t talk a lot, or have strong opinions about “people”, “issues”, “things” or “causes”, it was just that when they spoke, it was evident that they were not engaged or invested in revealing who they really were, particularly if it could mean that what they said would put them in a personally awkward or risky situation.

I can’t remember what I thought or said at the time. It was a quite a while ago. I suspect, however, that I would have thought that she was talking about me! I was an expert at “hiding in the bushes”. I talked quite a bit, took on causes for others, was seen as a rebel in some quarters, and, I was very conscious of not letting most people know what some of my strong opinions were – particularly if I thought my opinions would “tick” someone off should I speak them out loud.

How it all began for me – this “Hiding in the Bushes”

By the time I had moved through my teenage years and had settled quietly and responsibly into my early twenties, complete with a husband and family, I had developed a fine-tuned censoring system that ticked away at a great speed. If I had an opinion that I felt would ring an alarm bell in the other person’s head, and put myself and anything about/around me in danger, I kept those views/opinions, tightly buried and locked up – and as a result - I would say now, looking back, that I lied a lot! At the time, I didn’t see it as lying. I thought I was just going along to get along, or being nice.

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Looking back on the younger me, I believe that I wasn’t totally conscious about the consequences of doing what I was doing. I can see a pattern - the old me smiling many, many times when I didn’t want to smile, listening when I really didn’t want to listen, keeping my opinions to myself when my body was screaming at me to speak what was on my mind and in my heart - yet being terrified to open my mouth! I can remember experiencing physical symptoms – headaches, sore neck and shoulders, a sense of “after rage”, to mention a few. However, I don’t remember taking any responsibility for my symptoms or connecting them to my silence. I just blamed the person who I was not being honest with for having caused my frustration – I transferred my anger about my inability to speak, to them! I allowed myself to be victimized by my own inability to

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speaking, and for the most part, I was unaware of the part that I played in my own victimization.

This pattern of holding myself silent – of not speaking my truth openly – lasted from the time I was a young woman, well into my late fifties. It supported my growth and the expansion of my life within the status quo – it supported and nurtured what I believed others expected of me, and it allowed me to protect my children – or so I thought. To the outside world, my work evolved and the consensus was that I flourished, and had a successful career. I was seen by many as having a great deal of courage and tenacity with which to solve community challenges. That was the face I presented to the world. And, while the face I showed to the world was a part of me, it was not the whole of me – nor was it close to the potentiality of my greatness!

I chose to leave large parts hidden from public view – with only a few close friends being privy to bigger chunks of me – albeit even those were guarded.

The Dawning of Awareness

The older I grew, the more I began to realize that in many ways I didn't really know who I was. I remember feeling that I was like a leaf having fallen from a tree. I went whichever way the wind blew me. And, while sometimes that felt fine, there were many times I felt awful, but didn't know exactly why. The early years of my career were a great example. I allowed my traditional mentors – wonderful people at that – to guide me and I took great care to “mind what others said”. If I felt uncomfortable, well, I blamed it on my inexperience. I never questioned or thought that perhaps it was my authentic self, peeking out from behind the many layers of others' opinions trying to get my attention. I was too thick in the bushes to notice. I never would have guessed that I was not only hiding from others – I was hiding from myself!

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Over time I came to understand that regardless of the multitude of reasons that I, or any of us, give ourselves for not revealing our true selves to others – be it deep seated beliefs that we are carrying around from our early family systems, such as a fear of hurting someone else (particularly if we believed they were vulnerable), a fear of not being seen as compassionate toward others, a fear of invoking anger in another human being, or “the wrath of another”, a fear of not being “accepted” or able to “fit in”, or “be part of a community”, or a wish to “keep things private” – regardless of any or all of these reasons, I now know that there is no longer any reason that makes sense, or carries any life sustainability, for me to stay hidden in the bushes!

As I work with others – particularly women – I see the enormous untapped potential of these individuals – a potential that knows no bounds of age, gender, economic status, or history. I see the misspent and misdirected energy – energy spent on keeping their guard up, watching what they say – all in the name of fear and the incredible need

to feel that they are protecting themselves, or those they love. For a long time I reflected on this untapped potential with a great sense of a sadness. A sadness because I was beginning to wake up to the realization that this was not just about those I was working with, it was about me and all of us in the world who in our past have withheld the true essence of who we are from ourselves and those around us.

At some point over the past few years, I moved beyond the sadness, and in so doing, realized that I could not continue to hide from myself or anyone else. I made a conscious decision that I no longer was willing to live my life with only a portion of who I am being visible to myself or to others. Thus began a journey of coming out of “hiding in the bushes”.

It's been a somewhat slow and bumpy journey, with as many steps backwards as forwards. But, surely and slowly the way is becoming clearer and there is no looking back, only forward - with great anticipation!

As I began to speak my truth and to allow others to hear who I really was, my deep intention was to do so without blaming or judging anyone else.

My journey began by tentatively giving myself permission to ask myself a number of questions. I wondered - if I were to be true to myself and express myself from that deep place of authenticity, what might that look like and feel like? Who would I be, without the need for the cover of the bushes? How would I “stand up” and be fearless and harmless in doing so? How could I melt that lump of fear within me that has caused me so many times in my 63 years to be paralyzed and speechless? And, what would happen if I chose to jump out from behind those bushes that I believe have been “protecting” me all my life? These were indeed deep “inner” questions, and each one seemed to wrench and twist the bottom of my stomach and leave me breathless. The more I thought about them however, the more I realized that an important key for me was that as I began to “speak my truth” and to allow others to hear who I really was, my deep intention would be to do so without blaming or judging anyone else. With this clear intention my stepping out would indeed be all about me and not about anyone else! My fear dissipated.

Insights from my Journey out of the Bushes

Out of this journey from “hiding in the bushes” which isn't over yet - not by a long shot – insights have emerged, insights that are shifting the way I see the world and my place in it. I'd like to share a number of them with you. Perhaps something will resonate deep within you and cause you to ask yourself a question of two.

Who is the real “I”?

In my efforts to reveal myself, to find my voice, to speak my truth, I've found that I've needed to become very clear and honest about what is deeply important to me, what my core values and intentions are, and to know – at a very deep level who the unique “I” is. Not who I have been culturally conditioned to believe I am, but who I really believe – I am - in the here and now. I've had to come face to face with the real “I” and with the potential “I”. I've had to ask myself, if the real/potential “I” were to

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manifest itself, how would that happen, what would I be doing that would be a reflection of who I am? I found I was calling to myself to finally stand up and be heard – at long last. I came to know that before I could remove that final veil and allow myself to be seen by the world, I would have to be honest and clear with myself first and foremost. I found this to be a deep, revealing and sometimes painful journey – one that cannot be rushed – one that cannot be faked. It either is or it isn't. And, while one of the first realizations for me was that I was becoming clear about what “I didn't want to do” to manifest my new intention/values, the road of realization toward what I wanted to step into, was different, was much slower. It continues to be an ebb and flow process for me, and I'm perfectly o.k. with that.

Giving myself permission not to know everything right away

I continue to wonder about and marvel at how many other things, thoughts, and beliefs exist that are beyond my conscious awareness.

Coupled with the foregoing insight of the need to find the real “I”, a huge learning for me since beginning my journey “out of the bushes” has been that my “readiness” to learn, to accept new information, to let go of old beliefs, to change my behaviors, cannot be forced. There have been times when I have referred to myself as a “slow learner”. It has seemed, on occasion, to take a long time for me to absorb the new, or let go of the old, so that I can move on. And, I've learned that it is similar to my ability to “see” for the first time, that which has always been there! For example, I have a route that I walk, almost every day – except in the winter! This route is in the inner city with lots of buildings, green spaces, water and other venues to see. One could say that I probably should know every square inch of that territory! And, if one casually said that I would probably agree. This morning, however, I noticed, for the first time, a tower and a hill, both of which have always been there – in fact are historical landmarks. It's just that I wasn't ready to “see” them until today. I continue to wonder about, and marvel at how many other things, thoughts and beliefs exist that are beyond my conscious awareness, but which will appear when I am “ready”, to see, to hear, to feel and to know!

The knowledge that I always have a choice!

I have a choice to choose how I respond.

This insight is perhaps one of the most critical insights for guiding me forward out of the bushes, the fact that I always have a CHOICE. I have the ability to choose, every moment of my day. Regardless of what happens in my life, regardless of whatever decisions and actions are taken by others in my life, or in my community or in the country, I have a choice to choose how I respond. I am an adult, and I can, by my choices and my subsequent actions, determine the future of my next 41 + years. It is all up to me. I am choosing to be responsible for everything that happens in my universe. What a major lesson! And, an ongoing one at that. I don't fully understand how and why I came to believe – at some time in my life that my life was not up to me – that the actions of others determined my future. Changing this belief has been one of the most revealing and honest shifts in my perspective. Changing this belief has given me the courage and freedom to move away from fear and into curiosity and a more caring reality.

My reaction to others is all about me!

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Another insight from my journey, that still stuns me with its simplicity, is that every time I react to another person's words, actions or beliefs, my reaction is "all about me" and has nothing really to do with the other person. Every reaction I have to another's behavior/words or beliefs presents itself as an opportunity for me to learn more about me! I can't believe how many years I've spent believing that my reaction to the other person's words, actions or beliefs was about them – that it was their "fault" that I reacted the way I did, their fault that I felt anger, pain, sadness, guilt or whatever. Then when I began to realize that I had a choice to experience what was being said or done, anyway I wanted, again, another incredible sense of freedom ensued. The added beauty of all this was that I could choose to ask myself "so what is that all about?" "what is going on inside me when I listen to and react to what that person is saying or doing?" "What is it that their action/words are bringing up for me? Is it an old pattern, an old behavior that has become an unconscious pattern/habit? And, "is that old pattern/behavior serving me?" If not, perhaps I should consider choosing to replace it with another reaction! Another great learning experience that takes me "out of those bushes"!

What others think of me is none of my business!

I've learned not to worry about what others think of me. That's taken almost all of my 63 years to reach that level of understanding. I now know that what others think has absolutely nothing to do with me. Their thoughts are a reflection of who they are – of their filters, their perceptions - and not who I am. I've learned that to allow the potential of others' thoughts to control my behaviors is an amazing way to keep myself small. To keep myself as a victim. I've learned again that it's a choice I have – to be or not to be a victim. This is not to say that I wouldn't be wise to pay attention – at times - to what others are saying and thinking about me and ask myself is there anything in their words or thoughts that could be useful for me to learn, either in relation to improving my connection with them or improving the quality of my communications, generally.

Knowing versus Believing:

Knowing comes from, and is in, my body.

The differentiation between "knowing" and "believing" has been a huge discovery for me throughout my journey out of hiding. I continue to sit with the difference and continue to allow it to integrate itself into my whole being. But if I were to explain what I mean, it would be to say that "knowing" comes from, and is in my body. I reach a stage where I just "know" that something will happen, or that something is "right" for me. No arguments are needed, no attempting to convince others, or myself I just know! It is absolute! In my younger days I would experience this "knowing" but I would doubt it, I would argue with myself, I would dismiss

it, I would bury it, because it usually didn't fit with what the outside world was telling me. I suppose I even called it my "intuition", and brushed it off. My sense of knowing will always be there for me – should I choose to pay attention and just let myself be!

Being true to myself is a gift I should not withhold from others

I've discovered that **not** to speak out for what is true for me, is a disservice to those close to me. When I choose not to be true to myself, because I am fearful that they are not strong enough to handle the fallout from my decision, I underestimate them; and, I do not honor them or acknowledge their strength.

About 10 years ago, my very close friend brought to my attention what was actually going on one evening when I was expressing anger and frustration toward another individual. I had listened to that person speaking in public and had not liked how they had presented themselves. When asked by the presenter what I thought about the speech, I hummed and hawed and skirted around the issue, not allowing myself to be open and honest in my response. I was afraid to "hurt" their feelings. Afterwards I fumed with anger toward the person. My friend said, "you're not angry at that person, you're angry with yourself because you didn't have the courage to tell your truth to them". How right my friend was! I chose not to be true to myself, did not give honest feedback to that presenter, dishonored the presenter by not believing they were strong enough to handle the feedback. I gave up on both myself and the other person! What a learning that was – and what a challenge it continues to be. And, the closer the person is to you, the greater the challenge.

"You're not angry at that person, you're angry with yourself because you didn't have the courage to tell your truth to them!"

My Body is my friend and teacher:

I've learned that my body is a very good friend and teacher. For many, many years, I totally disregarded my body's attempts to give me messages. I translated my bodily pain, aches and soreness strictly in terms of a physical ailment, something that was symptomatic of something I had done – over exertion, over eating, eating wrong foods, smoking, drinking too much – whatever happened to be the trend of the day. During my journey I've awakened to the knowledge that my body is an incredible quantum biological processor! A marvelous instrument that gives me feedback instantly, connecting me to what I'm thinking and what my perceptions are – long before my brain can "figure" out what's going on. I've learned incredible processes that allow me to "decode" the messages coming from my body, messages that allow me to move forward making new more resourceful choices with which to live my life - moment by moment. In so many instances now, when I choose to listen to my body, I can make decisions that will take me into the future very resourcefully, while my mind is still in the "just waking up stage".

My body is an incredible quantum biological processor!

Paying attention to my breath

I pay attention to my breath as a strategy for supporting my movement through my day.

All my life I've heard references and recommendations to "breath". As a little girl, it was all about "taking a deep breath" before I went to speak/sing at a Christmas concert, or "holding my breath" in excitement or anticipation. As a grown woman it was about "holding my breath" in fear or anticipation of another's response to what I had said or done, or "breathing quickly and shallowly" when anxious or frightened. It wasn't until a few years ago, that I came to know how important that my actual breath is to my ability to think clearly, to be and stay focused in my body, to be grounded, to have clarity about myself and my life, and to exercise my deep level of wisdom. I'm now conscious and aware of my breathing to a much, much greater degree. I pay attention to my breath and I change the rhythm of my breath as a strategy for supporting my movement through my day.

And, it's not over yet!

So now what?

I now know that the insights I've had since consciously coming out from hiding in the bushes are my insights – my "inner sights"! As such they are deeply personal and individual to me. Anyone reading this who knows of me might say, "but I thought Cathy was like that all along, I never thought she had a problem speaking out". And, they would be right – superficially. I didn't have a problem speaking out. It's just that I spent such a large part of my life not knowing who I really was and not knowing, that which was of such importance to me that I would risk everything to speak out.

The years prior to puberty and the years after menopause are a female's most powerful years!

For a good part of my life I went along with what others thought was important to them and by association – and if it appealed to me - I would lend a hand by speaking out for them and supporting them. And, that was a good and safe thing to do. All my authentic struggles went on "inside" me – in a place not visible to the outside world, in a place I kept secret, even from myself. So, for the most part, no one – including those most close to me - were any the wiser!

Someone once said that the years prior to puberty and the years after menopause are a female's most powerful years! What that says to me is that I'm now in my most powerful years! And, regardless of how many hidden years I spent between my teens and my late fifties, it doesn't matter anymore. What's ahead is more important, what's ahead is where my focus is. Except for writing about it here, my intention is not to look back, but to look forward!

Now that I have awakened my "inner sights", I'm choosing to experience the world differently. No longer do I want to live my life with an inner struggle and an outer happy mask. I want to stay awake and fully engaged!

And what next?

I move through my days with a conscious awareness of my need to stay awake!

I pay much more attention to my breathing, to what is going on inside my body as an energetic response to my thoughts.

There is no looking back nor is there a "going" back.

I know I will live to be well into my 100's – probably about 104 or much older. Thus, clearing away the bushes, the wiry undergrowth of my life that has accumulated thus far - all that undergrowth that hasn't served me – has been and will continue to be, extremely important to me. This next part of my life, and the freedom that comes with it, is nothing to be fooled around with – it is serious stuff and deserves my full attention and the full revelation to the world of who I am, who I have the potential to become, and how I want to make my mark in the world

So, I move through my days with a conscious awareness of my need to stay "awake", paying much more attention to my breathing, to what is going on inside my body as an energetic response to my thoughts, and I learn from that. I'm conscious of needing to be gentle with myself, and to give myself permission to just "be" – to not worry about the things that may never happen. I give myself permission to do things that might be regarded by others as weird or crazy, and I can honestly say – for the first time in my life – that I could care less what others think! "It's my life, after all", I shout! I am conscious of needing to give myself permission to receive complements, and I am committed to speaking up when I wish to speak my truth, and to saying no, or yes when I want to – without censorship or fear.

Mind you, I still have my ups and my downs, and my challenges continue. It's like the peeling back of an onion. My awareness of self has moved to a level of understanding that I previously would have thought impossible – one that I could never have imagined before. I give myself permission to be excited about my future, about the possibilities that are out there - if I choose to reach for them. My intention is not to age, but to grow into the fullness of who I can become. There is no looking back, nor is there a "going" back. I now move without the encumbrances of the bushes, out in the open for all to see. It's exhilarating, sometimes scary and it is going to be - the "great adventure" of my next 40 + years!

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