

Nevermore Thy Temples Leave



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Photo by Susie Quiroz <https://www.susieqcreative.com/about> .

Two months ago, I began a leave of absence. I work with women who are beaten, yelled at, drugged, and ripped from their family, friends, and children. Witnessing survivors gather resources, leave abusive relationships, and find sisterhood in my therapy groups fills me with gratitude and wonder. And deep grief. Even while practicing self-care (mindfulness, exercise, sleep, “eating well”, personal therapy, and more) my body couldn’t keep binding the tears and shaking. As I continued the swim upstream in burnout, I looked for relief in community- my psychodrama community (learn more about psychodrama [here](#)).

I traveled to a stage nestled in the leafy hills of rural New York. I visit a few times a year for ongoing professional development with Hudson Valley Psychodrama Institute . Here, I'm challenged to share my personal stories for enactment, sharing, and processing within a group of familiar faces. As I learn this method experientially for use with clients, I also receive profound healing.

During this training week, warfare abroad intensified my weeping. I struggled to focus and feel the cool wooden floor under my feet. Each time the group chose which drama to enact, my story was passed over. It was almost my turn to direct a drama, and my mind was far away with images of a world on fire. One of the trainers had an idea. What if I relived the most joyful moment of my life? Would enacting such a drama shift my despair? I was willing to try. It felt like trying to locate the happiest memory for a "patronus charm". The most joyful I could remember (for you muggles, this is a *Harry Potter* reference).

It had to be my wedding day.

With a fellow trainee directing, we used chairs, scarves, and I invited group members to play roles as I set the scene.

We entered the basement dressing room of the church. I listened to the murmur of voices upstairs, guests settling in chairs, and waiting for my cue on the piano. Seeing my wedding dress in a full-length mirror, I "reversed roles" to speak as the dress, "I'm white, satin, from the 1940s, I have I lace neckline and drape across the shoulders, and I'm wearing Courtney's grandmother's golden leaf broach". Returning to my side of the mirror with the dress, someone knocked on the door. I chose someone to play my soon-to-be-mother-in-law. As she walked in, I shared my internal monologue with the group, "did something go wrong? Why is she here? Where's my mom?". I stepped into her role and spoke to myself, "I just wanted to tell you how happy I am that you're marrying my son. You're more than I could've imagined for Tyler. I love you both". The group member repeated those words back to me, and as I let them in, it was time to walk down the aisle. I chose a friend to play Tyler, waiting with nervous excitement at the alter.

“Meaningful Moments”, these psychodramas of joy, aren’t usually allowed changes. But I needed to change who made the walk beside me. My grandmother passed away months before the wedding, and I wanted to share that moment with her. Looking around the group, no one reminded me of my grandmother. My primary trainer volunteered, and she played the role perfectly. Through my words, she beamed, “I love you so much. I hope you have a marriage like grandfather and I had”. The group hummed “Amazing Grace”, and I walked towards Tyler with my grandmother. We hugged goodbye, and I turned into Tyler’s arms. Crying, I whispered, “I’m so happy. Words don’t matter here because we already made our vows. I want to sing together. A hymn by Charles Wesley”:

*Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav’n to earth come down,
fix in us Thy humble dwelling;
all Thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love Thou art;
visit us with Thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.*

*Come, Almighty to deliver;
let us all Thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve Thee as Thy hosts above;
pray, and praise Thee without ceasing,
glory in Thy perfect love.*

The song carried us into the first dance. Then cutting a frozen cake, played by a group member staring stiffly and sending the room howling with laughter. Finally, Tyler and I ran through a tunnel of scarf-throwing “bubbles” into the end of the drama.

Despair receded and joy emerged.

Embodied cognition is the idea that thoughts and feelings respond to the body's movement. Psychologist Dan Tomasulo discusses how this concept works within the positivity effect to create lasting change. After reenacting my wedding, my heartbeat slowed, I felt calm, open to learning, and curious. This allowed me to shift into the director's role when my turn came, and I sailed into the evening with ease. Did it cure my burnout? Not quite. I still have a journey with grief, fear, and a peppering of anger. But this gifted me with a flash of joy to hold close.

When I meditate, I often begin with an intention to confront my shortcomings, examine trauma, deal with the "difficult and dark". Then I'm surprised by color and loving-kindness. One part of me responds in frustration, "that's not what I wanted to work on!". And another part nudges gently, "but that's where your work is. Receiving and trusting the love shared with you."

In the words of Albus Dumbledore (obligatory *Harry Potter* closing):

"Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, when one only remembers to turn on the light."
