

# A WALK WITH MA

by Benjy Wertheimer

*Benjy's mother, whom he called "Ma," died December 25, 2007. She was a Harvard PHD, internationally renowned epidemiologist, gifted painter and sculptor, and a powerful and fiery woman. She died in her 80's. This piece describes an experience Benjy had a few weeks after her death.*

One late morning, I went to Maricara Park (Portland, OR) with my dog Barkley to enjoy an extended "sucker hole" sunbreak. Coming into the family of trees that have become such beloved friends, I noticed a special sort of inner luminescence in all of my surroundings. Mr. B was running around in his usual unswervingly cute way, and was experiencing a great deal of success in his trolling for squirrels — clearly the sunshine was urging them to engage the brightness of the day as well.

Just after jumping over a creek, I saw a clearly-lit moss-covered seat that beckoned me to it — no, it insisted firmly but with the utmost kindness and gentleness (as Ma would have) that I enjoy the sunbeams that warmed and illuminated this green cushion. As I sat down, I was fully absorbed into the natural surroundings, embraced by them and the unaccustomed warmth of the sun.

I fell instantly into one of the most powerful meditative states I can recall, feeling an absolute oneness with the grace, beauty and power of all that enfolded me in that moment. All colors took on a new vibrancy, and, for a moment, Ma's words about her fascination with the differences in perceived colors following her cataract surgery went through my mind. All this and peace, peace, peace beyond all words, characterizations, concepts.

Slowly and with unprecedented mindfulness, I looked off to my right, with an inner knowing that I was about to drink deeply of unending beauty and love. And in a moment that was not a moment, I saw the glinting of a tiny bead of water in the forest soil — a bead that had within itself all of the colors of the rainbow, all of the depth of the universe, and, most powerful of all, the absolute essence of the light of Ma's loving smile. In that miniscule jewel of water was the entirety of creation, held gently and sweetly by a Love that could no more be measured, defined or understood than it could be ignored by my heart. The seemingly bottomless blackness of the hole left in my breast since Ma died became an equally limitless vessel for receiving this Love.

As this Love poured into me, a squirrel chattering at the top of a nearby tree called Barkley to his true squirrel-herding purpose, bringing Barkley a level of joy and fulfillment seemingly commensurate with my own. With a smile as big as his face could contain, Barkley ran off to work — and I — I dived ever more deeply into this tiny water universe that continued to shine with the force of a thousand suns from the edge of a blade of grass embedded in the musty humus, mud and leaves. As I softened my gaze, everything around me moved in closer, holding my shoulders, my feet and hands, ultimately my every cell with a motherly embrace which I returned with utter surrender. All that ever was, is, or will be was brought together in that endless moment — still clearly totally centered on this immeasurably small rainbow sphere before me in the dirt. I was being pulled inexorably into its core even as my physical boundaries seemed to evaporate outward beyond my forest surroundings, the water in the creek below, the city, state, country, continent, the oceans — all of our world suddenly was no larger than this tiny water gem that had called me into it — all that I could possibly perceive in a lifetime was no different from this one sweet pearl of wisdom, water and Love that endlessly filled my heart and mercifully quieted my mind.

On one level, I thought that this moment too would pass, and that I would again be visited by sorrow, loss, the inevitability of change and endings — but I was able to witness myself clearly and lovingly in the same instant as I had this thought. I had been given the gift of the Timeless even as my mind latched onto the ephemeral. I was home.

As I crossed the street on the way home, now firmly re-established in the so-called "real world," I started feeling sadness that I was no longer swimming in that tiny yet infinite water world. I turned my head to follow a car, and my eyes were greeted by thousands of tiny water worlds glinting in the sunlight on the lawn of a neighbor I don't yet know. And Ma was dancing with a joy that surpasses all understanding in every single one of them.