

Dear Readers,

As I write this I'm still in California on grandparent duty but scheduled to be back in Cheyenne by Saturday.

Regarding my most recent writing: Sometimes it's good to take a look at one's life within the context of family, society, country, the world. This I'm doing with the column below and next week's. These will tie into social commentary the following week.

Some of you have heard the dream story before. I also used it in a lengthy essay in a collection that seems destined to linger as manuscript. Now that I reread some of these efforts, I can see why editors reacted as they did. I'm no longer disappointed; there are other things in life that are worthwhile. Keep the faith!

WTE column of April 18, 2015. Editor's headline: "Dreams can help us heal"
CST of April 19: "Making the dream your own"

I recently participated in a group workshop, "Spring Into Your Dreams," led by a psychotherapist who wanted us to experience our dreams as offering wisdom and healing. Participants were invited to "make the dream your own."

A frequent dream image was one of having to escape some (often ill-defined) menace or threatening being. Several participants spoke of having to run as fast as they were able. Sometimes the danger lurked in a pursuing darkness; sometimes the threat was toys coming to life, turning into monsters. Sometimes the running came to a dead halt as the dreamer felt suddenly immobile. Sometimes the dreamer felt it impossible to keep running, thinking it necessary to commit suicide before "it" happened.

At my turn, I discussed a dream I have shared before, which came to me when I was 27 and living in California. Based on dim but frightful wartime memories from my native Germany, in the dream I'm not the toddler who caught glimpses of a father in uniform or a house aflame after a bombing raid; no, I am a twelve-year-old huddling in a cellar amid unknown adults. We are waiting for the air-raid sirens to repeat their howling, which would tell us it's safe to come up. Nothing happens. We wait for what seems an interminable time. Finally someone climbs the stairs and looks around. All is quiet. Slowly, hesitantly, we all follow. Once above ground, we realize: No bombing raid is in progress; hence, the adults go about their business and disappear. I take up the bicycle I dropped when I ran into the cellar. As I make ready to pedal away, I glance upward. There hangs an airplane so huge, so gray, it obliterates the entire sky. Not a patch of blue has remained. Terror seizes me: the raid is not over; I must hurry back into the cellar! But my legs are like lead. As I watch, the belly of the airplane opens and a flock of smaller planes issues forth and flies away. I feel the ground shake as they drop their bombs. A thought holds me in thrall: what's the use, trying to escape? The thing is so big, it'll get me no matter where I hide.

Someone asked what the big airplane and the little ones symbolized. At the time, as mother of two young boys and spouse to an engineer who designed and tested missile components for the defense industry, I felt the airplane represented motherhood gone awry. I feared my sons would grow up as instruments of war

akin to their grandfather and father, perpetuating an endless sorrow.

The “language of dreams” is easily learned, consisting as it does of symbolic imagery. Dream language makes use of visible symbols to express inner experiences in concrete form. Although we often forget what we dreamed and therefore think we haven’t dreamed at all, each of us does dream every night.

While we dream, we know more about ourselves and other people than when awake. We may be irrational in a dream, but we are more perceptive and much wiser. That’s because, during the day, what we say and do is largely determined by the culture we live in. We have to work, acquire what we need to live, defend ourselves against attack. We manipulate things, use them, make something of them. We behave in ways society expects us to behave.

In the wakeful state we have no access to what we know when we sleep. At night we are free; however, even in sleep we tend to censor our dreams, for we are reluctant to understand ourselves and those around us. Yet the more we know about ourselves, and the fewer illusions we have about others, the richer, stronger, more vital our lives become.

It seems, we dream to get to know ourselves; yet in the process, we come face to face with our worst fears—and memories of fears. Perhaps this is why we suppress dreams as we wake.

At 27 I realized: No wonder I’m depressed: everything is grey, obscured by that unbearable airplane. I started to delve into my earliest years, that time of upheaval shrouded in mists of forgetting, started realizing that the terror gripping me as an adult as I lay awake at night came from airplanes flying overhead whose roars I equated with death and destruction. I marveled that I’d managed to leave my country and enter an airplane, which was like descending into the belly of the beast.

It is well to remember the painful past even decades later, even when it takes the form of a dream. As we acknowledge the confusion and disorder of childhood, the early anxieties fade away. Healing can and does happen.