

REFLECTIONS FROM MT. ST. MOSSBACK MONASTERY

*Ultimately, we have just one moral duty
to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves
and to reflect it toward others.
And the more peace there is in us,
the more peace there will also be in our troubled world.*

~Etty Hillesum

Blastomycosis is an unforgiving beast. It lurks as a spore in the soil, but is so elusive the dynamics of its habitus have yet to be fully recognized. What *is* known is that the soil conditions in northern Wisconsin are perfect for its growth, particularly along the Namekagon River. It is for this reason that blastomycosis is known locally as the *Namekagon River Disease* because of its propensity to make folks sick who live or play near the scenic waterway.

Once inhabiting a body—whether it be that of a dog or person—the spores morph into giant budding yeast cells usually in the lungs. Up until the 1960's, not too long ago really, the end result was often death. Modern pharmaceuticals have slowly changed that prognosis to life, but often the sufferer undergoing the chemical clearing wonders if the former result would be preferable. The dogs they just let go. Some people have lost two or three.

I have no idea exactly where I met these stealthy spores, but meet we did in late 2005. Could have been digging in my expansive flower gardens or on one of those long walks along the Namekagon River. My husband and I live on 40 acres between the river and Mossback Lake. Turns out that Mossback Lake used to be the Namekagon River before it was diverted for logging in the late 1880's. So, as fate would have it, I live between the river and the river. Never stood a chance, really.

On our property overlooking the Namekagon are several Indian burial mounds. No one knows exactly how old they are but all agree at least two could be called ancient. I had always thought of them as sacred and approached the area with some reverence. In the months that followed the diagnosis, I began to wonder if the mounds weren't put there as a warning for others to stay away. Certainly, if blastomycosis ruled the land now, it did then as well. Instead of reverence, I began to see the area as dark. The fevers and

general malaise added to the compulsion to envision our property in malevolent hues of black on blue-black. We considered moving.

In the end, the doctors declared the blastomycosis gone, though not conclusively. Kind of like cancer. One told me to be ever vigilant to its return. The aftermath of the beast left me totally disabled and angry at having to leave my beloved job at the top of my career. No one wanted to be around me anymore for few knew what to say. That was understandable. What's more, I had ten years under my belt in the study of ancient wisdom and meditation. But nothing had prepared me for this. Nothing.

One night as I lay in the dark, still running a temp after a year and a half, I stated melodramatically that the dark side was NOT going to have its way and cut me off from my all-loving soul. The vehemence of this declaration startled even me. But the next day I went back to meditation, although at first for only a few minutes at a time. Little by little my strength returned and the daily fevers abated. It took somewhat longer for the Truth to set in.

The Truth is, the life I had been leading was getting in the way of my spiritual advance. Prior to 2005, the Personality reigned supreme even though my 24/7 job could be rationalized as altruistic. In this life, only disease would assure that things got back on track. I was stubborn that way.

I began to recognize my house as a holy, healing place and started calling it somewhat irreverently Mount Saint Mossback Monastery, thinking that name might appease the Gods, at least those of a western persuasion. What's more, it dawned on me that no outside dark force had attempted to cut me off from the Soul, rather it was my own inner dark side that could take that credit.

Slowly, the shadow-laced land surrounding the “monastery” began to glow again with a radiant light. This past summer the garden flowers took notice and rewarded all who looked with a brilliancy never seen before. Every hardy perennial tried to outdo the other in height, width, coverage and color. Multidimensional healing was assuredly taking place and had seemingly spread from my body to all the land around until it was set off with wings to the rest of the world in meditation.

Oh so gradually, blastomycosis has become my friend in peace. Eventually, in one way or another, every one of us finds our own particular “friend in peace” in this lifetime or some other. All humanity shares this legacy.

At Mt. St. Mossback Monastery, the ever-present blasto and I now coexist. It's doing its spore thing on the land somewhere and me, well, I am sending out love through group meditation and a vision of hope in a daily blog called www.watchforchange.blogspot.com. The fortuitous and liberating events of the past three years have shown that we will each find peace in any number of ways, thus linking all to all in the greatest creative act that has ever occurred. In this way, the peace that passeth understanding *is* coming. That refulgent awakening is guaranteed.

Susan Kaye Schirott lives in northern Wisconsin with her attentive husband, Jim, five cats and a dog. This summer at the urging of her sister, she took up photography after a hiatus of 25 years, and her photos and those of her sister can be seen on her blog. Their respective flower gardens would have it no other way. "It's always darkest before the dawn" is the theme of her blog and in an open-minded and sometimes irreverent way, she writes what inspires her in hopes that it may inspire others. Susan left behind a 20 year career as executive director of a federally funded community health center that serves the poor and before that she ran a battered women's shelter and a law office. What keeps her engine going is a persistent Soul and the study of the works of A. A. Bailey.

