

Chapter 1 – Wounded Limbs



-Heather Hays

**I don't believe it's all important to be
what our culture calls "optimal."
Getting old isn't easy
for a lot of us.
Neither is living,
neither is dying.
We struggle against the inevitable
and we all suffer because of it.
We have to find
another way to look
at the whole process
of being born, growing old,
changing, and dying,
some kind of perspective
that might allow us
to deal with what we perceive
as big obstacles
without having to be dragged
through the drama.
It really helps to understand
that we have something,
that we are something,
which is unchangeable,
beautiful, completely aware,
and continues no matter what.**

-Ram Dass

Strange Day

Cool fall settles in with fresh zephyr
dawn beats away Ancient night
reflecting stained glass morning

Eager for majestic day
awaiting Brenda to start morning routine
trio of cats stretched across dormant legs

Seems just a reverie away 1994
studying massage at Heartwood
Institute of Healing Arts
East of Garberville
nestled in the emerald triangle
near Eureka and Trinidad
200 miles north of San Francisco
on the Mendocino fault
near the Redwood valleys
of Northern California

Clouds thick with the cool dawn
the sun cleared skies by 11 a.m.
mornings consisted of hiking
to mountain peak for twilight yoga with Gayna
followed by greeting sun with Michael in Tai-Chi
then Polarity class with Bruce
learning fundamentals of energy

Rumor on campus
some heard that the Grateful Dead
would play acoustic at the Warfield
as the Warlocks for those propitious to attend

Noon we snacked a quick organic feast
then caught ride with Gypsy
in a purple beat-up old VW van
easy trekking canyon cliffs
snaking desolate roads to highway 101
40 miles from Pacific Coast 1
just south of the Valley of Giants
where Redwoods stand primordial lofty proud

About 30 minutes into the descent
just after reaching paved roads
smoked out brakes surrendered grip to gravity
momentum gave-way to extreme acceleration

Increasing velocity rapidly loosing control
road disappearing to surrounding blur
there was no way to halt what was to come
nowhere to go nowhere to run

A few minutes turned into long centuries
terror animating moments
rubber trying to cleave to road
as speed gathered shooting us
sideways off graveyard cliffs

In death lunge there was just enough time
to realize space
before trees snapped limbs crackled
as we caved ridge in meteoric crash

Mountain unmoving my body puddle to ground
squashed in instant Jell-O smash
head snapped back in whiplash fashion

Carrie screamed my arm my arm
O, God... my arm
someone please help
then silence overcame panic moments

I knew something was certainly wrong
I tried to get up to run
to reach escape before the van exploded

Unresponsive my body lay
collapsed heavy in pain
arms swaying when I try to move
uncontrollably like limbs of trees
pushed by the wind's own interest

Loosing consciousness
inclination to breathe
body in despair
vision lost ears ringing
uncertain void stealing soul to new flight

Thinking Chinese

Laid up shattered on hospital bed
baffled by current circumstance
no retort TV for comfort/friend

Bewilderment I came to
in I.C.U. senses reeling feeling extremes
in temperatures pain awkward upheaval

3 times Flat-line death prevailing
asphyxiation pneumonia clogged breath

Weeks gone I can't even recall
screws drilled into skull
stabilizing the halo aligning my neck

Doctors backed by med school degrees
intruded morning sleep
making routine rounds
condemning me with callous word
to never walk again

'This is how it was going to be'
paralysis living with disability
dependent on monster wheelchair
help dressing bathing using bathroom

As quick as they came they left
leaving me racked in pain
wishing for a hole to hide
where nobody could touch me or see me
where all the noise and drama
would just disappear

They think they know disability
because of expensive degrees
years of college education
advising and then walking out

I wanted a hammer to crush skulls
shatter spines
this is paralysis
no walking out

They psychiatrist says I'm depressed
well damn it man
I just broke my fricken neck
what do you expect?

Get out get out leave me alone
your books can't explain
what I'm going through
don't feed me your intellectual opinion
or professional revelation

Go charge your 150 bucks an hour
to Medicaid but please
spare me the lame explanations

I'm screaming inside
scared out of my wits
unsure what next to do
what can I do?

Just turn off the light as you go
and shut the door
as you leave

Get up get up I say
but my body won't listen
leaving me stranded in bed alone
having pissed on myself
as if I'm thinking Chinese

**I have been very near
the Gates of Death
& have returned
very weak & an Old Man
feeble & tottering,
but not in Spirit & Life
not in The Real Man
The Imagination which Liveth for Ever.
In that I am stronger & stronger
as this Foolish Body decays.**

-William Blake