

## **Lying in Bed**

By J.O.Haselhoef

I woke in the early morning, the sunlight shining through the curtains onto the east-facing wall. I lay, looking at the stillness.

Reaching for my mobile to learn the time, I saw the world already began. Headlines and real-life communications filled my screen with journalistic leads about Hurricane Irma, North Korea, the end of the Dreamers. On a personal level, a text flashed about our long-time senior friends moving from their family farm, I listened to a voicemail from a pastor asking if I could taxi a woman without a car to see her son, and I read an email that my best friend did not get the job offer she desperately needed.

Within the calamity, hardship, awfulness, fear, anger, and problems for others, I own nothing but good fortune. Hurricanes, missiles, and immigration won't affect me directly. I worry about my friends, yet I am outside of their decisions. Today, I am lucky. Tomorrow, it might be me.

And yet, not appearing in any headline or social media was my overall feeling of frustration, anger, and lack of power — a general sense that had no exact source.

I don't like feeling as if I'm powerless. In the past, to regain my sense of control, I fired off letters to my congressman about immigration reform. I donated money to the

former U.S. presidents' hurricane relief fund. I Googled to find groups who planned to march for peace.

Nowadays, chaos appears to reign: Is it my age, the fast-moving technology, an irreverent president, climate change, new communication styles, or...? Perhaps my confusion requires a new strategy. It may be I need a more seductive, artful approach. Something more trusting? More personal? Quieter, but stronger?

I turned to look again at the bedroom wall. There, five paintings hung — each, green- and blue-hued. Their framed edges organized in a way that their mass created a rectangle. A bit of area surrounded the artwork and fit them comfortably on the grey space. I collected those five paintings or drawings over many years — artworks I liked for their appearance and the memories they brought.

A Haitian friend painted two of the six. Looking at those images helped me remember the Haiti I knew when we visited — the pungent smell of the dinner fires, the heat and humidity on one's skin, and the green valley seen from the mountain top where we stayed.

Inherent in those images were the reasons we went to Haiti twice a year for seven years — to help the village, where those paintings came from, to improve its peoples economic conditions. We contacted Americans to help them. The Americans were not in charge but could help financially. They needed to trust the Haitians to solve their own problems. That was a moment I did not feel powerless.

Two of the other artworks, my mother drew with pastels. The subjects — children she met on her travels during World War II as a Red Cross recreation worker. She

encouraged me — learn a bit of the local language, watch carefully, compliment a mother on her child, and play with the kids. She knew where real diplomacy took place.

Tomorrow, I will take to heart my mother's words. I will pack cardboard boxes for the couple who is moving and neatly write the objects held on the outside of each container. I will offer to drive the woman to see her son and read a book during the three hours they chat. I will offer to talk with my friend about her job prospects and hope her own reflections can help her. That will be a moment I will not feel powerless.

I looked at the last of the five art pieces — swirls of disparate colors on a rough surface. I stared as those shapes seemed to mix and separate, combine and part. Their infinite imagined movements captured my full attention and calmed me. I heard my breath flow in and out. I felt quiet. In stasis.

There are times I've taken action, leading or participating in activities with a group or as an individual. This period feels different. I need to stay out of the maelstrom of the moment. I should withdraw, not because I want to avoid involvement in the discourse, but because I must engage in it — with clarity and timeliness. I will watch. I will listen. I will absorb. Then, I will act.

I lie in bed. Now, I do not feel powerless.

THE END