

# The Boy in the Willow Tree

April 2022

In the middle of our spacious front yard stands a fine specimen of *salix babylonica*. Weeping Willows originate in northern China, but having been traded along the Silk Road found their way into Europe where they have been long cultivated. Those who stole this land (Australia) from the Indigenous Peoples in the early nineteenth century imported a great many plants to make them feel at home, including *salix babylonica*. My mother is an avid gardener, and her gardening is heavily influenced by the culture of Mother England. The willow is perfectly placed in the centre of a sloping bright green buffalo lawn, surrounded by beds of floral and shrubbery delight. *Salix* at the centre invites a small boy in a strained and hostile milieu to find solace and silence, to climb and to listen, to learn what is life and how to see...

# Attend

*Salix Babylonica*

Weeping Willow

it's long slender threads  
softly waving green strands  
floating vertical curtain

A small boy is

climbing  
entranced  
mesmerized  
embraced  
enfolded

*Salix* is weeping

cascading  
flowing  
dancing

The boy is open

to sky  
to silent music  
to invisible love  
to mystery  
to oneness  
to otherness

Willow mentor

teaches him how to  
attend  
stretching towards  
leaning into  
listening for

He is listening for

Everything

Here

Now

## Silent Teacher

Youngest sibling  
last, smallest  
his voice is lost  
in this combative household  
of hostile tensions, rivalries  
simmering resentments

Nuclear family indeed!  
suffocating  
silencing  
menacing  
alienating

Weeping willow beckons  
front-yard sentinel  
graceful centre  
silently  
whispering  
welcoming

Climb!  
Climb up  
into me

Come!  
for sanctuary  
for life

Observation deck  
Listening post  
Silent teacher  
Breathing space  
Willow guru

Be still  
Shhh!  
Listen  
Look  
Wait  
Feel

## Enough

There isn't enough...

Time  
Money  
Land  
Food  
Water  
Anything  
Any thing

There is not enough for everyone

And what you do is never enough!

More success  
More degrees  
More money  
More influence  
More expertise  
More celebrity  
More generosity

You are never enough!

Try harder  
Do more  
Go further  
No rest

You could be so much more

Influential  
Important  
Wealthy  
Smart  
Efficient  
Amazing

This, you discover,  
is the voice of death  
suffocation of soul  
trampling of self

In willow  
there  
is  
enough

## Parallel Worlds

No oxygen  
    around this family table

No space  
    to breathe in this torrent

of old worn-out chestnuts  
    dead mantras on repeat

These are your people  
    to whom you do not belong

Outside, the sun shines  
    willow leaves dance

A world on fire  
    with grandeur

Glaciers crashing, forests sighing  
    galaxies expanding, supernovae exploding

Wagtail dances in Willow;  
    ecstasy and life here!

## Slippery Memoir

History is mere perspective

Memory is plastic

Neuroplasticity accomodates

ego

trauma

shame

shock

bliss

amnesia

This memoir business, then,  
so unreliable

And yet

You must tell it  
your own story

Your slippery story is

all

you

have

who

you

are

## What I See is What I Get - 1

I gaze at the LCD screen's millions of images demanding my attention  
The incessant news-feed diet of suffering, death, and gloom  
The spreadsheets and algorithms which determine my life  
These heavily-mortgaged walls  
The fairytale lives of celebrities  
Glamorous mansions lining rivers and oceans  
Shopping malls screaming with insatiable desire

I see that I've had enough but feel pressured to do more  
All the needs in the world that I cannot meet  
The dreams which elude me  
The broken promises I have made to myself  
The impossible mountain of information I feel I must have mastery over  
Those perfect outcomes I can't seem to accomplish  
Sadnesses increasingly resistant to my cheerful optimism  
The rest I cannot allow myself

I see the wrenching loneliness of separation  
The self-recrimination mixed with anger at being overlooked for promotion  
The envy and resentment of feeling underpaid, undervalued  
The righteous indignation of discrimination  
Outrage over the unfairness of my disease  
The consuming pain I don't deserve and cannot escape  
The poverty I've always known, and cannot overcome

I see my ordinariness, that I can't fix with fashion spending  
The taxes and social contracts I resent and resist  
The self-satisfied smirks of crooks getting away with it  
The holiday dreams I have when my work has lost its sparkle  
This work prison I can't afford to leave  
The dream house that now bores me  
The Lotto life I'm still waiting for

And what is see is illusory freedom

The futility now of all those assets, all that stuff  
The loneliness of this isolating hospital bed  
The regrets for doing all manner of things that actually don't matter  
Those things that really do matter, now glowering at me

What I see  
is what I get

## What I See is What I Get - 2

The sky's unreproducible peach is deepening  
The vast ocean surges with restless potency  
The stellar energy-stream relentlessly blesses  
These morning birds refuse to be silenced

The daily miracle of birth  
The child's astonishing leaps  
The ingenuity to save lives and create beauty  
The everywhere daily miracles of faithful lovingkindness

Learning to see like this  
I am seeing through the illusion of consumerism  
The small screen's fear-filled visions  
These death-traps of competitiveness and rivalry and scarcity

And the more I gaze the more my eyes are opened  
To the simplicity of silence  
The liberty of mercy and compassion  
The astonishing miracles of goodness and beauty

And little by little  
I am seeing the sacredness of all things  
The unearned gift of my life  
The freedom of gratitude

What I see  
is what I get

## The Holy

Stumbling half-asleep into sun rise  
I am stopped in my tracks, dumbstruck

She emerges all pink and bloodied and tiny,  
silencing with adoration this clanging clinical audience

Hard-bitten *Shawshank Redemption* prisoners in their yard  
momentarily gaze heavenwards, transfixed by soprano's angelic voice

Bedside chit-chat ceases  
in the presence of my just-dead mother

After climbing strenuously upwards all morning, I step out of the forest  
before me an astounding, breathtaking majestic alpine otherworld

In a famous San Francisco skyscraper, they say,  
people involuntarily sputter 'Jesus Christ!' as they enter its soaring lobby

A boat-load of yabbering tourists suddenly lose their voices;  
sighting the gigantic ocean-mammal's graceful breaching

We stop the car one night out in a vast red desert,  
lights off, we learn the real meaning of awe

Transported to the otherland of orgasm  
we lie motionless, momentarily outside ourselves

Holding the now-wrinkled hand she's held for sixty years  
she smiles wordlessly at her life-long companion preparing to go

The 'h' word's not much in fashion nowadays  
but I will take my shoes off...

This is holy ground

## Good Friday

Today I see the power  
of archetypal story  
told and retold and retold

The generational power to shape  
nations  
civilisations  
  
and psyches

Your story is  
no less potent  
no less perplexing  
no less defining

Your story is  
Forgotten  
Recovered  
Fragmentary

It's telling shaped  
by the glorious mess  
of your unfolding  
your becoming

## Serve Mother

Mother Earth

life-giver of all

Heat-waves in tundra

floods in deserts

fires in rainforests

Mother of the faithful

nourisher of soul

Become cult-mascot

for regression and persecution

and blind bigotry

Mother of every child

ground of every human becoming

Devastated by patriarchal tyranny

and misogynistic fear

and blind shame and rage

Mother of earth

Mother of faith

Mother of blood

Your suffering is long

Serve Mother-Life

and all will flourish!

## There is Me, There is Us

Together we lie so close  
inseparable companions  
I am part of you  
    you, however, are gloriously yourself

*There is me, there is us*

I am inhaling deeply  
of forest DNA  
same stuff as me  
    yet magnificently other

*There is me, there is us*

I watch their haunting city-street faces  
this is not my tragedy, I tell myself  
they are not my responsibility  
    yet I am imprisoned by their plight

*There is me, there is us*

I see you fleeing the bombs, daily news-feed objects  
you had homes just like me  
I am so relieved I'm not you  
    but on my safe island nation, peace eludes me

*There is me, there is us*

You are my community  
my belonging and purpose  
bonded in prayer and ritual and sacred text  
    but divided by our competing gods' doctrine-bludgeons

*There is me, there is us*

You are my blood  
thicker than water  
we are family  
    but I am always an alien among you

*There is me, there is us*

## Facts of Life

The uncomplicated  
facts of life  
defy the crushing gravity  
of my paralysing inner turmoil

my soul caressed  
by flowing willowy silence

miracle-working trunk  
archetype of that One who  
descended into the abyss  
ascended into heaven

life-giving sap courses -  
sucked up from dark depths  
energy-bearing down from dazzling brightness

don't think so much  
your ancient body knows  
exactly what to do

relax  
just breathe

## Looking Both Ways

I am slowly learning to look  
and not turn away  
nor blink  
nor despair

To see all that is here  
this appalling suffering  
all of it as it really is  
no spit-polish

To really see this cross-shaped world  
practicing truth-telling  
becoming human enough  
to birth compassion

To also fall madly in love  
with strands of willow  
blindingly-brilliant glaciers  
unimaginably-weird deep-sea creatures

## Necessary

This push-pull of  
too-many things  
all the incomplete  
projects, responsibilities, ideas

Insistent shouting voices:  
You  
must  
make things  
happen!

Only by your effort  
will anything  
happen

How will you hear the  
whisper of true self?

The true voice never shouts  
only whispers

*There is just  
one thing  
needed today  
right now*

This moment  
is all we have

This one moment  
for this one necessary thing

## To Know

So many questions!  
The glorious inquisitiveness of young minds

Parents  
we're meant to have answers for everything

*For sure, that's definitely one of those...*

Mostly we don't  
An opinion here, a prejudice there

*Maybe it's because...*

So much ignorance  
masquerading as wisdom

Sometimes, I'm caught out  
Probably, I got away with far too much  
Who knows how much untruth I spread!

Eventually, I learn the trustworthy arts  
of waiting, watching, listening  
of silence, unknowing, humility

Certainty gives way for maybe  
Maybe gives way for

*I don't know*

## Answers

Sometimes

when storm front suddenly appears  
when tectonic plates lurch  
when the starlings murmurate  
when oil prices surge  
when shares plummet

Sometimes

when the world seems to have gone mad  
when your fresh start derails  
when a single smile lights your way  
when rising full moon tells your fortune  
when a widow's mite brings you to your knees  
when the first are last, and the last first  
when a single glistening leaf reveals the infinite

And sometimes

when you lie awake all night  
wondering  
    what happened  
why that single word  
    that tiny gesture  
can tilt the axis  
    of your being

You wonder, what if

there is no answer  
    to your plaguing question

And what if

dog's Buddha-nature resists  
    your will-to-power?

Then, at last

you need only fish up your own heart  
    from the well of mystery  
whisper your own voice  
    into the abyss of silence  
embrace your fragile soul  
    into wonder and love

## Awake

Calm surface breaks  
like clear air turbulence

Faster than lightning  
distress consumes

Oftentimes  
it's those ridiculously small things

I envy the ease  
of those with confident singular visions

Envy is futile, of course

The way of consciousness  
must be... messy!

The view from dark silence is  
sometimes, always, never  
here, there, nowhere  
home, away, homeless  
convinced, uncertain, unknowing  
calm, agitated, indifferent

To be awake  
to myself  
to life

I must be fully acquainted  
with my complexity  
with all multiplicity

## For Whom You Seek

You search  
for the One

You search for that perfect  
job  
friend  
dream home  
vacation  
deal  
gadget

You search for  
comfort  
ecstasy  
order  
certainty  
novelty  
celebrity

You search  
geographically  
relationally  
politically  
economically  
religiously

You search  
all life long

Finding your ideal  
each time, losing it

*Ideals always let you down*

For everything turns out to be  
ordinary  
transient  
fallible  
incomplete

And all your searching  
leads you here  
to this liberation

Finally you discover

You are the One you seek

## Lifesong

A gentle breeze rustles  
    green willowy strands  
You become quiet enough  
    to hear sap-flow  
    deep within this trunk  
    pre-human life-song

You are learning to listen  
    inside ordinary walls  
    to vast red landscapes  
    rocks with ancient tales  
    sighing mountains  
    laughing rivers  
    deafening silence of snow  
    fiestas of rainfall  
    yellowing leaves' relief  
    youthful buds' exuberance

And you are beginning to hear  
    these creaking joints  
    a hum in your head  
    the rush of breath  
    this constant heart beat

And when your door is shut  
    your devices powered-down  
    when there is only you  
    and all is silent  
    except your heartbeat  
    in that wee-hours encounter

You hear an inner orchestra  
    the whole assemblage of you  
    comes alive and beckons  
    playing the symphony of your life  
    strings serenading  
    trumpets warning  
    cymbals clashing  
    tympani pounding  
    flutes enchanting  
    harp soothing

And when you are finally still  
    still enough  
    and patient and loving enough

When you listen deeply  
    you begin to hear  
    your life-leaves rustling

your own life-giving sap flow

Your life-song  
is being offered  
to you  
as gift

## Coming To Himself

There was the trauma  
to be sure

Unspeakable behaviours  
insomnia, chest ache  
nightmares, betrayals  
utter exhaustion

There was all that  
oh yes  
and who needs it!

Yet hidden in soul's silence  
a great awakening  
a coming to himself  
a listening at last  
to the small voice

Liberating  
from title, role, dogma

Birthing  
body knowing  
native voicing

Saving  
the only life  
he could save

# Theory of Everything

I heard myself explain...

Why this sickness  
how that war  
this relationship breakdown  
that corporate corruption  
the reason for a death  
a child's bad temper  
a billionaire's wealth  
sadness, poverty, celebrity  
my privilege, your poverty

I heard myself explain  
tragedy and despair  
arms spending and homelessness  
economic rationalism and growth  
why private health care is good  
why wealth disparity makes the economy work

I heard myself explain  
why some will go to heaven  
others to hell  
how my sins are minor  
but yours unforgiveable  
why God blesses my empire  
and helps me destroy yours  
how my God is greater than yours

I heard myself explain  
climate change  
the motion of stars  
fission and fusion and chaos theory  
the importance of the Boson particle  
how mathematics explains everything  
how we will discover a theory of everything

I heard my own theory of everything  
to make myself feel better  
to comfort me in the face of suffering  
to support my happy illusion of being in control  
to give me a sense of power  
in the face of my powerlessness  
to eliminate the discomfort of unknowing

Finally, I heard all my explaining  
my theory of everything  
silenced at the precipice  
of infinite unknowability  
disappearing into the abyss of mystery

And then, at last  
I began to live  
to see and hear  
to truly love

## Value

Insignificant  
A tiny speck  
fragment, fragmentary  
speck of cosmic dust  
in one corner of vast galaxy  
itself merely one among  
two hundred billion

Cosmic insignificance therapy!

This perspective saves me  
from my self

Nothing I think I have  
I actually have

But this one thing I do have:  
psyche

Psyche is truly mine

Just as vast as cosmos out there  
everything is in here  
Everything

This wild inner universe  
its battles and sufferings  
its creativity  
its experience of nothing  
of having nothing

Being no-thing

To know cosmic insignificance  
is to know my only  
true significance

To see my self  
as speck of dust  
in a vastness  
is to know  
my true value

my being everything

## Standard Model

Physicists are all in a tizz today <sup>1</sup>  
They have Standard Model problems  
This W Boson has messed up  
everything

For this is what scientists abhor:  
inconsistencies in their explanations!

Standard Model is meant  
to explain all the laws  
all the forces of nature

A theory of everything

Funny, they are surprisingly like  
the theologians  
One god theory  
to explain everything

And all it takes is one anomaly...

And they are plunged into  
silence

The Silence  
of no tidiness  
no explanation  
no answer

The Standard Model  
cannot explain  
the great silence  
the crucible  
the womb  
life

In willow tree  
my soul delights in  
silence

Standard Model not required

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2022-04-08/standard-model-of-physics-challenged-by-w-boson-measurement/100964330>

## Myth

Easter Bunny is real  
and Santa and tooth fairy

Sun revolves around earth  
earth is flat

God is One  
and three persons

Christ was born to be punished  
for everyone's wrongdoing

Heaven is eternal reward  
for the saved

Space is made of ether  
stars are fixed in their places

Family is sacrosanct  
prosperity for the deserving

Suffering is payback  
monarchs rule by divine right

Celebrity is deity  
only the chosen few are beautiful

Coal is the future  
Euclid and Newton are all-sufficient

Life is merely a test  
economics requires poverty

Whiteness is the measure of the civilised  
sexual orientation is lifestyle choice

*All this was true  
in its time*

A moment arrives when  
you are glad you no longer live then

But then you see that  
all this remains shockingly true

*Do not underestimate the  
power of myth*

## Touching Volumes

I touch each volume  
Every one a story  
of chance finding  
hard-won dollars spent  
exhaustive online search  
an old wise one's precious gift

I touch each volume  
All shapes and densities  
revealing me  
the landscape of my mind  
the labours of my heart  
the shape of my passion

I touch each volume  
My single largest expenditure  
of three decades accumulating  
catalogued and carefully placed  
migrating with me  
these eight homes  
in three cities of two nations  
expanding for successive removalists

I touch each volume  
Envoy of my identity  
occupying pride of place  
in learned theologian's study  
badge of ecclesial authority

I can no more imagine  
parting with these volumes  
than losing my life!

Quite suddenly  
in the silence and the waiting  
it happens surprisingly  
easily!

I touch each volume  
One by one gratitude  
they have served their purpose  
time for me to relinquish  
to accept finitude

I touch each volume  
Caressing that earthy paper  
decorated with margin notes  
of earnest study  
wonderings, epiphanies, questions

their words nourishing me across decades  
or perhaps forgotten

I let go of each volume  
Ah, you cannot come  
where the spirit now calls me  
we take nothing with us  
even our prized possessions

Be free  
no longer mine

Delight and perplex others

You no longer define me

There is more of me  
to become

## Just Show Up

I just showed up  
That was my only plan

Hardly award-winning, I know

And all those superstars  
with their medals  
and fancy cars  
and share portfolios

But I just showed up

I showed up  
in willow tree  
being present  
to its silence  
and willow taught me  
everything necessary

I showed up  
for night feeds  
endless nappy-changes  
walks and games  
at kitchen sink and stove  
and washing machine

I showed up  
in empty churches  
to preach a thousand sermons  
for all those cups of tea  
for the mind-numbing diatribes  
of deathly narrow-mindedness

I showed up  
for the daily-news feed  
of the world's endless tragedies  
for morning birds  
soft breezes  
for full moon's brilliance  
to my own inner agonies and shame

Decade in, decade out  
I just showed up

The hardest part  
is believing it matters  
that showing up  
makes the blindest difference

And now,  
more years behind than ahead  
I'm still showing up  
in this morning tree-house  
in this simplicity  
watching, listening  
attending

And finally  
I am beginning to see:  
everything that really matters  
comes down to this...

Just show up  
to myself  
to the world  
to everything beautiful  
and horrific

Don't blink  
Don't look away

Just show up  
to love  
in love  
for love

Just show up!

## **Kairos**

No time to stop!

Ascent

Progress

Progression

Reputation

Accumulation

Busy Busy

Productive

Useful

Achieving

Mastering

Acquiring

Trading

This non-stopping kind of time

Linear

Finite

Commodity

Productive

Resource

Saleable

Invoiceable

Dollar-valued

Scarce

Scarce!

S C A R C E !

O mini-Lords of

Flat-earth-time

Pre-Einsteinian time

Enslaved

Deluded

Illuded

Rush-rush

to hospital-bed

to grave

Anaesthetise yourselves

Entertain yourselves

to death

Then, collapse

exhausted

into

your

sumptuous

bed

Repeat

This is the tyranny  
of Chronos  
Surface-time  
Shallow-time  
Uni-dimensional time  
Flat earth prison

Come drink, then,  
from the well of  
Kairos-time

Deep  
So deep  
Vast reservoir  
Limitless  
Infinite  
Curved  
Liberating  
Enlightening  
Interconnected  
Still  
Encompassing  
Profligate  
Creative

Drink deeply  
and live!

## Time and Me

To-do lists  
Schedules  
I have this-much time  
to get stuff done  
well, perfectly, efficiently

But time tricks me  
resists my will

Time reverses  
Skips beats  
Stops still  
Doubles back  
Loops and twists

Time beckons  
Caresses  
Invites  
Stretches  
Compresses

Time turns me upside down  
empties me out  
presses me to my limits  
sets me on precipices  
buries me in deep caverns  
transports me to mountain tops

Time traps me  
while others move on  
Time propels me to unimaginable futures  
while others, stationery, cannot see  
Time changes my mind  
undoes my theories, beliefs, convictions  
Time pulls the rug  
laughs at me

I am slowly learning...

I do not use time

Time uses me

## Ecstasy

In the midst  
    of everydayness  
Suddenly  
    unexpectedly  
Willow's silent bliss  
    overshadows

Seeking, and not finding  
    not seeking, and finding  
Grasping, and losing  
    letting go, and receiving  
Nothing and everything  
    emptiness and fullness  
Unknowing and darkness  
    silence and stillness  
Ordinariness and uniqueness  
    mundanity and bliss

In this moment of  
    singularity  
I am outside  
    *ek stasis*

Outside of  
    my self

At one with  
    every thing

## Tree of Life

You reach down  
for nourishment in moist darkness  
You stretch up  
for limitless star furnace energy

Your kind must have worked all this out  
by aeons-length trial and error  
until you struck upon  
this exquisite balancing act

Everywhere I gaze  
you and your myriad cousins  
breathing, refreshing, nourishing by  
reaching down, stretching up

Yet you, *salix*, are singular  
in this garden of sorrow and possibility  
Your symmetry and softness  
centering in this chaos

It will take me a lifetime  
to learn your ways  
To connect heaven and earth  
light and dark  
dry and moist  
To reach down to ground  
To stretch up to sky

A lifetime  
to fashion this earthling existence  
in harmony with all life  
To be nourishment and lungs  
To weave the seasons  
To bridge, to breathe  
when ground is dry  
and sky polluted

Silent willow  
Hearing every secret  
Keeping your counsel  
Containing my loneliness

I will spend a life-time  
climbing into your ancient wisdom  
drawing upon your fecund depths  
Reaching down  
Stretching up