

Art and Spirituality as Story

On Thursday morning, August 13, 2020, during my regular 7:30 – 9:30 am session of vanilla latte and drawing in my sketchbook at Madrona's Coffee Bar on Gabriola Island, I was approached by a mother and her daughter who showed great interest in my drawings. I took them on a quick tour of my sketchbook (No.5 in a series to illustrate my writing). They asked what the story was all about. So, I told them in brief because they had to catch a ferry. But, it was enough to result in an unexpected response. In particular, it was the daughter's reply that encouraged me. She is a university student majoring in writing and English literature. Her passion is writing in the fairy-tale style of a vivid imagination, not for social media snippets but for book-length stories in print; a surprisingly kindred spirit on a Thursday morning. I encouraged her; she encouraged me to be the storyteller, memory-maker, I have always been, but never had I considered storytelling and memory-making to be a synthesis of all my drawing, writing, teaching, and mentoring. Instead I had thought my calling to be one or the other and thus invited a never-ending, decades-long, discord between my art and my spirituality. Yet, a resolution had been staring me in the face since 2004, when I began writing the fourteen-volume epic poem *Cerulean Odyssey* followed by the illustrated novel *The Quest*. Many books and drawings later, I realize I am the storyteller memory-maker with no apology whether one is more Spirit-led and anointed than the other.

When I was ten years old, I began telling stories to children using puppets and a handmade puppet theatre complete with curtains and painted backdrop scenery. Since then I haven't stopped telling stories to my children, my grandchildren, and children of the community, including the adventures of the *pancake man*. And when it came to spiritual matters, I told the greatest stories of them all to adults in ways familiar and not, but always using both word and drawn images to keep memories alive and minds inspired. (tbc)