

ON THE ROAD TO IDENTITY

by

Paulette Payette

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"Madam! Have you ever composed music, written poetry or articles, or been involved in social work?"

This was the most puzzling questions asked by Doctor Dabrowski during my first interview. What a surprise! How did he know that all my life, I craved an artistic atmosphere?

For fifteen months, I have been undergoing the process of Positive Disintegration with Doctor Dabrowski. Today, at the First International Conference on Positive Disintegration, he has asked me to talk about my unique experience, my life. I feel insecure because I am opening to the public the door to my inner Self. But I will share my experiences to let you feel that Positive Disintegration is a suffering but a royal road to Secondary Integration, a road of thistles, a life-long road.

I will recall some of the major events which made me live, die and revive according to the Theory of Positive Disintegration.

Lost and wandering for more than forty years in an inner desert, I decided, one day, to see a psychiatrist to regain my identity. Yes, at seven years old, I had lost my identity, I had experienced death.

When I started school, I had crossed eyes, but I was not conscious of the situation. I remember I figured among the best students of the class. At the end of the year, teachers organized a public concert on the night the awards were distributed to the best students of the year. I had a special performance in that programme, I sang an elegy, a lullaby to my blue doll. I was so involved in my song that I started crying on the stage. I sobbed, and sobbed! Then, cheers and clappings filled the air and I became nervous because I did not understand the meaning of the ovation. Then the crowd wanted me to come back on the stage, but in vain, I could not revive a second time what I had been suffering while

singing with tears such a sad lullaby to my blue doll. It was too painful.

On Christmas Day, the next year, all the families were gathered at my grandmother's house. We were about twenty-five children around the Christmas tree. At midnight, each of us was invited to tell the poem learned for Christmas. Because it was the first time for me to recite a poem at Christmas, all my little cousins took their turn before me and each of them was applauded with great enthusiasm.

My heart beat so hard, I could hear it! My hands froze! My face perspired! My eyes filled with tears! My tongue dried up! My knees shook! I was so sad...so sad! Everybody anxiously waited to hear the title of my poem. Finally, I started: The Sad Christmas of Alice. Sobs cut my voice and pearls wet my eyelids.

It was a twenty line poem. And then again, cheers and clappings dazzled me. It was the least little cousin who told the longest poem with the greatest expression.

So, my grandmother took me on her knees, kissed me with affection and gave me the best gift. For me, sadness and joy were mixed in my head. Because Alice was so sad, I couldn't be so happy!

At seven years old, on Christmas Day, at my grandmother's house, at this moment, I reached the peak of my glory.

I was promoted to grade 2 with honor. All the family applauded at my success. When relatives came home, my mother was very proud of me and she always showed my report card. I didn't like it too much.

Before the opening of school in September, my parents took me to an oculist. My eyes were very weak. He prescribed eyeglasses, very thick

eyeglasses with a solid frame. I was the only pupil in the class to wear them.

One day, during recess, four little girls, older than me, came and threw those words straight at my face:

"You think you're cute with your crossed eyes and your 'bicycle wheels'! How ugly you are! Go and hide yourself!" They burst into laughter and left me alone.

I started crying and hid my face in my hands. I didn't want to go back to the classroom.

The teacher came and asked why I was crying. I couldn't tell her, because I was afraid, she was very strict.

So, I locked myself in an unhealthy mutism. Feelings of inferiority and insecurity grabbed me. I couldn't look at anybody. I was so ashamed of myself. I was "ugly" the girls told me, because of my crossed eyes and my "bicycle wheels".

After having experienced the peak of my glory, a year after, it was my first depression.

My parents noticed a conspicuous change in my marks. They were dropping down and down. My teacher scolded me and treated me as lazy because I couldn't answer questions properly especially in maths. I got many zeros in maths.

I always went to bed with the hope of waking up dead. Where was the key to open the door to the end of life? Deep down, I was dead. My Self, my original life was murdered. No more intelligence and freshness in my look. No Self! "Deep and hidden, the fact of not having a Self! Not being a Self! Not being!" How it is possible to loose a Self!

For the first time, at seven years old, unconsciously, I contemplated

suicide!

And then, another Self got into me. The reticent Self, the timid Self, the Self subjugated by social environment, the inferior Self, the eternally tired Self, this Self always confronted by my true dead Self. Will it be dead forever?

Knells, then, foretold the death of my ambitions: Farewell to music.... Farewell to poetry.... Farewell to writing.... Farewell to friendship....

After those simple but tragic events, I never performed any play on the stage at the elementary school. And despite that, I aspired to personify unhappy characters. I was so sad... so sad.

During my adolescence, I was involved in a traumatic experience which threw me into a deeper depression. For me it meant obsession, abomination. I deteriorated rapidly. Years after, I entered religious life.

The feeling of guilt increased more and more, and more and more reached its peak.

Very often, I was sick. My temperature rose during the night. Infected wounds covered several parts of my body. I hardly ate and slept. I worked while tired to death. I couldn't think or pray.

Again I asked God to come and get me out of my infernal internal world. But does He even hear me?

I went to see the doctor who sent me back with expensive medicines. This visit increased even more my scruples and my guilt, because of the costly expenses which could have been avoided, if only I had had the chance to talk to somebody. But nobody.... I remained involved in religious life.

Music, poetry, writing and psychology continued to be the gods of my life. But how could you express art and beauty when you find yourself rotten?

There was in my Self a kernel of life which wanted to revive, to grow. But the oasis in the desert of my soul was frozen, frozen to death.

When people met or lived with me, they often said: "How lucky you are! You always look in good shape! It's true, you're always tired, but when you're working, it doesn't show too much! You succeed nicely in your work and everybody seems to love you. Really, "you're born under a lucky star". All those statements were quite true.

Nevertheless, the more confidence people had in me, the more insecure I felt. I assumed simultaneous responsibilities which I was not sure I could handle.

My family and friends found me original, creative. I was always building "castles in the air", and what surprised me, was that I succeeded most of the time. I worked fast, easily associating with co-workers and had always in mind a concern for perfection. Available, I was involved in different activities. "Being around," people said, "created a calm and peaceful atmosphere".

My medical records register about ten minor operations, most of them under anesthetic; two major ones, three serious depressions and several lesser ones, as I am afflicted with a fibro-cystic disease. General diagnosis: chronic nervous fatigue.

Experiencing sickness and convalescence were for me the key to a better understanding of others. Happy! Happy are those who drank at this cup!

In November 1968, a displaced disk confined me, part time, for two months. How anxious I was during that period! It was a foggy period!

I was searching for my Self. It was so deeply hidden, so squeezed that I couldn't perceive it, and yet, I heard it calling:

"Come and get me! Come into the depths! I stretched my hands! Come! Don't wait! Tomorrow will be too late! Come! Come! It's your last chance!"

I didn't want to listen, I was afraid of reality. How could I get my true Self out of the depths and get rid of the false One? What would be the best way for me to revive my Self? My Self, dead for forty years! Anxiety! Anxiety! Anxiety!

Sisters of my community were very sympathetic. I deeply felt their love and understanding. They gave me time to catch my breath without rush.

In January 1969, I began sewing successfully. In February, I started to get better, and I worked at a part time job as receptionist in a college. I was not too fond of this work because it was mechanical rather than creative. For me, it was a transitional stage.

Meanwhile, I received information from the Famous Writers School of Westport, Connecticut, that I was eligible for their Correspondence Course. I succeeded in writing their Aptitude Test. It was an English Course. I never spoke or wrote English too much because I taught French for thirty years. I decided to follow the Course which could turn out interesting. Here is, I think, a work which would suit a part of my potential!

At the beginning of May, I talked about my anxiety to a close

friend, a social worker:

"Why don't you go and see a psychiatrist?" she said.

"See a psychiatrist? See a psychiatrist?" This suggestion shook me terribly and made me think deeply.

See a psychiatrist.... To tell him what? That I am tired? I didn't want to compromise my Self like that and I knew clearly that seeing a psychiatrist was quite expensive.

For three long weeks, I went around with an anonymous psychiatrist. And finding psychiatrists who talked French would be utopia. But if I want to find my Self, I had to make up my mind. I decided then, to see the Sister in charge and talked about my project. She kindly agreed and proposed to me a psychiatrist.

So, one day, on May 23, 1969, with fear and trembling, I made an appointment with a psychiatrist:

"Yes, Madam! tomorrow at three, would you be kind enough to come to my office?"

Yes, Doctor, tomorrow at three, I'll be there." His cool tone was a contrast to my weak, nervous voice.

The next day, in the waiting room, a man shook my hand and said:

"I'm Doctor Dabrowski, Madam, please be seated."

"Pleased to meet you, Doctor Dabrowski."

I sat down in front of him. He was a man in his sixties. Clear blue eyes softened his face and contrasted with a dainty white beard. His bald head shone like a mirror. Neat as a pin, he reflected a vibrant personality. He gave me a penetrating look, smiled and in a pleasant voice he said:

"Madam! tell me, why do you want to see a psychiatrist?"

"Doctor Dabrowski, I've been tired for forty years, and I want to know how and why I'm still tired?" After a subtle silence:

"Madame! Have you ever composed music, written poetry or articles, or been involved in social work?"

"Well Doctor! I listen to music, enjoy poetry, write more or less, and have taught for the past thirty years."

This was the most puzzling question of the interview. What a surprise! How did he know that all my life, I craved an artistic atmosphere!

"Madam! would you please read this little book and come back here in two days at the same time?"

"I will Doctor." So I went home with the book that totally puzzled my imagination: Positive Disintegration.

I tried to analyse the title. When something is positive, it doesn't disintegrate, and where there is disintegration, everything is negative. I believed in a paradox but surely not in absurdity.

So before I went to bed, still believing in the nonsense of the so-called Positive Disintegration, I started to read.

Positive Disintegration is a loosening, breaking up and dissociation of emotional, instinctive and intellectual functions which present clear, positive developmental elements as well as gradual generation and growth of higher levels of mental functioning: this culminates in personality integration. Positive Disintegration is characteristic of people with the capacity for universal development, and people gifted in specific fields of abilities and capabilities. (1)

Well, before I went on reading, I closed my eyes and tried to

(1) K. Dabrowski Positive disintegration. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1964.

understand the gist of the definition. "...characteristic of people with the capacity for universal development."

Questions then, emerged from the bottom of the sea of my subconscious. Am I qualified for special growth? I'll be fifty, and psychologists stick to the point that around thirty-five, development reaches its peak.

What is universal development? For me, it's poetry, music, literature and psychology, the gods of my life. I starve for them.

But life has taught me to be realistic, that artistic atmosphere grasps persons wiser than I am.

I tried to decide whether I was a person "gifted in special fields of abilities." What are my skills and my powers? I have some because I taught the past thirty years and I've made quite a success of it.

I was gifted, but wondered if those abilities suited my inner potential?

And finally, this "Positive Disintegration" culminates in personality integration.

So, to be a fully integrated personality, I have to disintegrate positively. What a puzzle! I closed the book and slept on it.

And I dreamed of giant ice cubes, melting from the bottom to the top, and hot brooks freezing from the mouth to the source. I froze in a steamboiler and perspired in a refrigerator.

In the morning, after breakfast, I skimmed through the book. It dealt with developmental dynamisms, which are:

--astonishment with oneself, dissatisfaction with oneself, feeling of inferiority with respect to oneself, feeling of guilt, dynamism of "subject-object" in oneself, the third factor, dynamisms of inner

transformation of stimuli, and ideal of personality." (2)

I hardly believed that dynamisms meant negative feelings. I was puzzled last night and more puzzled this morning. I put the book away and waited for my interview.

During the next twenty-four hours, I worked with strange feelings. For me, seeking a psychiatrist was a synonym for brain-washing. I started regretting going through that queer therapy.

Another statement had struck me last night "--and Positive Disintegration leads to Secondary Integration."

What are the factors between the two poles? When do we reach Secondary Integration? And where does it lead?

That night, I dreamed again. I saw My Self as a mummy, breaking into pieces, and, another Self, as a youth-poised young woman, sparkling and smiling at something new and grand. I grasped a golden casket and woke up.

Disintegration! Integration! What an obsession! For a moment I thought I was sick and couldn't go to see the Doctor that afternoon.

Then I curled my hair, dressed and went. I sat in Doctor Dabrowski's room, short of breath, with sweaty hands and shaky knees.

While waiting, on the screen of my imagination, I saw falling down slumps and building up skyscrapers! Three o'clock!

"Madam?" asked the receptionist. For a moment, I thought I was stuck to my chair.

"Here I am Miss." Doctor Dabrowski came to meet me.

(2) K. Dabrowski Personality-shaping through positive disintegration. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1967. p. 94.

"Well, Good afternoon, Madam! How are you?" I couldn't answer. At that moment, a blank filled my mind.

"Madam! tell me, please, how do you feel about the book I lent you?"

"How do I feel? How do I feel? I feel..., puzzled..., depressed..., used up. For me, your book means absurdity and I don't know if I'll keep on with your brainwashing therapy."

For a moment, he let me cool off and wrote down my reactions and my inhibitions. I was ashamed of my Self. I wanted to see a psychiatrist and now, I want to go away. Caught into my own absurdity, I apologized:

"I'm sorry, Doctor, I came here for one reason: to see how and why I am tired, and, despite my shame, my dissatisfaction, feelings of inferiority and guilt, I'll go through the therapy, unless you decide otherwise. But, Doctor, for me, in your book everything is negative. I'm getting old and I'm not a candidate for a personality integration. It's quite impossible to reach my ideal and I am sick, you know. But it's my last chance."

Doctor Dabrowski looked at me, smiled and I relaxed.

"Madame! I am sorry but I don't agree with all your statements. You're not old. You're a sensitive woman with a high potential for accelerated development. You're not sick, but rather have a sixth sense called "intuition". Your intuition leads you here, and despite your difficulties, and because of them, you're a candidate for personality integration. Furthermore you're intelligent. Only intuitive and intelligent persons can undergo the process of Positive Disintegration."

I could hardly believe Doctor Dabrowski because his comments sounded like reinforcements for his arguments. But he looked so sincere!

"Madam! would you please reflect on how and why you feel ashamed, inferior and guilty. Write the most traumatic experience of your life. This could be the key for your postponed development. But before you leave, I want to tell you, therapy is a hard process. Those who really want to be involved in it are gifted persons with high sensitivity and creative imagination." Hard process! Gifted persons! High sensitivity! Creative imagination! Each word fell in my false Self like a huge stone.

"Madam! would you be kind enough to come back, let's say in two days at the same time?"

"I will. And I'll try to reflect and write down what you're asking me."

Well, good luck, Madam." He shook my hand and I went home with heavy ideas!

Doctor Dabrowski is a sensitive, intuitive and intelligent man.

His books are based on many years of clinical and pedagogical experiences, and bring out the general human tendencies involved in the difficult road of creativity to perfection, mental and moral health. The recovery of numerous and mental patients results is not only a return to their previous state of health but also the attainment of a higher level of mental functioning. Patients also manifest their creative capacities, even during the climax of their illness. (3)

Where do I stand today, in my unique experience with Doctor Dabrowski according to the Theory of Positive Disintegration? It's a meaningful question.

Am I on the road to secondary integration? It is a life-long process! It is an achievement. It is perfection.

Now, a new system of values, or rather, my real system of values points to the horizon. The values of my pseudo-Self, teaching and business

(3) Pamphlet on the First International Conference on the Theory of Positive Disintegration.

work, start to dissociate to give rebirth to my true Self values: poetry, music, literature and psychology.

"Madam! When will you give me the pleasure of reading your first poem?"

"NOW. Doctor Dabrowski.

NOW

NOW!
The light sun,
The blue sky,
The fresh air!

NOW!
The rising dawn,
The morning song,
The crystal cup!

NOW!
The light breeze,
The new-born flower,
The glissening drop!

NOW!
The brittle cocoon,
The shy butterfly,
The flight to the sky!

NOW!
The verdant plain,
The whispering wind,
The wind in the meadow!

NOW!
The singing willow,
The trickling sap,
The promising bud!

NOW!
The charming lake,
The shimmering boat,
The wind in the sail!

NOW!
The sparkling spring,
The flashing rockery,
The bubbling falls!

NOW!
 From gloomy caves
 Light!
 From wild forests
 Serenity!
 From tortuous meanderings
 Clarity!

NOW!
 In the clear morning,
 The rugged climb
 To haughty tops,
 To severe crests
 And snow-clad peaks!

NOW!
 Love,
 A velvet glove!
 NOW!
 Love,
 In fine array!

NOW!
 Love
 For Love!

NOW!
 Love
 In love
 With LOVE
 Forever!

French: September 26, 1969
 English: August 12, 1970

"Madam! Could I hear your music soon?

"I wrote in music my longest poem: RISING FLAME which appeals very much to me. Is it musical poetry? Is it poetical music? Is it even poetry?

RISING FLAME

A rising flame
 Kindles
 On the altar
 Of my heart
 Dear Lord!

It troubles!
 Wounds!
 Fascinates!
 Carries away!
 Enlightens!

In my heart
 Filled
 With joy,
 My dazzled eyes
 Gaze
 Upon
 The rising flame
 Flickering!
 Twinkling!
 Sparkling!
 Glissening!

Why! Why!
 This rising flame
 On the altar
 Of my heart
 Dear Lord!

And this trouble!
 Wound!
 Burning scar!
 Gleaming light!
 Flickering!
 Twinkling!
 Sparkling!
 Glissening!

In my heart
 Filled
 With scum,
 My eyes
 Gaze
 Upon
 The rising flame
 Flickering!
 Twinkling!
 Sparkling!
 Glissening!
 AGONY!

Why! Why!
 This rising flame
 On the altar
 Of my heart
 Dear Lord!

Rising flame
 You trouble!
 Rising flame
 You wound!
 Rising flame
 You burn!
 Rising flame
 You fascinate!
 Rising flame
 You carry away!
 Rising flame
 You enlighten!

Why! Why!
 This rising flame
 On the altar
 Of my heart
 Dear Lord!

Rising flame
 On the altar
 Of my heart
 Before Thee,
 O Lord!
 Listen!
 Listen!
 Listen!

Rising flame!
 Sparkle!
 Flicker!
 Glitter!
 Enlighten!

Rising flame!
 Live!
 Burn!
 Warm!
 Blaze up!

Rising flame!
 Enlighten my path...
 Purify my eyes...
 Burn my feet...
 Blaze up my heart!

French version: October 8, 1969
 English version: August 11, 1970
 Music: March 1969

"Madam! This Rising Flame is not only subtle but mystical.
When are you going to write music for the others?"

For several weeks I have been roaming around and singing incoherent
melodies for Virgin Souls and The Silence of Mystery.

VIRGIN SOULS

Virgin souls
Are deep vessels!
If the first
Drop
Is filthy,
All the sea
Could pass over
And the stain
Will remain.
The stain
Is boundless!
The chasm
Bottomless!
Virgin souls
Are deep vessels!

March 2, 1970

THE SILENCE OF MYSTERY

This Night!
No noise,
This Night!

Silence
In its transparence
Whispers
Plenitude!

On the infinite
Mirror,
Glides the swan!

No sigh!
Silence!

This Night!
No noise,
This Night!

Swiftly
As a dart,
Moves the swan!

Solitude
Tackles it!
Infinitude
Enthrals it!
Plenitude
Surrounds it!

This Night!
No noise,
This night!

Solitude!
Quietude!
Beatitude!

Mystery...
Austere
And severe
Silence!

This Night
No noise,
This Night!

French version: March 10, 1970
English version: August 10, 1970

"Madam! Will you write an article soon?"

"Doctor Dabrowski! You've asked me to tell about my unique experience for the First International Conference on the Theory of Positive Disintegration on July the 30th. I started. To tell you the truth, I am not too much satisfied with my work, because I did not have enough time to work with."

"Madam! Are you involved in Psychology?"

"Doctor, for a month I've been working with your "Dynamic Silent Group" gifted with high sensitivity, creative imagination and sharp intelligence. I feel at ease with your group and deeply enjoy working with persons involved in the Theory of Positive Disintegration."

Well! Here I am at the end of a brief outline of my unique

experience. How many incidents I skipped! How many emotions I hid!
 How many feelings I missed!... because I was stifled in these few pages!
 Nevertheless, I hear, Doctor Dabrowski whispering in my ear:

"MADAM! WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO WRITE YOUR FIRST BOOK?"

At the dawn of my second golden anniversary, I am now a new woman
 smiling at her second but real career. The golden casket of my dream,
 partly opened, sparkles in my hands. Positive Disintegration slowly leads
 me to the contemplation of my real values, to a more serene empathy towards
 my brothers and to a deeper closeness to Christ.

AM I?

Am I
 NOW
 A VIRGIN SOUL
 ON THE RECOVERED ROAD
 TO MY IDENTITY?

Am I
 NOW
 THE RISING FLAME?
 SILENCE OF MYSTERY.

August 12, 1970