

Watershed turns into rebirth

By Ruth Ostrow

THE water around me is swirling rapidly as in a dream. I open my eyes long enough to see the beautiful face of Kaya Femerling, my water mother, holding me tightly to her bosom, her long blonde hair cascading, before I doze back into a trance-like state of perfect bliss.

As she twirls around and strokes my hair, I feel as if I am being reborn to god.

This is a therapy called oceanic bodywork, started in Switzerland a decade ago as "aqua wellness" by Kaya who took the work to Scandinavia and then around Europe before bringing it to Byron Bay, where she now trains trainers and therapists from all over Australia.

It's a form of massage but it does not rely on the touch of the masseuse. Rather she relies on the pool water which churns around the body stroking the skin under the spine and around the arms.

Given that I am now stretched out with floaties under my feet and neck, she can hold my legs and move my spine gently this way and that; opening, stretching, expanding me before she nestles me close to her body again. The water is warm, like embryonic fluid. The imagery is powerful.

I feel like an infant. I feel like I'm being carried in the womb. Which is the reason I'm here. To celebrate my birthday, but also for something more profound and significant. My father died a couple of weeks after one of my birthdays. Today is the 10th anniversary of his death. Even writing these words makes me cry. A decade, and it still feels like yesterday. I have wanted to do something sacred. Something really special. I have grieved so deeply for so many years and each anniversary is a huge drama. This year I felt like some sort of letting go.

No more weeping at cemeteries, time to do a sensuous thing to celebrate his death and my birth. I believe it's so important to acknowledge special days with ceremony. Planting a tree, singing songs, sitting in circles and speaking our truths. All passings need to be honoured this way, break-ups, divorces, deaths, and all new beginnings.

Having heard about this beautiful work of Kaya's for so long, I was delighted when a friend gave me the session as a birthday gift, but initially alarmed that she had booked me in on my dad's death day. And then I thought: "Yes. This is how I will honour him." So I'm being moved around the water, blissfully, sensuously. As with the popular watsu water shiatsu which has taken the US and Europe by storm, Kaya says that her oceanic bodywork helps autistic children and sick people. It stimulates blocked energy channels and helps ease depression.

But best of all, it washes the body with exquisite sensations because feel-good hormones and endorphins start flowing.

Kaya says: "I will create movements that your body craves, which it hasn't felt since the womb." And my body starts mewling in pleasure.

Then suddenly we are in different terrain. She gives me a nose clip. "Unlike watsu, I will be taking you under. It's a powerful journey. You'll see." I put the clip on. She taps three times before she takes me down so I can take in enough

breath. The first time we go under it feels uncomfortable. Strange. My ears fill with water. But then we are down for a longer time, and then longer. My lungs seem able to retain huge amounts of air.

On the third time down, I sense something changing chemically in my brain. I feel a sudden sense of heaviness and colours start moving slowly before my eyes. As happens in float tanks the mind has dropped from alpha waves to theta, which is the slow rhythmic beat of a tribal drum, it is the sound of the heart. It is the altered consciousness of a deeptrance.

Even though my eyes are shut, I can see intense blue. It is surrounding me. Kaya holds me tenderly while I somersault backwards and forwards. I'm like a sea creature, a whale. And then I'm part of the primordial water we all came from, both embryo in womb and amoeba in primal slime. And then, blissfully, I am nothing.

I run out of air. I need to come up. But I don't want to. A vision of my father envelops me, then vanishes. In the stillness that follows I suddenly get a deep sense of what death is, of dying, of surrendering to nothing and expanding into the awesome sea. I lose my desire to breathe. I am in ecstasy. Death, in an instant, is no longer frightening.

Kaya pulls me up. I emerge gasping for air, born again, as my water mother cleaves me to her breast.

I am somehow changed sitting here, writing this. Words do fail me. But I understand the great cycle of what Joni Mitchell sings as "death and birth and death and birth". And I'm now certain that wherever my beloved dad has gone to, it is a space filled with profound love.

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