

Essay Series

PPP: BREAKING OPEN

Personally Processing Pluto, Part 3

Welcome to Planet Earth, Taurus 1992

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The feeling began to germinate a few weeks before departure date. Inchoate. A sense of something just below the surface or hiding within the periphery of vision. A powerful fertile presence, of a kind unknown to me. I feel expectant. Excited. As if I am about to plunge into a dark, richly-hued ocean, glinting with gems and treasure.

[So this is to be how Pluto opposite my 23° Taurus Moon feels as it closes to exactness for the first time? Not what I expected. Not the usual reputation of Pluto. Where's the fall into the void, the terrible nothingness? Where's the death of all I have ever known, the consuming fire, the ashes?]

Jeff and I are due to join my parents, five sisters, two brothers and their spouses on an ocean-going cruise in honor of my parents' 50th anniversary. This cruise, I now tell Jeff, is going to be magical.

He looks surprised. Really? I sense his reaction and am not surprised. I certainly have not used the word "magical" in connection with my family before. I begin to doubt myself. "Magical? What am I talking about? How could I be feeling this?" I admonish myself. "I am being unrealistic. What the trip will really be is a replay of all the old family dramas, the glue that links us, the mucus that clogs us. Me, big sister and family scapegoat; Marnie, 2nd sister, the pretty one; Kathy, mysterious and romantic family

recluse; Mary, the sweet one who had survived cancer; Mark, the handsome one, the ladykiller; Big John the clown, etc. etc. . . Each of us locked into a particular stance, a stereotype, defined long ago. Each of us co-dependent with all the others. Re-enacting subtle territorial battles. Wanting recognition — from each other, from the parents. . . . Trying to just survive the noise and chaos of this large and active family.

Our sibling roles perfectly reciprocal, our neuroses dovetail exactly; they are the gears on some big grinding machine, endlessly replaying the drams we internalized as children. Some of us favor Mom; others, Dad; and of course Kristin, the baby, now 34 years old, and always wiser than her years, is close to both of them, protective. The two boys, as usual, will half-jokingly play out their rivalry with each other while feeling lost inside the large female group.

Dad has long since softened from his towering German doctor patriarchal stance, though the imprint of that still shudders through us all. And Mom will be as always, lovely, lively, Libran, the perfect counterbalance to his shy, rough awkwardness with especially those he loves. I could go on and on analyzing the dynamics of this particular family in the late 20th century. I could go on and on like I used to, when I was actively involved in attempting to save my own life, to pull myself out of that sea of yuck . . . but why bother? Each of us has our close family system which we, if we are doing the work of this time, have been looking at, both from close to and far away. We are looking at our families of origin with the aim of freeing ourselves from the mechanical pushes and pulls of their psychological hydraulics. We are taking responsibility for our origins during this final decade of the second millennium A.D. when a fundamental shift is at work. We are to revolutionize the nature of all human relations, transform all values, revision all possibilities. At least that's what's supposed to happen. At least that's what I tell people when they ask me about what's going on within the Pluto in Leo generation (1938-1957) now that Uranus/Neptune in Capricorn sextiles Pluto in Scorpio.

I've been involved in this business of freeing myself since I was 26 years old. That was when I wrenched myself from what is now called the dominant scientific paradigm and, with the help of a terminal illness and psychedelics, opened to my soul. But the business of freeing myself from family I didn't really recognize as important, indeed

utterly and totally necessary, until my Uranus opposition, when I was 40. Until then, I thought I *was* free, since I could only barely endure being around especially my parents for even a day at a time. From the age of 26 until 40 (14 years, half a Saturn[father] cycle), I was driven by anger, mostly focused on my father, and acted it out whenever possible. Indeed, the tension the entire family had to endure whenever we were both present must have been awful to go through.

By the time I was 42, the tension between myself and my father had grown so explosive and vengeful that I stopped all communication with both parents. When Mom called a few months later — and in her pleasant Libran way tried to pretend everything was okay — I cut her off abruptly, told her that I didn't want to talk, that I couldn't pretend we were in a normal place with each other, that I needed to observe silence. "Something in me must change before I can see or talk to either of you again," I told her, "and I don't have any idea how long that will take."

It was exactly one year later when I suddenly realized that I had to go see my father again, that it was time. I called and told them I would drive there the next day, to stay for 24 hours. Mom answered the phone, sounded both relieved and anxious.

The moment for my talk alone with Dad did not present itself until 4:30 in the morning, when he and I arose, as usual — we had always both been early risers, studying until dawn. [When I was a child we would sit in the living room in armchairs, him poring through the *New England Journal of Medicine*; I, the *Lives of the Saints*.] Now I peek out my bedroom door to the living room, where he sits on the couch. "Dad," I say to him, "we need to talk." "About what?" he counters, looking belligerent.

At that moment I realize something about my father which I have never known: he is as frightened of me as I am of him! Seeing him so defensive, and feeling what he must feel, when confronted with his eldest and only errant child, something in me changes, relaxes. I say, teasingly, softly, "You know. It's why I'm here. We need to talk." At this, he responds by moving over on the couch, placing the palm of his hand on the cushion next to him.

Our talk takes only ten minutes. I tell him I now realize that part of our problem has been that even though our world-views are utterly opposed, we each hold our beliefs with the same kind of fierce dedication and stubbornness. That our real problem is we are so alike.

“Yes,” he agrees. “Renee and several of the girls have also said that.” So, I continue, I couldn’t come home again until something had changed in me. Because until it did, we would always clash. *I realized what I had to do was to get out of my mind and into my heart. I needed to learn to love you, no matter what our points of view.*

The entire time I am talking, he is nodding his head somberly, seriously, as if to say yes, I have been through this same process, and have arrived at the same conclusion.

I finish by telling him how grateful I am that he is my father. That whatever qualities of dedication, discipline, and integrity I have developed are the result of his example.

At that point we both reach over to hug each other. I am thinking that will be the end of it. It feels good, feels wonderful. But then I receive a gift from my father which is totally unexpected and undeserved. Instead of remaining the patriarch, intellectually distant from me, he says, out of the blue, as we embrace: “And I want to thank you, for making me question each and every one of my beliefs.”

This is the kind of father I have. Even now, seven years later (another quarter cycle of Saturn), I marvel at what he said that day, his capacity for transformation when he was nearly 70 years old.

Since then we have felt at ease with one another and, though we don’t have much to say, it doesn’t matter. Our hearts are open.

I assumed that my personal work was done with this experience, and was not prepared for the opening which it provided into an even deeper wound with my internalized mother. This work began shortly afterwards, when I “fell in love” with a man who reminded me of her, without knowing why. [I can remember thinking at the time: “Well, at least he doesn’t remind me of my father. I must be learning something!” I had no idea that his reminding me of my mother was a clue as to what was to come.]

Over time, I began to realize this man was ambivalent, continually swinging between wanting me and pushing me away. Finally, after a two-year period of dealing with the enormous pain which came up every time he abandoned me, I discovered that this man *was* my mother, in that, like him, she had also been ambivalent. A “war widow” during World War II, Mom had spent the entire time Dad was gone terrified he would never return, distracted from her mothering.

Then, when Dad did come home, when I was two and a half years old, she “betrayed” me, by siding with him as he began to discipline me, to teach me who was boss. He tells others in the family, “It took me six months to teach Ann to respect me,” i.e., to break my will, to subjugate me to him. I had to spend 14 years as an adult actively replaying that early hostility. I had not realized that underneath my anger towards my father was the profound loss of my mother, the fundamental feeling of abandonment through betrayal: for even though she was only barely there for me, she was all I had.

I tell this story not to blame my parents. I tell this story to speak of the gifts to consciousness which pain brings, once it is re-membered, and upon being fully re-membered with all the cells in one’s body, released. To re-enact the drama of abandonment, was to unlock the pain held inside since I was an infant. In doing this, I was able to uproot a secret feeling of worthlessness which had undermined any sense of accomplishment from the beginning of my life.

I would say now, at 49, that work on my inner triangle with Mom and Dad is what my 40s have been about. That this emotional clearing — first of the rage, and then of the grief over loss — has lightened me now to the point where, for the first time in a decade, this inner work is not my primary calling. I can turn again to the outer world, and hopefully, make my contribution with more objectivity and detachment.

I’d been working hard. I knew that. I had no idea I was not alone. . . .

About six months ago, my sister Kristin called from Seattle and said, “People are changing around here, everybody in the family who lives around here (both parents, three sisters and families) is really working on him- or herself.” At the time I didn’t think much about what she said.

Then, about a month before the trip, I was surprised to receive, for the first time ever, a Christmas card from my old rival, sister Marnie: “I’ve been changing, Ann . . .” On reading this, I burst into tears.

So there were clues as to what lay ahead, even before the peculiar Plutonian feeling, of a richness, a fullness, a wealth beyond measure — described above, began to seep in. Clues that Pluto’s deep sextile fueling of Uranus/Neptune was beginning to crack open the Capricorn family structure.

Scenes from a Cruise

- I am with Jeff and my brother-in-law John in the bar of the hotel in San Pedro, sitting so that I can see who comes into the lobby. All 17 of us are due to arrive during the late afternoon from points east and north and south. Suddenly I see three tall and graceful women milling about in the lobby. I recognize them. Jump up, run to the lobby. Embrace. The embraces go on all afternoon and into the evening, as we all joyfully find each other again. Everyone looks wonderful. They welcome Jeffrey into the fold. He beams. Amazing. The feeling is real. It is open, it is high.

- The next A.M. We have had breakfast and have all agreed to meet in one of the hotel rooms, where Kristin has announced that Ann will give a short presentation of the astrological chart for the moment when the ship is scheduled to leave the dock that evening. I have xeroxed a computer chart nine times (for the eight couples and sister Kathy) and have drawn the aspects with colored pens and laminated them. I hand these to each couple in turn. [Amazing how lamination turns astrology into reality. Take paper, add plastic . . .] I’m surprised to note how everybody is really looking at them, wondering what they mean. [Astrology has not exactly been a welcome subject in my traditional medical and Catholic family, where they worry about “science” on the one hand, and “free will” on the other. I recall my father, at one point, asking me with disgust, “Why are you wasting your good brain?”]

The talk was intended to be humorous; it became instructive. I tell them what Jupiter on the Ascendant means Opportunity! Expansion! I point to the huge Capricorn/Aquarius stellium in the fifth house. Creative expression! I become somewhat

more serious as I mention the Uranus/Neptune conjunction in Capricorn, the restructuring of the entire world, teaching us to “accept each other as utterly unique individuals (Uranus), while feeling our oneness (Neptune)” . . . By this time everybody is serious, wants to know more. Nope, that’s it. Now it’s time for the cantata.

- The cantata. everybody in my family is musical, playing instruments and singing. Even during our hardest times, we have always been able to make music together. During the ’70s, when some of us were already grown and coming home for Christmas, we began a tradition of creating a “Kreilkamp Cantata,” as a surprise, for the folks. Each child would make up lyrics to a well known song, and sing it. The songs would be connected together through a common refrain which we would all sing. The cantatas were designed to make our parents laugh and cry by turns, and they always did just that.

During the months prior to the cruise, all eight brothers and sisters had agreed to compose another cantata: our gift to the parents. Sister Paula from the South, and a real pro, both musically and as an organizer, would create the common refrain, and tell us which songs to make up lyrics for. Each of us would practice on our own and then get together for just one rehearsal. The cantata itself would be sung following the parents’ renewal of their vows, during the evening on the ship that we had arranged for a private meeting room.

I’ll never forget the extraordinary feeling of that morning in the hotel room, all eight siblings there, sitting around, laughing, talking, listening to one another’s songs, appreciating them, clapping, laughing some more. At one point Kristin said, “Are we all here? It feels like some of us are missing!” And it did feel that way, so light and spacious was the atmosphere that we had trouble believing we were all there. *We had transformed a closed Capricornian family system into an open Aquarian group. Each of us Pluto in Leo, creating and holding open our own space, literally singing our own song, being honored by all the others.* Then, at one point, we squabbled, and noticed: *we were* all there! No doubt about it, and the room felt cramped, claustrophobic. Marveling at this, we all instantly laughed, reared back, and re-entered our open Aquarian space. I was no longer “big sister” but simply a sister, one member of this wonderful singing group.

- After our practice was over, I had been so filled with the coming magic that I commissioned an artist friend of mine to make nine tiny clay pregnant mother goddesses [one for each sister, plus two sisters-in-and our Mom], to be worn around the neck, and containing some sort of gemstone in their bellies. They were in many colors and sizes and shapes, each both beautiful and individual. The entire time I was doing this, a small part of me was still lambasting myself. “What are you doing? You can’t afford this! And besides, only one or two of the women will appreciate it!”

Tina, the artist, stayed up all night to make the little figures. “I was sick,” she told me wonderingly, “but I didn’t mind staying up. It was easy!” I wrapped the necklaces carefully in a long beautiful bright blue scarf, each one individually, so that when I unrolled them they would appear one at a time.

The women drifted in. My mother wondered if she was supposed to be there. “Don’t you just want menstruating women?” she asked. I was startled. Why did she ask that? I had given no hint as to why I wanted the women to gather. “No, no,” I told her. “Stay. You hold your blood. That makes you powerful.” Sister Kathy overheard us and said in amazement: “Funny you should talk about menstruation. I got my period last night and there’s a huge circle of blood on the sheets in the middle of the bed.” “Good,” I replied. “Then we’ll unroll this scarf on that exact spot.”

Looking back on this, I’m amazed at the entire scene. These were not crones, not witches, not pagans . . . These were good Christian women! And yet here we all were, focused, intent, as the scarf was placed on the center of the bed and ceremoniously unrolled to reveal the little figures. “Take the one that is yours,” I said. Each one did. We talked briefly on what Mother Goddess energy symbolizes, her inexhaustible power of creation. The women were radiant, exclaiming on the beauty, the power of the little goddesses. We all wore them openly for the entire cruise.

- The final scene of this Aquarian drama was decidedly Plutonian. Was where I felt the dark rich power seeping into the energy of the room. This was our family program, from 6 to 8 on Saturday night, somewhere off the coast of Baja, in the belly of the ship. Sister Paula had prepared the liturgy for the parents’ renewal of their vows after 50 years. Each of the siblings was given a part to play: we were each to sing a song or read a

prayer or a psalm. The parents would repeat their vows to one another, and then light candles, and with their candles, light all eight of our candles, one by one.

My father sobs quietly throughout the ceremony. The long work on himself has produced this result: he is broken open; his natal Pisces Sun finally allowed to shine. And the tears are those of centuries.

My mother is intense, her gaze smoldering and fierce; Mom's Mars in Scorpio is finally surfacing. Their children are seeing, perhaps for the first time, just how powerful she is, and has been all along in this marriage. Her Libran self supported by the resourceful Scorpio Mars.

Then, the new cantata, which as ever, moves our parents to both tears and laughter as each of their children sings his or her own song. My song was about souls and their longing for their own path, the pain they feel on that path, how "from that pain gifts flow like rain."

Throughout my song, our father nods his head, as if once again to say yes, yes, I've been through this too, and have come to the same conclusion.

Afterwards, as all 17 of us are hugging each other, and crying: my father holds me to him and says, suddenly, as if it just burst out of him, "I want to thank you" . . . his voice sobs, cracks; he draws in another breath . . . "for being *you!*"

Jeffrey and I have been back home for a few weeks now. I'm still absorbing the fruits of that journey. And I confess: I feel disoriented, am having trouble getting my bearings. It's as if the brief seasickness I experienced on ship has lodged in my psyche. And no wonder. Our particular closed family system had defined the limits of my world. As much as I always wanted out, I had not prepared myself for the feeling of loss, the leap into the void, that the magic of our transformed family journey would engender. My entire identity has been bound up with defining myself against what I came from. I have no experience in assimilating the gift (Pluto) of unconditional freedom (Uranus) and love (Neptune) that lights up the world when we finally do break (Uranus) open (Neptune).

Note: I wrote this article about a month ago. Since that time I have found my feet again. However, a dream I had last night was revealing. In it I was in a large hotel in a foreign country. I thought I was alone, but discovered my entire family was there, too. They were having a reunion without inviting me! I was so upset by this rejection that I lost my purse containing my money, my identity, my plane ticket back home.

And I thought I was done with family business. . . .