

Personal Perspectives

A Different Life

by Patricia J.

We didn't kiss each other goodbye at the airport. A long, tight hug, then attention focused on each other's eyes for a moment. Tears came to mine..."Be careful, remember how close I always am..."

More tears came as I drove away and she walked into the airport, headed for a day in the city and then halfway across the world. While I drove back to the mountain and my day of work, I saw so many signs of it being just an "ordinary" day...faces in cars rushing past me, joggers on city walks, a black cat hunting in a field, the dark green corn 12" high, a bank of black-eyed Susans glowing in the early morning light, crowded parking lots at the Bagel Bakery and breakfast haunts...just an ordinary day...just an ordinary moment of two people parting at an airport started this rise of feeling, this too-clear awareness that even in ordinary moments our lives are different (at least on the outside, and on the inside as we try to live with the outside).

Had I been with my sister or my cousin, I would have kissed her and never hesitated, but this was my partner, my closest friend - in some people's terms my spouse, my lover. (We don't even have a name that feels right for who we are together. How often do married partners use "husband" or "wife" to refer to each other, never having to stop, think, choose a word, often determined not by the relationship but by who will hear it?) In that moment, without even realizing fully what we were doing, my partner and I chose not to express our love in a public place. From outside our reluctance may seem extreme (and a reflection of our own self-oppression), but consider the ease with which a man and a woman may hold hands on the street, reach

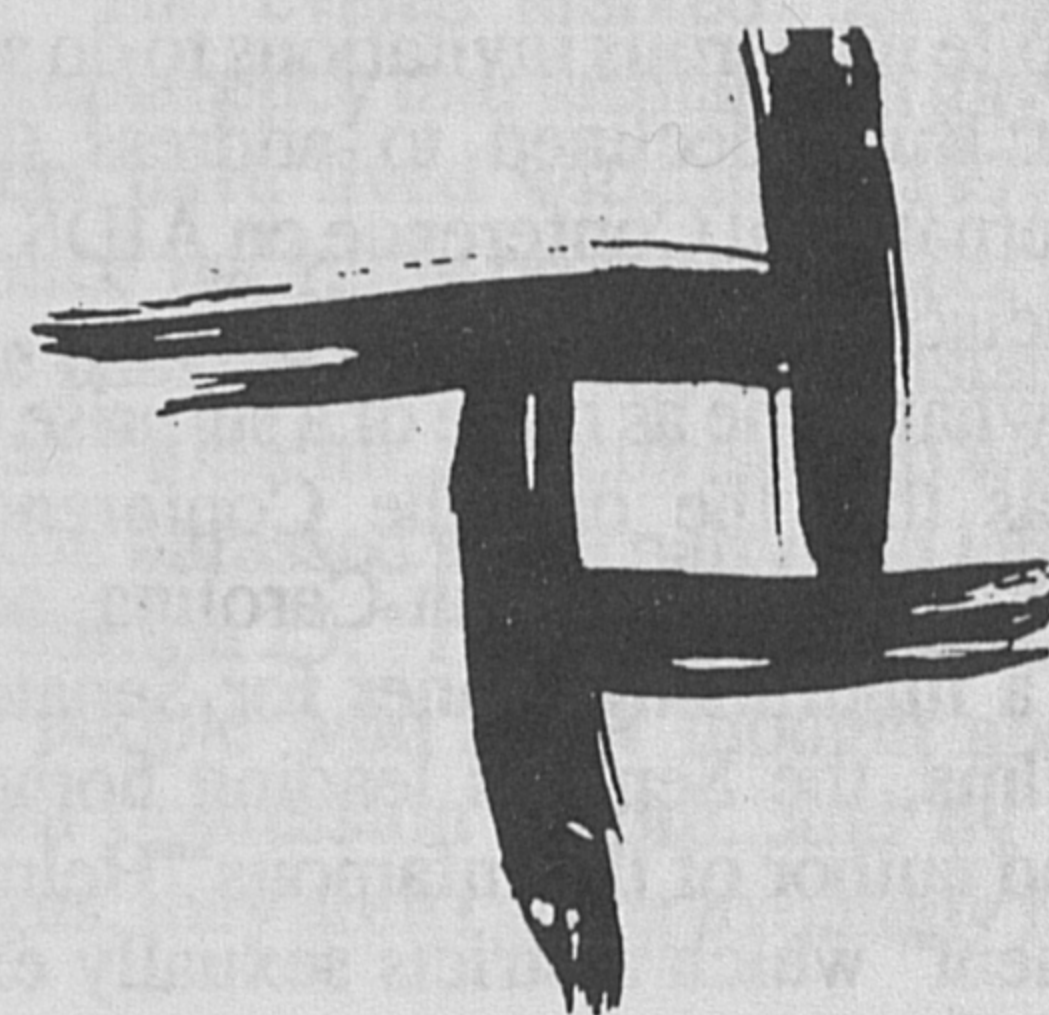
over and touch each other in a restaurant, sit close to each other at a picnic or on the beach.

We feel those same impulses and needs to be affectionate, but risk with their expression anything from disapproval to physical harm. And so, most of the time, we don't. But all the same, holding back and hiding take energy even when they become a way of being.

Now, in my mid-forties and having spent my life so far carefully navigating the waters of social acceptance and cultural propriety, I'm noticing a change, a subtle yet powerful "shifting wind." It tempts me to put pictures of my loved one on the desk (beside my nieces and nephews, who others presume are my children). It urges me to bring my partner when man-and-woman couples have been invited as a pair. It moves me to sadness and anger when I realize that I can't or don't let my voice or eyes or hands express my real feelings because someone else may hear or see. It whispers to me in an increasingly louder voice: "It's time they did see and hear - that it's love and care and concern we share, something too precious to hide, too beautiful to smother."

In a life where there is never enough love to go around or perhaps, more accurately, a life too short to adequately express the love we need to feel and share, none of us can afford to keep from each other - or from ourselves - the most important gift we have to give.

It is risky to let the wind of change fill our sails, and we need to steer a course with strong hands and hearts...but this wind holds the promise of taking us in a whole new direction.



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