

## The Gift

By Jodi Lorimer

This Christmas will be remembered at our house as The Holiday of the Walking Wounded. Infirmities of one sort and another afflicted friends and family so that festive plans were curtailed and mending was rather more the order of the day than celebration.



I had foot surgery to repair once and for all (I fervently hope) a bunion that has given me fits for years. While the rest of the western world was dashing hither and yon to shop, feast, party and share gifts, I was confined to the couch and crutches for several weeks with only limited mobility and energy. Being one of those people who bristles at confinement, it was a frustrating challenge that I entered into defiantly with both heels dug in. Before surgery I ran a mantra through my head about letting go, letting others take over, and not being a pain in the neck to my family. Visions of morphing into a crabby woman who jabbed at things with her crutch, made unreasonable demands and complained of everything complainable gave me pause. Lucky for my family, surgery takes the stuffing out of a patient and I logged a good deal of time knocked out under a blanket.

My sister came for a visit with her husband and, as it happened, she had had surgery on her hand. She was frustrated with her cast and inability to do up her zipper, open jars and other things you don't give a thought to until they're taken away. We were quite the pair. Rather than tell the boring truth to people who may wonder about these two damaged, bandaged and crutch-wielding middle-aged ladies we opted for the story that we'd been in a bar fight and you should see the other guy. I was sure they would believe it-just look at us. We'd planned to get together with friends to play music one night but one went to the hospital with an infection. Another engagement was cancelled by a severe onset of arthritis in both elbows. It was beginning to look like a conspiracy.

And so it was. Enforced relaxation can make you crazy, obsessing on everything you're NOT doing. Until you realize how healing, on many levels, it can be, especially during the most manic time of year. For once, you have no choice but to sit around with your foot up and be waited on. And sleep. And read. And sleep. The best thing you can do is nothing and not whine about it. (I would like to express my eternal gratitude to the providers of toffee.) No battling the lines and hysterical shoppers at the mall (all of them sneezing, by the way). We spent far less money than we have before. And Christmas was actually restful. THAT's never happened.

As Officially Removed Hostess, others were allowed to shine; to decorate, to cook, to serve, to help and to give. They enjoyed it and so did I. We have finally convinced Grandma, the Matriarch of my husband's family, that we really don't need another oven mitt or shirt we won't wear so her trudging through stores is no longer required and she needn't feel guilty about it. The kids are grown and no longer content with a five-dollar Tonka truck. They need real cars, jobs, weddings and houses that are beyond the reach of our Christmas budgets. Larger contributions than usual to the food bank and other worthy causes replaced the unnecessary accumulation of more stuff and could be done from the comfort of the couch. The Christmas dinner gathering this year was peaceful, centered in conversation, family and good food and not ravaging packages. For the first time in many years the girl cousins didn't have a snit, no politics were discussed and a mellow time ensued.

Although planned or unplanned, these time-outs from life can be gifts; opportunities to rest, read, heal and realize how hectic normal life can be. To watch the light shift across the room, touching this wall then that; to admire moments of sunlight that illuminate a picture, shadow a corner in purple, or bathe a plant that is normally taken for granted in lush color. To be hypnotized by a surprise snowfall, watch the tree twinkle, provide a warm lap for a purring cat, and to reflect on the passage of another year. Too often we neglect the pleasure of moments like these, wracked with guilt for 'stealing' time to just be still. It is an art often lost to us in our relentlessly busy world that we must value and perfect. As Thomas Moore says, "The soul has an absolute, unforgiving need for regular excursions into enchantment." Even, I might add, if sometimes forced into it.

I missed many wonderful opportunities to walk the labyrinth over the holidays (or much else, for that matter). That is the time I put aside to welcome enchantment on a regular basis. My task these last weeks has been to embrace not walking and now, learning to walk again in a new foot. Although I'm now ambulatory in a walking boot, the racket it makes is not conducive to the meditative focus of my fellow walkers. I was especially sorry to miss a couple of vital meditations on the tragic events in Haiti. The Haitian peoples' suffering and their long history of suffering certainly casts my own tidy surgery, temporary pain and discomfort in the light of absolute luxury. No whining permitted. I am grateful for this respite, this perspective and the slow healing. Now that this phase of the journey is drawing to a close, it's time to move out of the calm center and back into the business of life. But also I must remember to make time to watch the enchanting light twinkle across my wall.

About the Author:

Jodi Lorimer is the author of [Dancing at the Edge: Origins of the Labyrinth in the Paleolithic](#), and she presented a workshop about her research for this book at the 2009 TLS Gathering at Edgefield.