

MOVING THROUGH GRIEF

It is as if I and the nation of which I am a citizen are one being

It has now been nearly one year since my beloved husband, Jeffrey Joel, died of a heart attack. This time finds me cocooned in the comfortable little nest that was so briefly ours, observing my first seasonal cycle without him. I move slowly, deliberately, noticing how I absorb subtle aspects of his vast being while my own melts into a formless mass. I pinch myself and ask, what remains? Two things, I sense, my thirst for meaning and my trust in the mystery.

These two qualities are those I was born with, as a human being. Together, they magnetized the dynamic around which my old life organized. I trust they will fuel the future.

Jeff flew out of his body during the transit of Pluto over 18° Sagittarius, when it was first nearing my Ascendant: Death, Pluto's dominion, came calling, as I had suspected it would. I assumed Death would snatch one or both of my parents, in their late 80s. That would have been a natural passage, and, of course, will still happen; Pluto is not done with me. Starting in January, 2004, and for the next ten years, Pluto will cross over my 21° Sagittarian Ascendant and 27° Sagittarian Sun. While on the Ascendant, it will activate a powerful but subtle "finger of god" yod formation with Jupiter in Cancer and Moon in Taurus. I presume this aspect will be personal, transforming family and my relationship to family. Then, after squaring Neptune at 2° Libra, Pluto will conjunct Venus and Mercury at 5° and 7° Capricorn, squaring my 5° Libra Midheaven and triggering another yod, this one exact, and more difficult, with Saturn in Gemini and Pluto in Leo. I assume this aspect will be more impersonal, transforming my work.

But of course, I could be dead wrong. None of the outer planets—not Uranus, not Neptune, and certainly not Pluto, the furthest and most unfathomable—work to satisfy expectations. Nevertheless, even during this ongoing meltdown where day and night merge into a blur, my battered ego works to understand and prepare for the future.

Jeff's death opened the door to an unknown country. Pluto's soul-making activity will activate my chart and life in ways I shall never entirely comprehend. No matter how many or how dear my companions, I imagine I shall travel essentially alone—as anyone who receives Pluto's shuddering touch tends to fall into solitude.

I now recognize Jeff's death as Initiation, heralding the increasing presence of this most faithful of followers. For ultimately, of course, the encounter with Pluto is with my own Death. And hopefully, the coming ten-year journey will prepare me to surrender both to the exit

from this life—whenever it comes—and to the slow or fast dispersion of the life force which precedes it. As I age, consciously or not, so will I die.

Looking back, I think now, perhaps I should have known the loss I would first undergo would be that of my closest companion. For when Jeff died Saturn, the karmic timekeeper, was transiting through my 7th house of marriage and partnerships, exactly conjunct his natal Uranus, planet of sudden changes, and separating from its final opposition to Pluto at 24° Gemini, opposite my Ascendant/Sun midpoint.

In loss, boundaries dissolve. This may be why solitude has been essential. I am more than usually sensitive to what lies beyond my skin, and can fall into states where there is no separation. This is confusing, of course; it also helps me remain connected, despite my body's tendency to curl into a fetal ball. And, during this year I have also been unusually sensitive to larger political and cultural currents. It's difficult to remain within my own separate process.

In my grief, I instinctively compare—and contrast—my loss to that of our nation's recent loss. As 9/11 was the Saturn/Pluto awakening for the collective consciousness of the U.S. people (the U.S. chart has a 13° Sagittarian Ascendant; that event occurred during the first of three exact oppositions, when Saturn was at 14° Gemini and Pluto at 12° Sagittarius), so Jeff's death was my personal Saturn/Pluto awakening. In both cases, there was shock, and a sudden descent/ascent into what really matters.

As the U.S. was transformed irrevocably by the events of 9/11 and the so-called death of American innocence, so I was transformed by the death of the man whose love and protection I had so blithely taken for granted.

But of course those of us familiar with history know that American "innocence" was never real. This country was constructed by the labor of Negro slaves; its Darwinian enterprise was erected atop the graves of Native Americans and their buffalo. Genocide was but the beginning of dirty big and little wars throughout our 200-year history. Since World War II, U.S. military bases have tentacled the globe. U.S. "Missile Defense" technology will soon dominate Earth from space as we follow, with the insufferable logic and bearing of divine entitlement, our so-called "manifest destiny."

Like the U.S., prior to my own Saturn/Pluto payback I was no innocent either; I too, had lived in a state of denial. Jeff's family has a history of heart trouble, and he had suffered a heart attack five years earlier. Ever since then, despite seeming good health, we knew he walked a knife's edge. Every morning, on awakening, I would

secretly check to see if he was still breathing, and, until that final morning, breathe a sigh of relief. During his rare episodes of chest pain I would inwardly panic, try to talk him out of it, casually pretend his discomfort was no big deal. I was trying to help his heart by dampening his anxiety; I was thinking, hoping, it was “all in his head.”

One might think it odd that I would fuse my personal loss and our collective loss, conflating the two events. But it is hard for me not to, given the connections between our natal charts. Even as a six-year-old I was reading the headlines, my heart soaring or dropping depending on what I thought I found there. It is as if I and the nation of which I am a citizen are one being, designed to suffer the same fate and path.

Imagine the natal chart of a nation as operating much like that of an individual. Whenever we are attracted to or repelled by someone, that is clue to interchart resonance. There are many who feel a strong, even special (not necessarily “patriotic”) relationship with their country of origin. Not only individuals, but whole generations can feel this strange magnetic tug, a seemingly irrational sense of personal responsibility for the behavior of an abstract collective-mind-created entity that is way bigger, though less real in a material sense, than individuals and generations composing it. And because it is bigger, it is utterly out of our control. As stoic Jeff used to say, whenever I would get too upset at the daily news, “But Ann, what can you do about it?” This was not a cynical remark, but an appeal to common sense. Each time I would shake my head—as if to dislodge an alien presence—and be grateful for his mirroring. But then, of course, sooner or later what I perceived as the next myopic/megalomaniac U.S. intention or deed would set me off again.

I have a Sagittarian Ascendant; so does the U.S. Our personas, when acting in an unconscious manner, tend to make the grand assumption that we always act on principle, and that our noble ends justify any means. Unfortunately, what results can be dogmatic, moralistic, righteous hypocrisy. Rather than being loved for our ideals, we are feared as ruthless, and hated for what appears to be willful ignorance of the consequences of our actions, an extreme insensitivity to others’ suffering.

George W. Bush is the perfect example of a person who identifies with the U.S. He is a simple man, he says, not suffering from ambiguity, subtlety or complexity, and he knows what’s right for America. God is on Christian America’s side, and he, a proud true believer born-again convert, is the President, speaking the Word of God. Like the Catholic Pope, George W. Bush speaks *ex cathedra*.

This U.S. President just happens to have his natal Sun at the exact same 13th degree of Cancer as the Sun in the U.S. birthchart (their birthdays are one day apart). Welcome to King George, for whom “l’etat, c’est moi”!

I look at George W. Bush and see myself back in the early 1980s. I was a peace activist who assumed I knew The Truth about what was right and wrong for America, and would berate, browbeat, and literally hate, anyone who didn’t agree with me. Luckily, after a few years I became aware of the chaos my rants against war were creating. Since then I work hard not to step on others’ toes and bore or infuriate them with my own fiery fundamentalist brand.

I wish I could say the same for my country. But of course, I remind myself, nations and those posing as their leaders tend to operate at a more unconscious level than we who are seeking to evolve. In all cases, however, what wakes us up is something that does not meet expectations.

This administration assumed Iraq would be a cakewalk, our army greeted as liberators, its justifications for going to war proven true. Instead, Bush and the U.S. are getting Saturn’s comeuppance. In June, 2003, Saturn slipped into Cancer, to slowly bear down on that (Bush/U.S.) 13° Cancer Sun, turning to go retrograde on that exact degree, staying on or near it for the final four months of 2003. Saturn delivers the real consequences of any actions. And it does so against the profound backdrop of transit Pluto, still grinding through the U.S. Ascendant’s first house. Whatever needs to be purged, will be. Pluto’s confrontation is ruthless, scouring and unforgiving. The arrogant swaggering postures of unevolved Sagittarius, the contempt for others and their views, receive the reverberating sting of Saturn/Pluto’s whiplash karma.

For both the U.S. and myself, that high-minded and/or high-fallutin’ Sagittarian Ascendant is buttressed by Neptune, the most elevated planet in both charts, in the 9th house (naturally ruled by Sagittarius) near the Midheaven. Neptune positioned there puts an entity inescapably on a path of idealism, aspiring to some kind of paradise.

The U.S. Neptune is in Virgo: it puts its faith in a materialistic/technological utopia, fed by science, hard work, and analytic intelligence. My Neptune is in Libra, the sign of both war and peace. I was programmed from the beginning to notice situations of injustice and conflict and to yearn unceasingly for justice, equality and harmony. I hold this kind of idealism in common with those in my generation, born between 1942 and 1957, when Neptune slid into the more intense and cynical sign of Scorpio.

The Neptune in Libra signature is paralleled by an even longer one, that of Pluto in Leo, imprinted on the generation born between 1938 and 1958. We are the Peace, Love and Dope generation (Neptune in Libra), and we are the Me Generation (Pluto in Leo), determined “to do our own thing;” we snap up SUV’s, McMansions and other pricey toys while carelessly devouring the world’s non-renewable resources. Such luxuriating self-centeredness is the unconscious, shadow side of Pluto in Leo.

But this signature is also that of highly creative self-expressive beings. And, as usual, the key to a generation’s evolution is to expand its range of interest, by incorporating the sign opposite, in this case Aquarius opposite Leo.

With my usual Sagittarian optimism, I was hoping that once Uranus and Neptune entered Aquarius this expansion would take place, that the Pluto in Leo generation would turn from largely selfish pursuits to work for the common good. Uranus went into Aquarius in 1995; Neptune joined it in 1998.

The word “Pluto” means wealth. Notice that it is not uncommon for the current U.S. administration to be labeled a “plutocracy,” government by and for the rich. On the other hand, I am happy to see that these Aquarian years have seen many CEOs of my generation turn to philanthropy. Socially responsible investments are the growing edge of the Wall Street world. There are even a few green banks! The sudden

and electrifying protests in Seattle in December, 1999, seeded this new century's populist movement to transform the socially unjust, destabilizing, and environmentally destructive effects of WTO and World Bank globalization policies.

Finally, now that Uranus is about to leave Aquarius for Pisces (more on that later), I sense that we are actually starting to work together in an ongoing manner befitting the brilliance and originality of our generation. Examples here are the Howard Dean campaign and www.moveon.org, which politically utilize the new Aquarian power of the internet. Thus Pluto in Leo can evolve from the narcissistic pose into a recognition that not only am I the center of the universe, but so is everyone else. In an expanding universe, we are all both special and equal.

Inside the Neptune in Libra/Pluto in Leo generation is another smaller one which attunes especially to the U.S. chart. This is the signature of those born between 1942 and 1949, who have Uranus, the planet of brilliance, iconoclasm, inventiveness and experimentation in Gemini, sign of logical mind. I call us the original hippies, more articulate and scientific, less emotional and personal than the second generation of hippies, whose natal Uranus was in Cancer (born 1949-1956).

In keeping with the inherent romanticism of Pluto in Leo, I like to see my Uranus in Gemini cohorts as a tribe of reborn revolutionaries. For Uranus—which stays in one sign for seven years, not to re-enter that sign for another 84 years—was also in the sign of Gemini at the birth of the U.S. when the Declaration of Independence was signed.

Inside this Uranus in Gemini group is an even smaller subset, the more conscious members of which are likely to feel an even greater identification with the U.S., its fate and path: myself and all those born between 1942 and 1943, for whom Saturn was in Gemini, conjunct Uranus. We are here to ground and make practical (Saturn) the wild energy of inventive, experimental Uranus. I suspect this group in particular is responsible for the ideas which launched the spread of internet technologies and other globalizing instruments.

I speak of this group as inventive and revolutionary. And so is the U.S., of course, which not only has Uranus in Gemini but Mars there as well, both planets occupying prominent positions. This U.S. Mars/Uranus combination has spurred a 200-year burst of scientific and technological advancement. Were the U.S. people to demand it, our scientists and inventors could turn on a dime to focus their extraordinary brilliance on creating/discovering sustainable energy technologies. This single shift would both transform geopolitics and allow nature to regenerate.

Unfortunately, what usually spurs technological advances are military applications. This should not surprise us, as the U.S. Mars/Uranus combination is both impulsive and explosive. Even a cursory glance at the U.S. chart puts an astrologer on notice as to its extreme potential for violence, aggression and war.

In any chart, the most prominent planets by house position are those nearest the "angles" of the chart. These are the four points which define the horizontal (Ascendant/Descendant)

and vertical (Midheaven/Immunus Coeli) axes. The U.S. chart sports Mars at 8° and Uranus at 21° Gemini, straddling and midpointing the U.S. 13° Gemini Descendant.

Those born in 1942-43, during the Saturn/Uranus conjunction in Gemini, and especially those, like myself, for whom this conjunction is configured with Mars, are deeply attuned to the collective warlike energies of the U.S. This attunement may be conscious, or not.

In my case, Mars opposes Saturn/Uranus: I woke up as a conscious being when I was two and a half years old, on the day we bombed Hiroshima. Later, in the early '80s, during the mid-life wake-up call of the Uranus opposition to itself (this occurs sometime between ages 38 and 42), I experienced my eureka moment: I had been a peace activist for years, and on that day I realized I was a *violent* peace activist, vociferously berating others for not going along with my agenda for stopping the MX missile.

Pluto is now in Sagittarius. Following secretive Scorpio, the Sagittarian truth about the inherent testosterone-ridden drive of the U.S. is coming out. We are fortunate: the current U.S. administration unwittingly brings what used to be secret to the surface for transformation.

9/11 stirred American children to ask, in the wonder of early innocence: "Why do they hate us so much?"

Now that the in-your-face belligerence of current U.S. foreign policy generates ever more terrorists, Saturn's karmic law becomes blatantly clear: we reap what we sow: violence begets violence. Saturn and Pluto force the American people to wake up to governmental terrorism, a long-standing cowboy tendency to shoot from the hip while hypocritically espousing democratic ideals.

(Just speaking about these matters makes my blood boil. My Saturn/Uranus/Mars combination wants to strike out at something, anything, what?)

So there I was, during all of 2003, deeply immersed in my own personal grief while sitting in the soup of ongoing post-9/11 collective grief, and furious at how the neocons used this moment of vulnerability and fear to hijack the good will of those who love this nation, both here and abroad. I like to think that my response to my own personal grief has been more conscious and aware than either that of the U.S. Government or my own reactive fury at current policies.

Like 9/11, when we all, stared transfixed in horror as, over and over again planes melted into exploding towers and bodies dropped from window sills, that early morning's perception of my husband's cold dead body on the bed triggered sudden systemic shock. My heart burst open, to briefly participate in the communion of souls that, as ultimately spiritual beings, we long for all our lives.

Automatically, in self-defense, my system reacted to this massive heart-opening by trying to close up again, move into denial. And there were times, after he died, when that did happen. Even so, a part of me was *aware* that I was numb, that I had not yet fully registered the impact of this life-changing event.

I was determined to keep my heart open. I knew it was vitally important to allow in every feeling, to experience the numbness, for example, with awareness. To honor the numbness, so that it could move and dissolve. I did not want

to live in a state of denial or distraction. I wanted to be able to encompass the extraordinary challenge of intense personal grief, to live it fully, to allow my response to Jeff's death to incubate a rebirth in myself.

This, I suggest, may be the only route that offers itself through grief.

We are a culture frozen into denial of our own grief. It is a grief which moves from 9/11 deep into the heart of this nation's history, a grief of lies and betrayal, of conquest and genocide, and the proliferating wars it has spawned since our beloved nation's founding moment.

But until we move that grief, it has us in its grip, and will cause the U.S. to keep repeating itself, acting out that Mars/Uranus violence in ever more terrible ways. As long as we keep on "projecting (military) power," we will feel the increasing sting of reaction to that power. This is not just a karmic law, it is a scientific law, Newtonian.

The key to moving grief is to feel it. To allow it in. To stay there, in that heart space, and give pain room to do its work, gradually stirring the life force in us, easing us in a new direction. As Gandhi and Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela all showed us by the example of their own living presence, to meet violence with violence simply ups the ante. There is no way out. We can only move through. The path to peace is that of surrender, of giving in to what is real, of acknowledging—for example, through "reconciliation commissions" as modeled by South Africa and other nations—where the United States of America has gone astray, how we have hurt and destroyed others both within and beyond our borders, since our nation's inception. This is formal ritualized way of atoning for extreme injustice creates a safe channel for grief to move, and, like rituals have done since the dawn of time, it brings us together as a people. We participate consciously in a common experience, with the intent to heal.

The path of surrender may sound foolish to some ears, foolishly "utopian," something only someone like me, with Neptune at the Midheaven, would say! But remember that the U.S. also has Neptune at the Midheaven. The path of repentance is not only possible, it may be exactly what this nation was born to do.

Neptune is the ruler of Pisces, the sign that Uranus entered briefly last spring, and will re-enter, on the very last day of this year, December 31, 2003, to remain for seven years, until 2010. We are about to undergo a sea-change, into the sign of the planet which rules the sea. We are about to drop from our Aquarian mind into our Piscean heart and soul. Rather than ideas, we will move in the world of feeling.

Uranus will be the first to journey through this sign of no-boundaries, followed by Neptune, ruler of Pisces, to enter Pisces in 2012 and remain there for 13 years, until 2025.

During these great outer planetary sojourns through Neptune's sign, the boundaries between and among us will gradually dissolve. We will collectively become aware of our human communion and community, how we are each a drop in the ocean, washed together by

currents of love and fear, ease and disease, mysticism and madness—our only choice to sink or swim together.

Yes, we are about to undergo an extraordinary shift in the zeitgeist, one of those which may feel, even to the uninitiated, like divine choreography. For not only is Uranus about to enter Pisces, but it will be accompanied, only one year later, by the U.S. progressed Sun. After 30 years moving through the sign of Aquarius, revving up humanity onto a technological high-speed trajectory, the U.S. Sun is to move into Pisces, starting in 2005 through 2035. The 7-year and 13-year sojourns of Uranus and Neptune through Pisces will be accompanied, deepened and extended by the 30-year secondary progression of the U.S. Sun itself through that same sign.

And, wouldn't you know, given the identification I feel with the fate of this nation, that I too will have my progressed Sun moving through Pisces. My chart is so yoked to that of the U.S. that my progressed Sun is exactly timed to track through the same degrees of the zodiac. I too have just undergone nearly 30 years of my progressed Sun in Aquarius, and must surrender to the ocean of human unity.

If Aquarius connected us through the internet, in Pisces we won't need the internet. Aquarian communication will dissolve into Piscean communion, psychic, empathic. We will actually begin to sense our hearts all beating according to the same rhythmic drum. There is no distance, no gulf so wide that the heart does not cross it.

Of course, as a Sagittarian with Neptune at the Midheaven, mine is a largely utopian view of Uranus, Neptune, and Progressed Sun moving in Pisces. Let us remember that the key, as always, is awareness: for when experienced unconsciously, this surrender to collective feeling may signify an utter loss of individuality, a sweeping up into oceanic fear, which in turn would seed the fertile breeding ground of totalitarianism. No opportunity without danger. In these coming decades, let us remember the freedoms of individuality and autonomy delivered by Aquarius. Keep them close to our hearts, as we are delivered into the arms of a watery Piscean mother who will either nourish or devour.

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