

Newkind –Jenni Cargill-Strong

When Hare discovered Death he ran back to the place where he lived. He shouted and cried 'My people must not die!' And then he suddenly thought: 'All things will one day die!' ... He entered the place where he lived. He reached for his blanket, and rolled himself into it. He lay there and wept. There will not be enough earth for all that dies he thought. He buried himself in his blanket. He made no sound. ¹

When I arrived at New Kind 2019, I was feeling excited and full of anticipation, but underneath that I felt deeply flat.

A year earlier, I had briefly met Erfan at Renew Fest in my home town of Mullumbimby. My friend Ella, the Director of Renew, told me glowingly about him and the Conference for activists called New Kind which had an inspiring set of principles and a zero waste policy.

About that time, I had begun writing a book called 'Storytelling for Changemakers'. To research it, I studied theories of storytelling, changemaking and the political stories that run our world. I read, watched and attended scientific talks on the threats to the health of our biosphere: from climate change to insect apocalypse, to multiple environmental system collapse, as well as predictions of the consequent near term collapse of civilisation.

Not easy reading.

The worse the data looked, the harder I looked for a theory or evidence that could provide some grounded hope. My search just lead me to even more dire predictions.

My writing stalled.

I gradually began to feel like Hare When He Learned About Death.

Now here I was, with my Joyality friends, safely delivered by mini-van to Marion Bay. We were greeted by smiling, warm-eyed volunteers, as well as bracing, icy winds blowing in off the Tasman Sea, a refreshing contrast to the sweltering humidity we had just left behind.

We were ushered to our very comfortable, spacious tents and then it was dinner time in the large, communal dining tent. We got three nourishing vegan meals a day, which impressively, were made from local, mostly organic, unpackaged food. It took me two days to adjust to the food, but I so appreciated not having to cook, as well as the staunch ethics and nutrition of our meals.

Here are my highlights.

Learning and eating with two hundred activists of all ages for five days was deeply nourishing. A wonderful man, inspired to volunteer by his adult son, played the Scottish bagpipes (well) each day, to let us know it was dinner time. On the last morning he wore full Scottish kilt and outfit!

On the third morning, I felt myself awaken from my Hare-like slumber, my life force and passion for storytelling rekindled. Part of what had made me feel frozen, had been the difficulty of keeping what I knew to myself for fear of scaring my friends and family, who didn't know and didn't want to. At NewKind I was with people who not only knew what I knew, but understood the terrain of feelings that came with that knowledge. And they were doing all sorts of wonderful things.

There was a large campfire which I gravitated towards most nights, where we relaxed, chatted and sang.

At that campfire, I was thrilled to meet the inspirational Thomas Mayor, a spectacular TSI man (Zenadth Kes), the Northern Territory MUA branch secretary and signatory to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. He had presented that morning and he was not only passionate, articulate and charismatic but also approachable and easy to chat to. He told me he was compiling a book from the interviews he had done all over the country with elders about the Uluru Statement. Hearing of what he had so tenaciously accomplished, despite derision, and resistance and seeing his fervor and clarity, put my feelings into perspective.

The Opening and Closing Ceremonies, with local custodian, Linton were extremely heart-warming and he was enormously friendly and welcoming. In the context of Tasmanian history, this felt especially beautiful. I was profoundly moved by the phenomenal activist and singer, Matt Wicking tell his story 'Lost at Sea' and his singing on stage and around the campfire.

In Aidan Ricketts session, "Activism as We Approach the Edge" he acknowledged exactly how precarious Gaia's condition is. I felt I could exhale. He generously gave us a measure of hope with an explanation about complexity theory, how quickly systems, including social and political systems can change and got us both crying and laughing. He talked about Grounded Hope and outlined his quirky way to alleviate overwhelm: his Black Hole meditation!

It was a huge honour to share my gifts at New Kind. I got to install an ephemeral labyrinth. I worked with Ella and my Joyality colleagues to help participants emotionally integrate their experiences. I got to present key ideas from 'Storytelling for Changemakers' workshop to exhausted, yet enthusiastic and receptive participants on the last day.

Most magical of all for me, was leading 200 people holding hands in silence, into the labyrinth. The labyrinth is an ancient form of earth mandala, a sacred symbol of the divine that crosses all boundaries of religion and spirituality. It allowed us to go within as a community, connecting to ourselves, each other and the earth beneath our feet. As we emerged, Linton and friends lovingly smoked us with gum leaves and ochred our faces with several different colours, each representing a distinct spiritual quality. Erfan's mother, father and grandmother came and walked it with us. As the sun set behind the labyrinth, a young Aboriginal woman, backlit by the sun, gracefully danced, as if she was dancing the story of the earth beneath her bare feet. We didn't want to move. People lingered grinning quietly and hugging in groups.

Now, nearly two months after returning home, what of the Hare in me?

When Hare curled up beneath his blanket, Earthmaker was concerned. She recalled him to Spiritland. Grandmother invigorated him and bestowed upon him a mission: to create the Medicine Lodge with all its healing rites and ceremonies.

Given the magnitude and urgency of the impacts we face, we need resilience, courage, love, resourcefulness, compassion and peacefulness. New Kind has rekindled and strengthened in me my resolve to use oral storytelling to support Humankind's transition to regenerative ways of living: synthesizing ancient and new ways of knowing to become New Kind.

FOOTNOTE

1. Winnebago Trickster Cycle, Gersie 'Storymaking in Bereavement', pp 34-35
2. <https://hotcakencyclopedia.com/ho.Hare.html>