



## *Solicitude*

### The Abbots' Letters of Reflection

#### Belonging

"Your daily life is your temple and your religion.  
Whenever you enter into it take with you your all.  
Take the plough and the forge in necessity or for delight. For in reverie you cannot  
rise above your achievements or fall lower than your failures.

And take with you all men:  
For in adoration you cannot fly higher than their hopes  
nor humble yourself lower than their despair"

*Kahlil Gibran: The Prophet*

**I**T seems to me we all generally share a deep desire to belong. But what does the sense of belonging entail?  
Is this really a common theme in our lives? Does it include NOT belonging to some group or groups?  
I belong to a core family of my parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents and ancestors long forgotten.  
I belong to a core family of children and grandchildren with more to come.  
I belong to Karen's family and all it is and has been and will become.

I am Polish, French, Austrian and probably much more (no DNA tests yet).  
My children carry the DNA of Karen's history and ancestry also, so add Dutch and English and whatever mix has  
yet to be identified, so include me. Karen's DNA suggests deep European roots extending through Spain and  
into Morocco. Who knew?

I have been part of the Christian family by choice since my teen years. This also includes some bias against those  
who did not choose as I did, so include me in a group of religious bias. Karen recently noted religious bias can be  
on a par with racial bias. I have recently loved and become part of the Abrahamic family then part of the larger  
family of spiritual seekers and that of the perennial wisdom family as practiced in OOOO with Yeshua as my  
Master.

Our daughter & son-in-law lived and worked in Poland over the course of three to four years so we visited Poland and experienced the earthy culture of my mother's parents. Hard work and joyous spirit were evident in the people as well as the history of resistance to the Nazi occupation. Karen and I visited the site of Mila 18 (a street address) made world famous by a Leon Uris, the center of Nazi resistance by Jews and Poles alike. I felt pride in their efforts. Even more striking was a visit to the center of Old Warsaw, impressive in its medieval presence except the town was in rubble in 1944, having been leveled with tanks and dynamite when the Jewish ghetto was destroyed by Nazi troops. The town was rebuilt, largely by peasant efforts, using old plans and pictures to replicate its look prior to the war. A unique statement to Polish fortitude. In Poland I would never be known as a "dumb Pollak", I belong.

Yet I do also belong to a group referred to as "dumb Pollak's". Perhaps someone saw my battle with wasps while on a ladder with a hammer in my hand. Yes, swinging at the wasps I hit myself in the head and reached the bottom of the ladder with blood on my face and three wasp stings. I wish Karen had not been present to witness my struggle!

On my first trip to France a customs officer looked at my name and recognized it as French and asked had I been to France previously. When I said no he offered his hand and said, "Welcome Home". I was 'IN' new community. That same French name kept my father out of some stores in Canada simply for being "Frenchy". I belong to that group also.

Traveling in the Middle East I experienced being "in" more than "out":  
Welcomed in every mosque we chose to visit.  
In one mosque, "This is your home".  
Please carry the message home – "we are not terrorists, they are infidels."  
Pray for me.  
Pray for us.  
We Love YOU.  
Our Jordanian guide, "I did not work for four days, I was with family."  
Syria: "My home is your home."

What about other places and times of feeling "out", not welcome?

Not Baptist -- no cards, no dance, no alcohol!! Are they kidding? I have learned that old labels are not true in all cases. The Baptists I really know are among the most loving, compassionate and socially-committed people I know. I have been invited and celebrated wedding and family interaction and danced until my feet hurt. Why did I think I was not wanted?

Not Roman Catholic - no communion for me. This holds true more often than not and yet I have often been invited to the altar even in Roman Churches.

In one trip to England, Karen and I visited Warwick castle, once ruled by one of Karen's ancestors—more family. In the display of military arms of the period there was a sign –typical arms used to raid the Poitevins in France - guess I was not as "in" with the Brits as much as I thought!

There are also many "outs" within my family of origin. Thieves & scoundrels in my ancestry and not so distant past. Racial prejudice --usually denied but apparent. Mental illness. I have been called "nigger lover" and "queer lover".

I have been ostracized by closest friends and have denied what I knew to be true. I have come to believe it was not about me but their fears of change and the unknown. It appears I am in the community of “outs” as much as “in” all the others.

This line of thought has clarified more clearly the recognition that I belong to the largest group of all...Humanity. I am intimately connected with all that is good and all that I might call evil. It is up to me to choose how to walk this path of interconnection.

How do I acknowledge all that I am and convey the desire to claim connection to all that I am and may become? Only by claiming a connection to all beings and celebrating life whether it appears to me to be either good or bad when in fact it is just LIFE and I am intertwined deeply to all of it. All are my family. Within the earliest statements in OOOOW, we are inclusive, all are welcome, and we recognize the restoration and healing of all beings.



Not a forest –One tree connected to all at the roots

My younger sister gave to me a small pillow that I treasure. The words on it say “I smile because you are my Brother. I laugh because you can do nothing about it.” So to all sentient beings I too offer a similar message:

**I smile that you are my family ---and I can do nothing about it!**  
**... except love you, and I do. With Many Blessings I celebrate your presence in my life.**

Ron Poidevin, Abbot