

DRAGONS ARE REAL OR THEY ARE DEAD: Odes to discrepant boyhood

written by Kristen Stone | March 24, 2016



“Actually, not discrepant. Deeply human. And this mixture of suffering and joy is deep. Very deep.” – Bhanu Kapil

Today, I bought my boy ice cream and took him to the creek. The behaviorists say ice cream should be a reward. To motivate the target towards positive behavior. This ice cream was undeserved, like grace. (It was rainbow sherbet.)

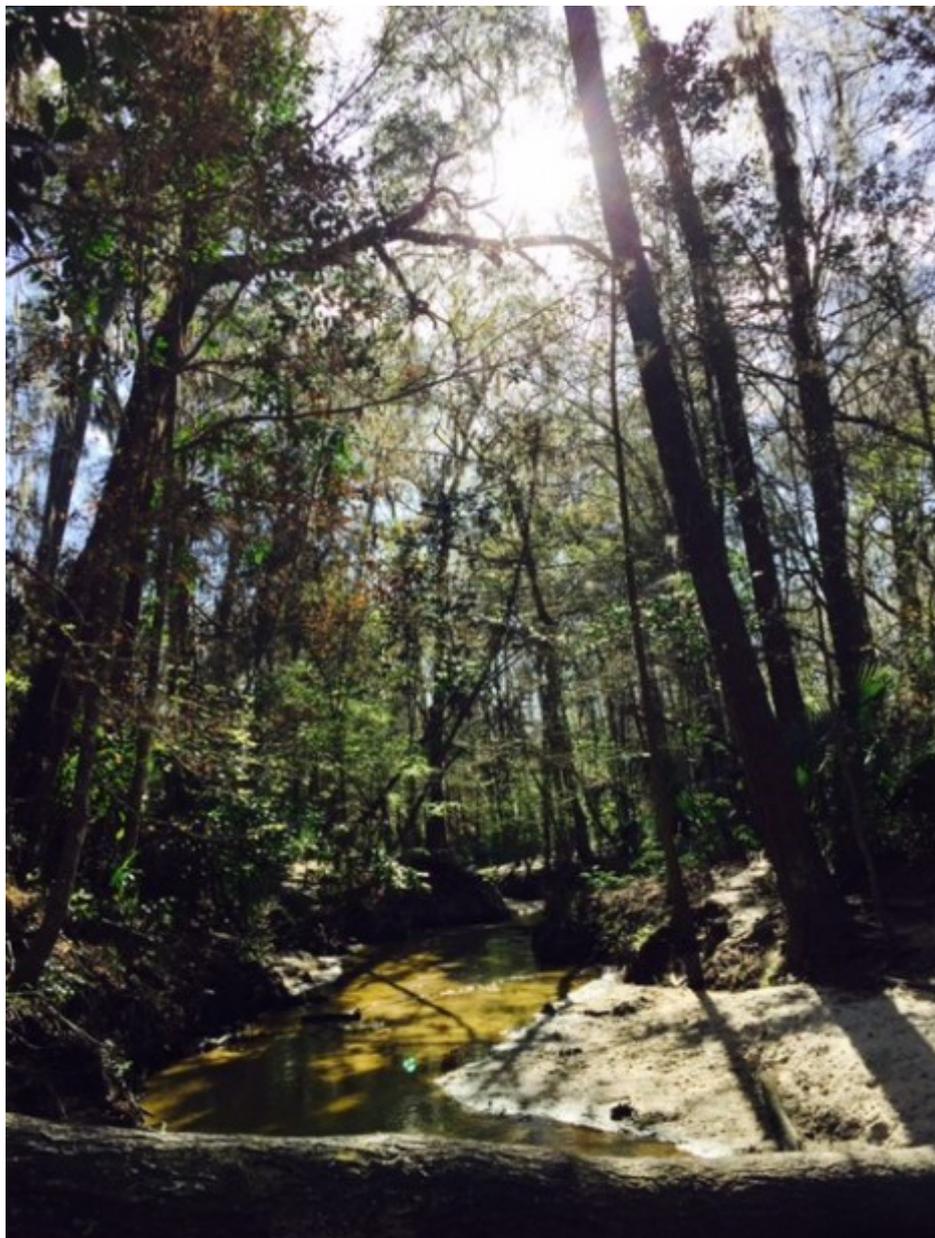
On days when things are wrong, fear eclipses any joy in discovery I might feel. On days when things go wrong we go to the creek. After the rainbow sherbet, and a sickly-sweet coffee for me, this is where we went. Site of nervous system recalibration. I sat on a rock in the sunshine and remembered to-order myself to- love. Love should be the foundation. We should work from a place of love, not in order to be loved. This is grace. This is hard.

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Last night, I wanted to keep him home forever. Today, I took him to school. It was picture day. He wore his bow tie (“tie bow”) and all was forgiven. One boy exclaimed, “J- looks so handsome.” Kindergarten is a forgiving system.

(Resilience is the ability of the system to absorb the shock of difference.)

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What overwhelms the parent's nervous system?

I cry reading *On the Day You were Born*. I cry reading a children's autobiography of Malcolm X. I cry reading a book about a little girl who runs away to be with the elephants. I can take the hardest things, except when I cannot. *What's wrong with your voice? You crying?*

Now I guard my heart. Against getting too close to strangers. I know now, what it actually takes. To radically chance because of communion with another (an Other.) It means being made a mother when someone brings a little boy to your house and says, "here's your new mommy," and leaves. He promptly finds the electric toothbrush you used to clean the bathroom, in the old, pre-child days, when you had time to clean. He turns the toothbrush on. (He still does things like this.) He wanted to cut an unripe lemon from your tree. It was only October. He wanted to use a serrated knife. He cut his finger and you learned quickly to say no.

I am still recovering from this series of events, seventeen months later. I think I will be recovering from this series of events for the rest of my

life, until/unless I get used to the fact that people bring fully formed children to my house and leave them here. How does anyone ever get used to that?

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He lays his body across me, stalling at bedtime.

You didn't know if I was black, he says. Before I came.

I didn't, I say.

How you didn't know?

Because I was waiting to meet you for the first time.

He's not soft like a baby. He's strong and bony. His limbs are long. We bond in these moments. Do the work of mothers and babies, but he has a mouthful of teeth. It hurts, sometimes, to hold him.

I don't believe like this but I had a dream about him, before he came.

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(What do we talk about when we talk about pain?)

Despite never feeling another's pain, not really, we have a language for it. Dull or sharp. An ache or a throb. On a pollen-green day, I breathe in hard and feel a hollow, sharp pain in my face.

My body is distinct from your body, but you do not understand that.

Do people all blink at the same time? He wants to know.

No, because our bodies are not connected like that.

Oh.

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Even if my eyes are closed, my hand can send a message to my brain, he says, stroking the window.

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Sometimes I dream about going to the creek instead of school. Surrendering to light pools and moss. He builds a bridge across a minor tributary; I make notes for this essay. *It feels like stitches.* The green threads move under the water, which is colder than it looks.

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