

THIS ARTICLE IS A REPRINT FROM

GreenSpirit *magazine*

Engaged spirituality for a living Earth

GreenSpirit

Engaged spirituality for a living Earth

Volume 25:1 £3.50

Connection, Creativity and Care for the Earth



Learning From the Way of the Mushroom

Interview with Donnachadh McCarthy - Zero Carbon Lifestyle

The Path to Forgotten Freedom: Healing Unresolved Ancestral Trauma

....and much more

www.greenspirit.org.uk

The Path to Forgotten Freedom:

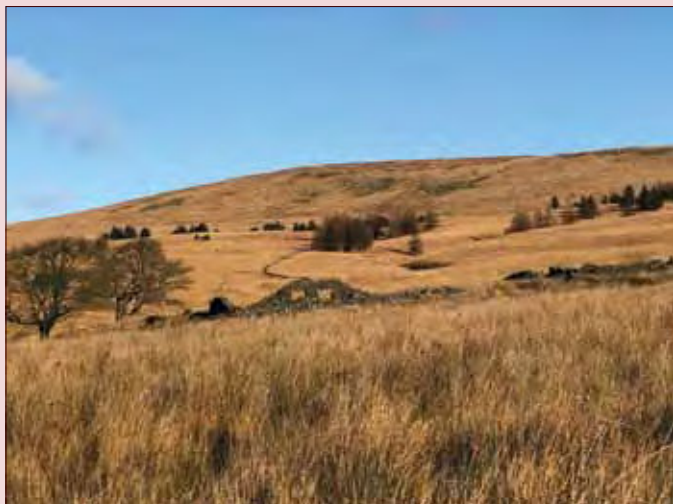
Healing Unresolved Ancestral Trauma

NICOLA SMALLEY

My home looks across to Anglezarke Moor on the edge of the West Pennines. Up on the moor are the ruins of twenty farmsteads, and in some, the doorways, windows and fireplace mantles are still in place.

on the horizon. Perhaps some may have been happy about the move, but many weren't. There are accounts of people here taking their own lives rather than leave the moor to work in the mills of the surrounding Lancashire towns.

PHOTO © NICOLA SMALLEY



Hempshaws farmstead ruins on Anglezarke Moor

I like to sit amongst these ruins and let my imagination take me back a few hundred years to when people lived in these homes. I gaze down to where the flames of the fire would have been and imagine the faces of the wide-eyed children listening to their grandparents tell all the old tales of the moorland passed down from their grandparents.

These piles of stones and rotting wooden lintels are all that is left of the Anglezarke Clearances of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Farming families were removed from the land during the Industrial Revolution to make way for reservoirs to collect water for the city of Liverpool. There is a haunting beauty about these places. I wonder how these people felt about leaving their homes and what they spoke about on the last evening around that fireside. I am curious whether they took a final glance over their shoulder as they walked towards the smoking chimneys

Severance

The Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are glorified as great achievements of mankind. Yet this was a dark time for millions who suffered significant trauma. Whether through the Enclosures of England, the Scottish Clearances or the Great Famine in Ireland, mass migration from the countryside into towns and cities occurred during the centuries that preceded our modern-day era. These people were our ancestors.

Severed from their land and communities, they were forced to move into the slums of industrial Britain. They left behind their rural traditions and social support structure. On arriving in the slums, they formed the much-needed workforce for the growing industries, but the cities' infrastructures couldn't cope. Housing was of a very poor standard, sanitation was virtually non-existent and disease would spread quickly. The working hours were long, and the food was expensive. In just one generation, people went from living in a close-knit rural community where their family had lived for generations sustaining themselves, to living in slum tenement housing with strangers in a city of hundreds of thousands of other migrants.

Those who couldn't support themselves endured an even worse fate: the workhouse. My mum occasionally spoke about workhouses as my nan and great-grandmother were close to having to live in one. She told me in a melancholy voice: 'if you went into a workhouse, you never came out again.' On researching my family tree, I have found several of my ancestors lived and died in these terrible places. The best way I can describe the workhouse is a prison for the poor. It was a last resort where the poor would get a bed and food in return for work. It is hard

going reading first-hand accounts from people who lived in workhouses. They were gruelling institutions designed to strip the very soul from people.

People who spent time in the workhouse would have undoubtedly experienced great distress. These were harrowing places to live. I also believe that even if people didn't end up in the workhouse, there would be emotional and physical stress around doing everything they could to avoid ending up in one. People would do almost anything not to go there.

This new life in industrial Britain's workhouses, tenements and back-to-back houses was a world away from the natural way of being.

Ancestral trauma



The powerhouse of industrial Britain

The anguish of being severed from the land and living a life of such poverty is hard to comprehend for many people living in the western world. But why does this matter? Surely this is so long ago it isn't relevant to us now?

Only it is. The science of epigenetics has proven that the damage these experiences caused to our ancestors can be passed down to future generations through the DNA. As descendants of these people, many of us are living with this inherited trauma.

We get our physical characteristics from our parents through DNA, such as eye colour, hair type, facial expressions, and mannerisms. However, these contribute to only 2 per cent of a person's DNA. Recent scientific evidence has revealed that the remaining 'noncoding DNA' holds genetic memory about inherited emotional, behavioural and personality characteristics. This noncoding DNA is affected by environmental conditions, such as exposure to toxins, poor nutrition, and stress. This means that if our ancestors experienced a distressing incident and hadn't the opportunity to process it, it was coded into their genes and passed on.

I have painted a picture of a recent period in our history where suffering was experienced on an unprecedented scale. However, it stands to reason that if this noncoding DNA can be altered in one way, it can be modified the other way. Through the science of epigenetics, we now know that we can change these inherited emotional traits in our DNA. We can literally recode our DNA. We are born with the ability to heal ourselves and re-write what we inherited. This is empowering, as once we have the origin of these traumas in view, we can finally lay long-standing family patterns to rest.

Finding the stories

One of the steps to healing inherited ancestral trauma is to find the stories where the wound originated. I began to uncover these stories through genealogical research as I started to build my family tree. I noticed a pattern of migration of my ancestors from the countryside to the cities around two hundred years ago. Through social history research, I learnt how their lives changed and became aware of the struggles they must have endured.

I began to create stories about them, and in doing this, I found great revelations. Where there were gaps, I would fill these in by carrying out research into other people's lives during that time. I am a shamanic practitioner, so I would also use shamanic journeying to build the stories, working with an ancestor ally in the Otherworld. And I would take notice of my dreams as a valuable tool for bringing the unconscious to the conscious.

One story in particular claimed me: the life of my great-great-great grandmother Catherine, who fled the Great Famine in Ireland in 1848 to seek refuge in London. She was the unknown ancestor, the only person in that generation who lay hidden from me despite many years of research. One of the things I have noticed in ancestral healing is that it is the family secrets that speak the loudest: those things that were never spoken about. Catherine's story touched me deeply and I have written about her life in my new book, *The Path to Forgotten Freedom: Healing Unresolved Ancestral Trauma*.

One of the common questions people ask when they are interested in ancestral healing is: 'how do I know where to start? how can I find the root cause of the ancestral wound that needs healing?' I recommend following the story in your family that intrigues you the most. In my case, as my family name is Riley, an anglicised Irish surname, I wanted to know where in Ireland we came from and why we came to England. Following this enquiry led me to the root cause behind my ancestral wound, an unhealthy work ethic, which is one of the themes in my book.

There is great healing in the telling of a story. How much better do you feel when someone has listened to you? We can look at the lives of our ancestors through a 21st

Century lens. The things they endured and never spoke of can come to light now and be healed.

Coming back to nature

PHOTO © NICOLA SMALLEY



Coming back to nature

Another way I believe we can heal the wounds our ancestors experienced from forced migration is to come back to nature. We can reclaim some of what our ancestors lost when they were forced to leave their home. We can return to the land and fall back in love with nature again.

There are different ways to reclaim our connection with the land, even if access to the countryside is difficult. It can begin by aligning our lives with the natural flow of the seasons, marking each turn in the wheel from autumn to winter, spring to summer. We can also develop a relationship with a small patch of ground close to home and visit it often. We can learn about the natural history of the trees and animals and learn how to hear the messages they have for us. Nature allows us to hear the quiet voice of our soul, take steps to move in a new direction, get a fresh outlook and lead us to our soul's calling. This is a homecoming: reclaiming what was lost.

Up on Anglezarke Moor, one house, in particular, is my favourite, known as Hempshaws. There once lived a family here, warmed by the glow of the fire, fed with cut peat night and day. Faces would look out across the moor as I do now, watching the sunrise in the morning and then setting through the door come nightfall. Above the roof, kestrels would perform their courtship dance as the full moon rose. The white owl would hover over the ditches and dykes, its feathers lit up by the auburn glow of the setting sun. The ravens would fly over, calling each other every night before sundown as the smoke from the chimney rose into the cool night air.

Living out in the land gave our ancestors experience of the wild. There was a time, not that long ago, when our ancestors didn't need to rely on others for food or work. The severance from their land led to a trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation. I believe we can bring the wild back into our lives. This is the path to forgotten freedom. Our ancestors forced from their land had few choices available to them. Who are we, not to take the choices that are available to us now?

The Path to Forgotten Freedom

Maybe you are someone who has the ancestral healing call within you too? If you are, my book will help you make these steps, providing inspiration and tools you can draw upon.

Alongside telling the story of my great-great-great-grandmother Catherine Riley, I explain the impact that inherited ancestral wounds can have on us. I offer practical steps to enable this trauma to move through the body and psyche using techniques from Shamanism to wild therapy and dreamwork to genealogical research.

Themes that underpin the causes of many ancestral traumas include power, powerlessness, oppression and control. These are explored alongside reflections on how our lives and the lives of those that came before us are affected. My book offers hopeful practical solutions to live a different way and presents a path to reclaim the lost freedoms of our ancestors.



Book cover of "The Path to Forgotten Freedom"

Nicola Smalley is an edge-dweller, shamanic practitioner and writer with a passion for anything connected to nature and the mysteries of the Earth. Contact - website: www.thewayofthebuzzard.co.uk/books, email: nicola@thewayofthebuzzard.co.uk.