

**WHAT'S IN YOUR WALLET/SUITCASE/BAG?
CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
MARCH 10, 2019**

OPENING WORDS *We Travel This Road Together*¹ ~ Tess Baumberger

From the busy-ness of everyday we gather once a week
to remember who we are, to dream of who we might become.

We travel this road together.

As companions on this journey, we share the milestones we meet along the way.
Individual moments of joy and sorrow become shared moments of comfort and
celebration.

We travel this road together.

We share this journey across differences of belief and opinion
Because we value diversity and because we care for one another.

We travel this road together.

Today as we take the next steps, let us notice our fellow travelers:
The burdens that they carry, the songs that inspire their hearts.

We travel this road together.

As we gather in beloved community, let us open the holy havens of our hearts,
Let us share the sacred places of our souls

For we are pilgrims who share a common path.

We travel this road together.

STORY FOR ALL *You Have Everything You Need* ~ Joseph Parent

from A Walk In The Wood: Meditations on Mindfulness with a Bear Named Pooh

(Pooh and Piglet talk about 'just noticing', 'aimless wandering', and trusting that you have everything you need.)

♪ **WALKING MEDITATION**

(Tibetan Tracks: Buddhist Meditation with Positive Vibration of Singing Bells and Bowls, 30 Sacred Prayers Background)

READING *The Things They Carried* (summary)² ~ Tim O'Brien

This reading may feel 'out of place' on International Women's Day, as on the surface, it is only about men and war. Yet, Julie chose this reading because it poignantly illustrates a powerful way of thinking about what we carry with us...things that keep us grounded, safe, that are familiar, that remind us of home, or that weigh us down. I'll leave it to Julie to explain further,

Lieutenant Jimmy Cross, of the Alpha Company, carries various reminders of his love for Martha, a girl from his college in New Jersey who has given no indication of returning his love. Cross carries her letters in his backpack and her good-luck pebble in his mouth. After a long day's march, he unwraps her letters and imagines the prospect of her returning his love someday...

¹ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/litany/we-walk-road-together>

² <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/thingscarried/>

The author, Tim O'Brien, describes the things all the men of the company carry. They are things in the most physical sense – mosquito repellent and marijuana, pocket knives and chewing gum. The things they carry depend on several factors, including the men's priorities and their constitutions. Because the machine gunner Henry Dobbins is exceptionally large, for example, he carries extra rations; because he is superstitious, he carries his girlfriend's pantyhose around his neck. Nervous Ted Lavender carries marijuana and tranquilizers to calm himself down, and the religious Kiowa carries an illustrated New Testament, a gift from his father.

Some things the men carry are universal, like a compress in case of fatal injuries and a two-pound poncho that can be used as a raincoat, groundsheet, or tent. Most of the men are common, low-ranking soldiers and carry a standard M-16 assault rifle and several magazines of ammunition. Several men carry grenade launchers. All men carry the figurative weight of memory and the literal weight of one another. They carry Vietnam itself, in the heavy weather and the dusty soil. The things they carry are also determined by their rank or specialty. As leader, for example, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carries the maps, the compasses, and the responsibility for his men's lives. The medic, Rat Kiley, carries morphine, malaria tablets, and supplies for serious wounds...

O'Brien uses the list of physical objects that the members of the Alpha Company carry in Vietnam as a window to the emotional burdens that these soldiers bear. One such burden is the necessity for the young soldiers to confront the tension between fantasy and reality... The emotional burdens that the soldiers bear are intensified by their young age and inexperience... they were children, students, and boyfriends who had no perspective on how to rationalize killing or come to terms with their friends' untimely deaths...

Among the things the men carry are guilt and cowardice that they are neither able to admit to nor negotiate...

[O'Brien] explicitly demonstrates his characters' natures not by describing them but by showing the items they carried with them... (*pause*)

In what ways ARE we formed and defined by what we carry? This is one of today's questions.

MESSAGE *What's in Your Wallet?* ~ Rev. Julie

Oh my gosh...I have so much I'd like to share today. Over the last few days, I've brought my spirit to many seas³

...Peterborough's International Women's Day celebration on Friday night
...the news surrounding the Wilson-Raybould/SNC-Lavalin debacle
...the ensuing resignation of Jane Philpott
...yet another painful example of how the best intentions can create damaging impacts as demonstrated by a recent article in the UUWorld magazine about trans and non-binary folks⁴

³ Just prior to this sermon, we sang "I Brought My Spirit to the Sea" #4 in SLT

⁴ You'll find links to related articles here: <http://peterboroughunitarian.ca/cuc-in-solidarity-with-trans-and->

... and all of the reading and exploring I've done to understand more about the implications of what it is that we carry. Many seas.

I cannot do justice to all of this today. Or better, I could never do justice to all of this because, in the process of trying to center stories that are not usually heard and even while listening to understand, a hard lesson to remember that these stories are not mine to use in order that, as cis gendered and white and privileged, I might put myself at the center, once again.

Except, I am a woman. And to tell and center the stories of women is precisely the purpose of International Women's Day, right? Like every woman, there are things that I carry that are common to other women, things they carry that I don't, and there are things that I carry that are uniquely mine.

And so why did I choose a reading⁵ that centers men, and centers war, especially as we mark International Women's Day, a day that has a strong and long history in efforts to de-center men and to end war and violence?

It is true, as Jovanna said, that it was the most concise and profound telling I could find about how what we carry tells our story. But, I also find that fact indicative of the very need to mark International Women's Day. I mean, I have to ask myself why a description of what men carry into war is more powerful than an article about what women carry in their handbags, or even an article about the burden women carry as caregivers. I found such articles,⁶ and even though they were written by women, I also found them cute or patronizing...or complicit in perpetuating a patriarchy-supporting idea of what womanhood means.

So I recognize, with sadness, that I didn't find a more women-focused reading, and I hope you can see the irony in that. And, I do find this article's content compelling.

But, first let's briefly explore another kind of content. If you are willing, and if you have carried a purse, a wallet, a backpack, pockets, or even a smartphone, into the service with you, take it out and have a look inside. Really.

Open it up. Reach inside. Rifle through what you find there. Or think about any 'container' that you carry things in...be that your car or your desk drawers. Take a minute or two to do that.

This is just a beginning. We didn't delve deeply into every pocket and corner, and we're not taking the time to tell each other the stories behind these things.

Still, you (and I) would do well to consider what these contents tell. You might refer to a great article Jovanna found written by Venkatesh Rao called "The Things You Carry."⁷ He really

[nonbinary-uus/](#)

⁵ <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/thingscarried/>

⁶ <https://www.businessinsider.com/14-things-every-modern-woman-should-carry-in-her-purse-2015-9>

<https://www.amusingplanet.com/2009/11/what-do-women-carry-in-their-handbags.html>

<https://www.thetravel.com/22-things-all-women-should-have-in-their-carry-on-bag-before-boarding/>

<https://stylecaster.com/what-to-carry-in-your-purse/>

<https://www.demandaplan.ca/post/women-carry-a-lot-on-their-caring-shoulders>

⁷ <https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2015/06/12/the-things-you-carry/>

helps one to consider the 'why and wherefore' of what we carry.

And Rao does a brilliant job of looking at what the things we carry say about who we are. For example, he carries an old, heavy, and too-large backpack, because he doesn't like discarding things that basically work fine, and he doesn't feel an attraction to the new unless it serves a new purpose. But, Rao says his backpack and car are littered with ballpoint pens because he doesn't like not having a pen when he needs one, and because they are cheap and they don't "cause much trouble just laying around everywhere."

What we carry says something about us and our values.

But, let's look at this another way...beyond physical things. I want to explore what we carry in our souls and on our backs because of our gender, because of our roles, because of our upbringing, because of our culture.

I came across a beautiful video in which a young poet, Michaela Coplen,⁸ referring to O'Brien's book, speaks to what military families and children carry. Coplen mentions letters sealed in plastic bags, and carefully preserving every grain of sand contained therein which might tell of their family member's real experience. But she also speaks of carrying calculations of days and months until the end of a tour of duty...of carrying an intimate knowledge of transplantation...of carrying a need to write a poem for every brave soul.

I believe that we each carry around, with us and within us, similar imprints of our lived experiences. So what of the lived experiences of women?

In preparation for today, I read two possibly contradictory articles. One⁹ spoke of the unjust burden placed on women worldwide to be the carriers of water...to be responsible for acquiring safe water for their children and families, sometimes walking hours and carrying heavy containers for miles, and paying a bodily price for this.

The other¹⁰ spoke with pride of the role of women in the Anishinaabeg culture as the carriers of water, a role they receive in relationship, as male and female human beings. Women take care of water, and men tend to fire...reflecting their tradition's focus on a natural and necessary balance in all things.

Women carry. Water. Children. Poverty. Compassion. The burden of care. Intuition. A penchant for collaboration. Guilt. The stigmas of sexuality. Wisdom. And what we carry carries meaning.

On Friday night, I observed a great diversity of women at the International Women's Day event...women listening, women mothering, women connecting, women leading, women telling their stories. I share my observations with a caveat...because I did not unconfirm my assumptions of what these women carry...there are my observations only.

The emcees, Rosemary Ganley and Kristen Muskratt, carried the symbolism of the generations of women in this work. Rosemary as the elder and part of the settler culture; Kristen as the

⁸ The Things We Carry - Michaela Coplen https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M_ncfK68p0

⁹ <https://theconversation.com/women-still-carry-most-of-the-worlds-water-81054>

¹⁰ <https://www.waterdocs.ca/water-talk/2018/3/8/why-women-carry-the-water-during-a-sacred-water-walk>

younger and an Indigenous person from Curve Lake. Their shared leadership carried the tension and the beauty of our co-existence as women of different ages, backgrounds and experiences.

Chief Laurie Carr of Hiawatha First Nation carried an expressed obligation to educate every time she speaks. Invited to welcome us to the territory, she used her time to tell of the legacy of residential schools, the 60's scoop, and the very current pain of the 1600+ missing and murdered Indigenous women. Chief Carr also expressed her apologies for leaving early, because she carried responsibility for helping her auntie to prepare for a memorial service.

(I now carry and wear this red dress as a reminder of the missing and murdered women. How often, and for how long, and will I carry this reminder?)

Councillor Kemi Akapo carried in, and handed to us, the reminder that while women's issues in Peterborough are real and important, we must pay attention to unjust realities for women the world over. We are none of us free, she said, until all of us are free.

Two young girls from Fenlon Falls, spoke of their solidarity with the indigenous women in Chiapas, Mexico, carrying with them, and reading to us, a letter from those women, whose very existence is being squeezed by capitalist agendas.

Stacey Love-Joliceur, a 2-spirited trans-Aboriginal person, carried in a strong and grounded voice as an advocate for incarcerated LGBTQ2S people. I wondered how Stacey can carry all of her experience without breaking, keeping a willingness, even a gratitude, to speak about it.

Alexandra Arraiz Matute, a professor at Trent, and an immigrant from Venezuela, told us of trying to carry the reality of the current struggles in her home country while existing here in Peterborough...literally carrying her small child as she spoke.

After that event, I carried myself over to the Garnet to experience some of the music happening there in celebration of International Women's Day, and saw how women had lugged their instruments out to share their music...letting their voices and tunes so beautifully carry out into the crowded room. I have much awe for each of them...including our own Jessica Lindeman and Judy Jordan.

And then there's the news cycle. I'm particularly struck by the words of former attorney general and justice minister, Jody Wilson-Raybould. In her opening statement before the House of Commons justice committee, Wilson-Raybould explicitly invoked her "lived experience" and sense of personal history, saying this:¹¹

"I was taught to always be careful of what you say, because you cannot take it back. I was taught to always hold true to your core values and principles and to act with integrity. These are the teachings of my parents, my grandparents and my community. I come from a long line of matriarchs and I am a truth-teller in accordance with the laws and traditions of our Big House. This is who I am and this is who I will always be."

What does that tell you about what Wilson-Raybould carries? She carries her lived experience,

¹¹ <https://www.macleans.ca/opinion/the-playing-field-is-tilted-against-jody-wilson-raybould/>

the DNA of powerful matriarchs, and the traditions of her people. Some of the weight and the beauty in her words is in the very fact of her awareness of what she carries.

It would seem that what Wilson-Raybould carries made it impossible for her to participate in the political system in ways that were asked of her, but also made it possible for her to know who she is and what decisions she had to make. What we carry shapes us.

So what do you carry? If you are a woman, what carrying does that gender require of you? Or gift to you? If you are not a woman, you can still ask these questions of yourself, but as we honour International Women's Day, I'd ask you to pay some attention to what it is that women carry.

In a review of O'Brien's book¹², Jocelyn Heaney, who teaches literature to classes of veterans, and who uses O'Brien's book in those classes, writes of how telling our stories helps us to unpack the trauma in our experiences, which in turn unveils the lies and the lessons that can be hidden in the things we carry. One soldier in her class reflected on how he was told that he was at war for a reason, doing something great for his country, which was how he was taught to make sense of the killing.

Heaney then references something O'Brien said after a lecture, which is that he worries that there is not enough trauma, because it seems that we heal too well, and too quickly from hurts and realities that should invoke late night anxiety and depression. Our very humanity should be calling us to listen to the stories of pain.

Now, I'm not a militant feminist, and most of the time, I can't even find my anger about how I have learned to carry aspects of supposed femininity that have hampered my becoming. (See, I was taught not to be angry.) But if I truly pay attention to the plight of so many women...around the world and in our community, I should be angry...and traumatized. The endless violence perpetuated on women is trauma that we should not ignore. We need to fight for equality and respect.

Like the men in O'Brien's story, women everywhere carry love letters that burn, fetishes that offer false hope, medicine that cannot heal, photos of loved ones lost, and the weight of the world on their shoulders. And they are told that these burdens are theirs to carry because they are women, because they are powerless, because they are worth less.

Remember Rao, the guy with the old backpack and a plethora of pens? He offers a check-list to determine which carried things might be worry of our introspection. He suggests that the things we carry are most significant when they are near constant companions, or without which we feel slightly incomplete, or which wear cowpaths in our lives and minds. Look carefully at these things...carried close and carried constantly. Are they yours to carry? Do they serve you?

Look especially at the cowpaths. Worn beautiful or worn painful. Paths that regular use or attention has worn into a deep rut or a comfortable groove. Neural pathways. 'A mix of

¹² <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-things-we-carry/>

amplified and atrophied capabilities'.¹³ Cowpaths cause us to think differently. They shape us and our daily lives. The question is whether we walk them mindfully and with intention, or whether we walk them out of habit and without thought. Are they representative of our chosen bags and burdens?

Will we carry guilt and self-doubt? Or will we carry fire in our bellies? Will we carry hatred for our bodies? Or the beauty of our sexuality? Will we carry acceptance of violence? Or, our life-giving, life-nourishing natures?

What we carry shapes us. Women and their lives have been shaped by what society has taught them, and forced them, to carry. When we tell our stories, and tell them true, we begin to recognize the cowpaths we no longer choose to walk, and to see that there are other paths of liberation and free choice. We can be who we are, and we can choose to be who we want to be.

My International Women's Day suitcase was over-packed, to be sure. But take these final wishes, you women and you lovers of women. Be the person you choose to be. Claim your right to be that person. Tell your stories of both pain and joy. Support each woman you know in their journey to become. Walk your path with love, first and foremost for yourself.

May we, together, wear down cowpaths of love, justice, and equality. Amen.

READING *Step Zero* ~ Gretchen Haley

If you had the chance to start again
To make your life from scratch
To decide what sort of person you would be
Who you would love, and how
The content of your days, your hours
What songs would you sing to yourself,
or with others?
What prayers would you let fall from your lips
Urgently and with praise,
With mercy, or hope?
What blessings would you name
and share,
with strangers, and friends?
If you could take now that first step
what journey would you begin
across deserts, or mountains -
or would you take to the sky,
which, despite the bitter cold
is still vast, and filled with light?
What work would you take,
what mischief would you make
with boldness, and bravery,

¹³ <https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2015/06/12/the-things-you-carry/>

what failure would you embrace, and
what would you release,
and where
in the end,
would you return, and call home?
In this new day
on the brink of ~~a new year~~ [new possibilities]
no magic wishing or wondering
is required
for such a chance
is always available
As with the in, and out of our breath
to begin now
to live like we mean it
to see with new eyes
the life that is already and always
available,
to respond to this gift
with wonder,
and gratitude
to join in this partnership
to tend this flame
even when it breaks our heart
to keep showing up
to go with courage
into this dawning day.
~~Come, let us worship~~
~~Together.~~

* **CLOSING WORDS** *We Give Thanks for Life*¹⁴ ~ Andrew Usher

We give thanks for life:
For fellowship and love;
For the songs of birds and the beauty of flowers;
For the memories of people and places long since gone;
For hope, bursting new each morning with the sun,
and peace coming with the close of day
and the end of a journey.
For all that gives meaning to existence
we give thanks...(so may we go forth from this time together)
In freedom, hope, fellowship and love.

Amen.

EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME

¹⁴ <https://www.unitarian.org.uk/pages/closing-words>