
Editorial:

Journal of Applied Hermeneutics
April 22, 2015
©The Author(s) 2015

Aletheia - - Remembering and Enlivening

Nancy J Moules

Dedicated to Dr. Tyrone Dang (April 19, 1956 - November 10, 2014)



In choosing the cover of our new book, *Conducting Hermeneutic Research: From Philosophy to Practice* (Moules, McCaffrey, Field, & Laing, 2015), we wanted to showcase a word that seems to be at the heart of hermeneutic work. The word that came to mind was the Ancient Greek word aletheia.

ἀλήθεια

Aletheia is a word that is about unconcealment. The word is the opposite of Lethal (dead) – aletheia then means to enliven. It is also connected to the mythical River of Lethe in Hades: the River of Forgetfulness – a river that, if crossed, erased memory. Aletheia is the antithesis of this: it is about remembering. In its unconcealment, enlivening, and remembering, aletheia brings

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Nancy J. Moules

Email: njmoules@ucalgary.ca

home what may have been lost, forgotten, deadened, or concealed in our “simply getting by.” The work of hermeneutics is the work of aletheia.

I have a friend that I have known and loved for close to 30 years. He was an award winning family physician and internist in Hawaii and he is also one of the fathers of my godson, Thanh.

Ty had a most interesting history. Some of his “stories” I have heard over time and I am sure that they have shifted and changed in my mind as all good stories should. I do not then offer this editorial as a biography on his life but rather a “remembering” of him and an unconcealment of the story of him in my mind and experience.

Ty lived in Vietnam with his siblings and his parents. He was the 8th of 10 children. During the Vietnam War and the fall of Saigon, Ty and his parents and siblings experienced famine, abuse, and incarceration. Ty himself tried to escape many times and was caught and sent back to jail. His sisters and brothers escaped in awful circumstances under torture of Thai pirates and other perils. Ty, like eight of his siblings, made it to the United States and from there he pursued degrees in pharmacology and medicine, finally settling in Honolulu where he adopted and co-parented his son, Thanh, from Vietnam.

Ty’s escape from Vietnam and his rescue by a German fisherman has been documented in newspapers. His story from childhood to adulthood has been retold in other forms and I had the privilege of receiving hundreds of reflective emails from Ty about his life experience and how he looks on it now. What mattered always to him was family. I offer this one.

Our fourth attempt to escape from Vietnam. Ma had arranged for me, Phuc, Hoa, and his wife May, to leave. Quick goodbye, in the dark of night, shiny tears like pearls in Ma's eyes, looking at her sons. Not one, but three pieces of her guts, blood were torn, not in succession, but altogether. Bye, Ma.

I am in a lot of pain, too.

We got into a trap soon after we left home. The troubling, vicious red light circling the ocean dark, like red blood pulsating from an open wound, appeared, closer and closer. Then stopped, the ocean seemed all red. My heart sank when they boarded our boat. Phuc took a beating for being the oldest. The Pacific now had ma's blood in it.

We were still in handcuffs when the sun rose above the thatch hut where we spent the night. A long yellow school bus is awaiting. Time seemed still, stretching in the denied reality. And we were taken to a place called B5, the notorious re-education camp outside of Saigon.

For the next six months, we spent our time in the inner camp to be interrogated. We were separated in different sections. Phuc threw the last glance at us, the younger brothers, loving and pained looks... I am so sorry, so sorry...

I did not see him and Hoa again for a while...

By October, I was shaved, completely diseased (scabies, typhoid etc.) and no more information to extract out of a 90 lbs. body, Ma and Ba bought our way out to the labor camp section of B5. The table in the visit room was rough, as wide as an ocean, Ma sat there. She looked at me, wordless, tearful, the soft, round teardrops that were sharp, tearing me inside too, Ma. We shared the same guts, face, heart, even the laughter.

December 1979, we came home. Ma's hair had turned silver from black. An eight-month insomnia, punctured with the sound of mango leaves touching the ground. Ma would get up thinking they were our footsteps coming home night after night.

The house seemed cold and big. I crawled underneath the bed and slept there for the next two months, fearing the nightmares of the camp would come and take me in my sleep. And again, I left Saigon. April 1981, on the day Ma brought me into this world, I became a refugee in Malaysia. Tears of joy, Ma, and a few black hairs back in the jungle of white, funereal hairs.

Phuc is now gone, and I am here thinking about what Ma must have felt as a mother, each and single heartbeat, every time disaster struck... have you ever regretted bringing me into this world that was full of deaths, destruction and sufferings?

Suffering no more, Phuc is gone, so is Ma. The last of her I saw in a dream, black hair cascading like waterfall, spinning on one foot, and smiling at me. I hope that was where Phuc belongs now, with Ma/Ba.

He came home.

Before Tai was diagnosed, he purchased a beautiful home in Hawaii Kai, which he remodeled. He told me he wanted this to be his family's "ancestral home" – a place where his family was welcomed and that held the ground of honoring the past, remembering the past, and unconcealing the pain. I told him that what he was doing reminded me of aletheia and he loved the idea, so much that he ordered a sign to be in his home. In his Hawaii Kai home, this sign was as you entered the door of his home.



Ty was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma in April 2013 – April mattered to him – it was the month he was born, the month he left Vietnam, the month his mom died, the month he was diagnosed, the month he was told he was in remission. He would never die in April; he died on November 10, 2014, while at work at his family practice office, which he never gave up.

Ty was mischievous. He was a coyote and a raven. He knew Hermes intimately. He could make the best of us blush. But he always saw and spoke truth, for what it is.

Ty knew the hermeneutic call of aletheia. A part of the reason that we live in this world is to experience the terrible hermeneutic angst of remembering. There are times we wish to swim the River Lethe and forget, and there are times we are afraid we already have and we clamour to reclaim what is lost from memory. There are things we wish would no longer live and things we want to keep alive forever. In hermeneutic understanding, we know that things must be awakened, recalled, remembered, and suffered. It is why we embrace with “trembling and fear” (with all due respect to Kierkegaard) that which we have to be prepared to meet in this kind of research. We have to face the living presence of what we come to suffer or as Kearney and Caputo suggest – a preparedness to meet the stranger at the door who may be kind or may be a monster. There is hospitality to aletheia – an openness to what might come to, and maybe enter, the door.

Last week, I received a package from Hawaii with the sign enclosed - - the same week that our book went to press. The sign hangs now just inside the front door of my home. Thank you Ty. I remember you.

