



## THE VELVETEEN RABBIT



When I became a father one of the books I most enjoyed reading to my little boys was *The Velveteen Rabbit : How Toys Become Real* by Marjorie Williams, first published in 1922. Its timeless pages are filled with wisdom, love and beauty about the essentials of being human. My very favourite part is this:

"The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. For nursery magic is very strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand all about it.

"*What is REAL?*" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child *loves you* for a long, long time, not just to play with, but *REALLY loves you*, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose you are real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

"The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished that he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him. "

## Long After the Nursery:

### Musings , Reflections and Personal Experience with the themes of

#### *The Velveteen Rabbit*

This past summer I turned 60 years old. I have come a far ways now from the nursery and my own childhood.

It is from the perspective of mid-life that I reexamine the truthfulness and applicability of the important ideas of *The Velveteen Rabbit*. As I consider them, I am of course informed by the hard-earned insights and sometimes painful lessons that I have gleaned from my own private life and relationships. As much, for more than a quarter century, I have been educated and enlightened by the stories of my clients' most intimate and personal journeys through life, stories that range from heartbreaking to soaring in nature.

What ideas about living have stood up over time from the passage above? Which ones have been shown to be incontestably true and reliable? Which have been demonstrated to be fallible? And which, though lovingly intended, have proven to be naïve, mistaken or utterly false, not meeting the stringent tests of real life?

For what they are worth, here are my musings, reflections and personal experience with these matters.



**“Real isn’t how you are made. It’s a thing that happens to you.”**

False. Being real, or what I call being true to your deepest self or soul’s journey, is a personal, private choice. It is a decision, often a courageous and consequential one, about who you choose to be and how you choose to go through life. Do you choose to discover your personal truths and passions and live them in the world? Are you willing to examine and take personal responsibility for what you are honestly feeling and thinking in your most important relationships and reveal this to the other? Or do you choose to cover up, get by, avoid, or be liked by offering others only what you think they want or need you to be?

To be who you most are and live this in the world is the choice for meaning and a soulful life over personal comfort and security and the opinion of others. It is not “a thing that happens to you.”

**“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit. “Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful.”... “That’s why it doesn’t happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept.”**

Absolutely true. It can hurt. It can (temporarily) hurt a lot. It’s just that over time not living this way can hurt even more so.

Being real is not for the passive or the faint-of heart. It is only for the brave. To endure some of the outcomes that it may precipitate, it will have to be built on a solid foundation of self-love. Why? Because you have to esteem and love the authentic person you are so much that you are willing to face the possible pain, fear, confusion, and uncertainty that living this way (at least initially) may elicit in yourself and others. Changes, almost certainly, will need to occur. Key, cherished people in your life may not understand or support these changes. Relationships may be altered. Some, in fact, may be lost. Others, however, may grow and deepen. In regard to your job or profession, you might discover that you need to quit or alter work that you have been doing for years and find something new that speaks to your current values, aspirations and yearnings. This can hurt the pocketbook and might require an adjustment in your standard of living. Tough choices all.

**“When you are Real you don’t mind being hurt.”**

False. You do mind being hurt. I don’t know of anyone who doesn’t mind being hurt. It’s just that you start to experience that living *your* truth or finding that which wishes to come through you, whatever that may be - i.e. being straight or gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered; deepening your closeness and commitment to your relationship partner or leaving the relationship; communicating honestly with a friend or letting the friendship go; working for money or working because it is your calling - provides an unassailable spiritual foundation and protection you can fall back on.

In a certain sense you gain within more than you might lose without. You earn a self-esteem that is not contingent on the reactions of others. It is a self-esteem that no one can take away because no one has given it to you in the first place. You can become one with yourself. You can feel truly comfortable in your own skin, an impressive achievement for any of us.

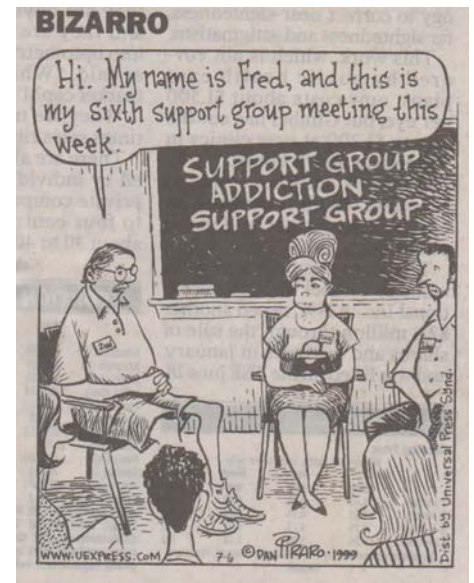
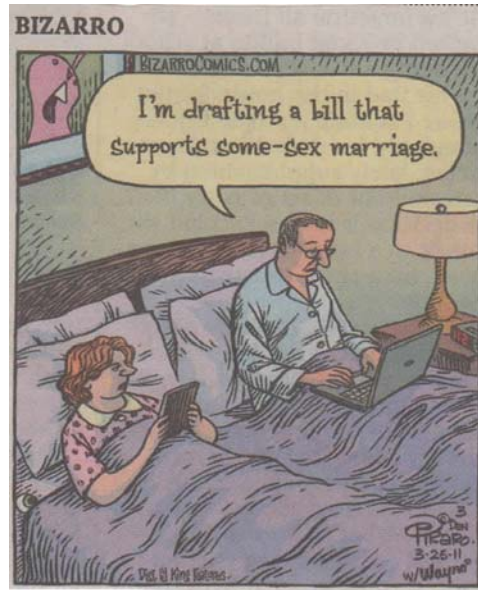
**“But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are REAL you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”**

Absolutely true. No longer enslaved by living for the applause of any audience, you are free to make your own music. If it appeals to others, well and good. Yet if it doesn’t, your life and its meaning will be carried on the winds of the melody that you hear alone.

**“When a child loves you for a long, long, time, not just to play with but *Really loves you*, then you become real.”**

Absolutely true. Having spoken earlier about how deep and abiding love of self is necessary to be able to be who you really are in your life, it is equally necessary to feel embraced and loved by one or more other people. These people, the old friends who have continued to love the Real you all your life (that is, for a long, long time) or the new friends, who celebrate and empower the new, authentic you are blessings and treasures beyond measure. By means of their tried and tested love and commitment to you and the vision they irrepressibly hold of who you are and all you can be, these “angels on your path” mirror your fullest potential back to you.

Without this glorious image of you held fast in their sight, you wouldn’t know who you really are or could be in the first place. They believe in you until you can catch up and believe it too. Without at least one other who loves you for who you really are, just as without self-love, you can never even set out on the journey of being REAL.



### UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

HEALING THE ORIGINAL PAIN OF YOUR LIFE:  
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 VANCOUVER: OCTOBER 22-23, 2011

RELATIONSHIPS: THE WORK OF LOVE WORKSHOP  
 VANCOUVER: DECEMBER 3-4, 2011

To register in either workshop or for further information, please contact Reena, Workshop Coordinator, at 604-689-4532 or reena@telus.net

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