

Hearts Quarantined

Faith, Hope, Aging, Love, and Death

Drawings and Text by Ira



Faith:

Realize that little things lead to bigger things. That's what... this wonderful parable in the New Testament is about: the Sower scatters seeds. Some seeds fall in the pathway and get stamped on, and they don't grow. Some fall on the rocks, and they don't grow. But some seeds fall on fallow ground, and they grow and multiply a thousand-fold. Who knows where some good little thing that you've done may bring results years later that you never dreamed of? I think the world's going to be saved by millions of small things.

Pete Seeger

Hope:

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Maya Angelou

Aging, Love:

A Blessing for Old Age -

May the light of your soul mind you.
May all your worry and anxiousness about your age
Be transfigured.

May you be given wisdom for the eyes of your soul
To see this as a time of gracious harvesting.
May you have the passion to heal what has hurt you,
And allow it to come closer and become one with you.

May you have great dignity,
Sense how free you are;
Above all, may you be given the wonderful gift
Of meeting the eternal light that is within you.

May you be blessed;
And may you find a wonderful love
In yourself and for yourself.

John O'Donohue

Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place.
Welling and swelling

Zora Neale Hurston

Death:

The Buddha taught that there is no birth and no death. Our belief that these ideas about birth and death are real creates a powerful illusion that causes us a great deal of suffering. When we understand that we can't be destroyed, we're liberated from fear. It's a huge relief. We can enjoy life and appreciate it in a new way.

Thich Nhat Hanh

This volume in the Heart Quarantined series explores the themes of faith, hope, aging, love, and death.

These Heart Doodles, the simple drawings, and verses, are my explorations and meditations. The crisis of Covid gave us all the task of separating the wheat from the chaff in our lives. I'm learning when you lean into faith and hope the spirit strengthens; when you lean into love the heart expands; and when you lean toward accepting the end-of-life some peace may come.

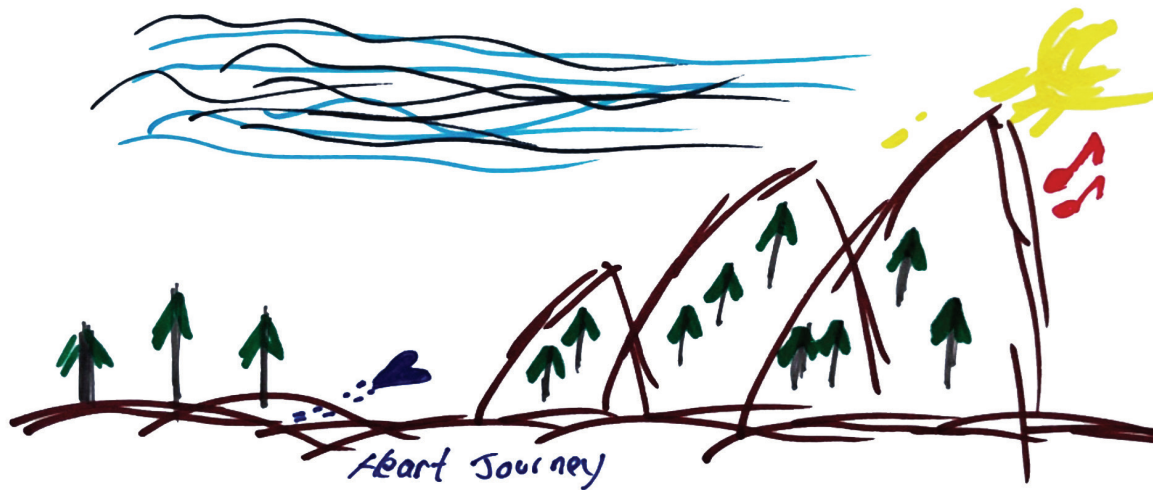
This volume of Heart Quarantined is completed as I cross further into my seventies. It is a time when memories are more present, I count my blessings daily, I keep those I cherish close, and try to pass on and do what I can, for the greater good.

In that spirit, I hope this edition of Faith, Hope, Aging and Death can be a kind companion to you on your journey as well.

In peace, Ira

Can you imagine us years from today
Sharing a park bench quietly?
How terribly strange to be 70
Old friends, memory brushes the same years
Silently sharing the same fears

Paul Simon, Old Friends, 1968



i accept i'm but one
traveler on this road

my gait is awkward
and more slow

my heart and soul
are weary

yet faith runs
through my veins

faith
runs
through
my veins

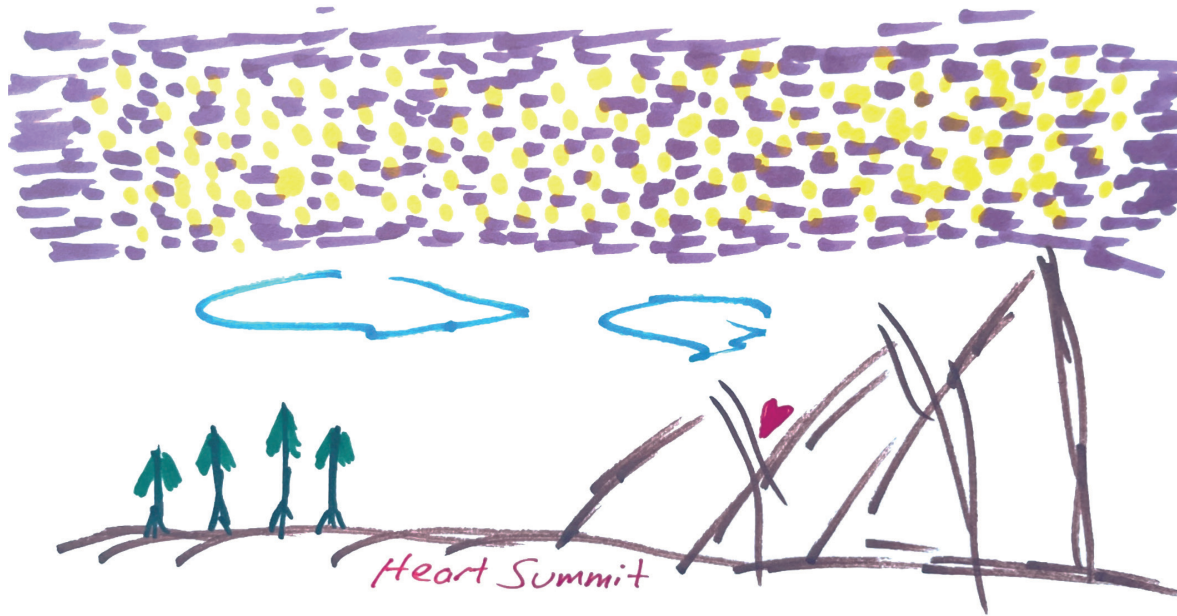
i hear drumbeats
and singing voices
from a distance

is it
the sound of death coming
from the other side

or is it
notes of hope
ringing from here and now
like church bells

either way ...

the summit
calls me
forward



the elder asked the night sky in a dream

can i be on the path again after
traveling so far and so long

thunder spoke back in soft tones

yes, you have
mountains to still climb
you have bridges to cross

yes, you have
relationships to form
good deeds to be done
surprises to uncover

yes, you have
many tears to cry
and laughs to share

yes, you have
sunrises to see
sunsets to behold

yes, my dear one
you have
lots of love left

the elder's eyes slowly opened
saw the morning light
sprinkled with dust
come through the window



may we collectively
seek courage
to cross the divide

as community
may we offer
generosity where needed

may we lift
those who are
oppressed

can we all become
construction workers
of the heart

building anew

rebuilding what
has fallen



i walked along a path
among the pines and hemlocks
rays of light
twist through open spaces
welcoming me deeper into the woods

i hear a voice
i cannot see
softly tell me ...

do not be afraid
to let your soul open
to new possibilities

do not be afraid
to redirect
a spiraling thought

do not be afraid
to challenge
old ways of being

softly the voice
now whispers ...

allow yourself
new ways
to move

allow yourself
to twirl
amidst the chaos

mist rises from the warm ground

a path before me
widens

i can see
the horizon



on this eve of a new decade
to those of you who know me
have loved me and been with me
now and in the many years before

if i come to have an illness of the mind
which my older brother had at an
earlier age than i am now

i ask you follow the plans
i have made for my comfort
that you do not anguish in
what ... once ... was

please hold our memories ...
where we smiled at each other
took on projects large and small
stood for the underdog
maybe drank ourselves a bit silly
and always ...
knew we loved each other

and if i don't recognize you
or know the facts of my own life
i have faith that these
precious moments are stored
in sacred places ...
in my heart and soul somewhere
and in my dreams, they may come
back to me or in certain sparks of
light on the wall, i will sense
something very special and familiar

there is a time when details are not
important and a deeper quiet
knowing is felt in silence

one request i would have
is that i have a chair
a comfortable one
by a window with a view
it could be a landscape
with changing light and clouds
or a street where i could see
strangers' comings and goings

if you do come visit
just hold my hand
you can say hi,
you look nice today
show me an old photo
play me an old dylan song

in your eyes and in your smile
you can let me know
you understand

and i trust in that moment
the place where knowing lives
in my blue eyes

you'll see me again



old lovers
so familiar
so grateful
for
sparks still flamed

know afternoons
are best

mornings ...
bones and hands
are stiff

evenings ...
the bodies too
weary to go
beyond the wanting

late in the day
like ancient magnets

remembering decades
of past delight

drawn to each other
once more



Spirit Heart

if you were gone ...

i know where i
would hear you
calling me

it would be
anywhere the
light danced on
moving waters
like thousands
of tiny diamonds
glittering

your spirit shining
over and over
again and again
with each rise and
fall of the waves

reminding me
of the wonder of
this life
the preciousness
of this moment

telling me ...

no matter how strong
the gusts of wind
no matter how
cold the winter

to remember to have
courage
to keep your
step fully planted on
this earth while
you are here

and as the light off
the water began to
fade as the sun kissed
the horizon in the
west

the last sparkles
would say
be brave
look into all of the eyes
that pass you

use your remaining
breaths toward love



i can see night skies
i can see morning sunrises

i can see faded moons
i can see full moons

i can see your eyes
i can see your tears

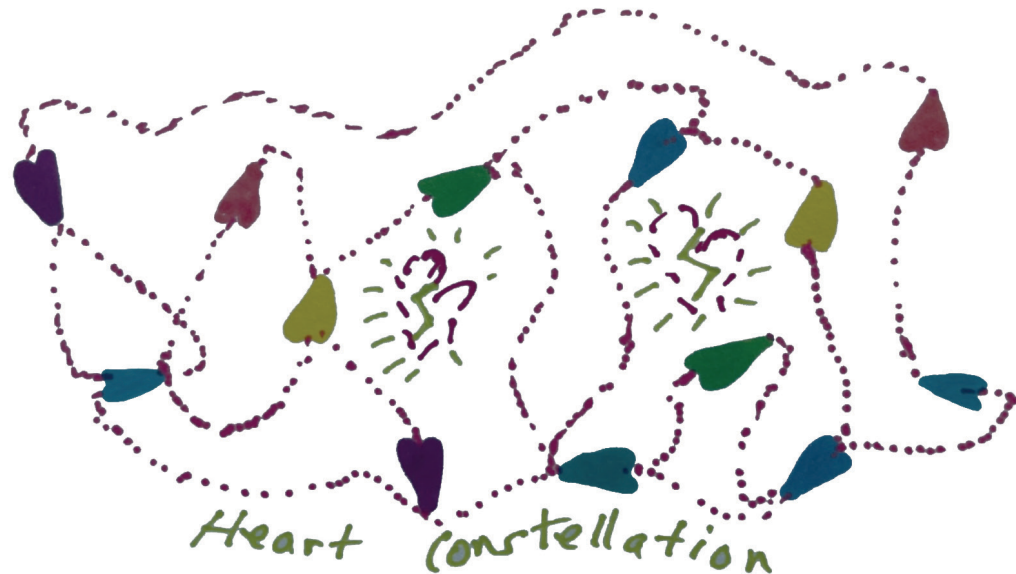
i can see your suffering
i can see your kindness

i can see you giving birth
i can see you dying

i can see my own ignorance
i can see my own humbleness

i can see your faith
i can see your hope

i can see life now
i can see life fading
i can see blessings
yes, i can see blessings



massacres aren't supposed to
take place in supermarkets

in cities, it's where we gather our
fruit and vegetables
we greet our neighbors
we smile at babies sitting in
shopping carts

the violence shattered my heart
into splinters
angered my soul into explosions

i've shopped in one of those
stores in Syracuse
buying chicken breasts, broccoli,
and ice cream

outrage and a horrific sorrow filled me
so deeply I couldn't speak

take the hand off my face
that muffles me

let me scream so loud
that windows shatter
let me pound the drum so loud
all of us must cover our ears in a
shared pain

in hebrew we say dayenu – ENOUGH
no more plagues upon all of our houses

i bend down from the obesity
of this horror
and pray from the most inner
cell of a broken soul

do not let these destroyed
pieces die inside us

instead let this hideous act ignite
the dormant sparks
that rest in us to go into the night
joining other sparks

like constellations
to guide us across troubled waters

*In memory of those killed at
Top's Supermarket, Buffalo, NY
5/14/22*



sages say the only processes we
can rely on indefinitely are cyclical

the sun rises even
after the longest night of the year
spring buds return
after the coldest of winters
hope follows faith
faith follows hope

choosing one another
follows loving one another

in love, we promise to always return
to what is most true between us

when we hold each other's hearts in
our palms ... knowing that grief and
sorrow are welcomed as much as
happiness and joy
love returns

in a forgiving that allows us to
fold into each other knowing
that understanding will follow
love returns

in giving acceptance and appreciation
such simple sacred offerings
love returns

in being grateful for the grounding
we offer each other...
knowing we are travel companions
in each other's journey
love returns

in the courage to face each other
through
life's thick and thin moments.
one stands tall when
the other needs to lean
love returns

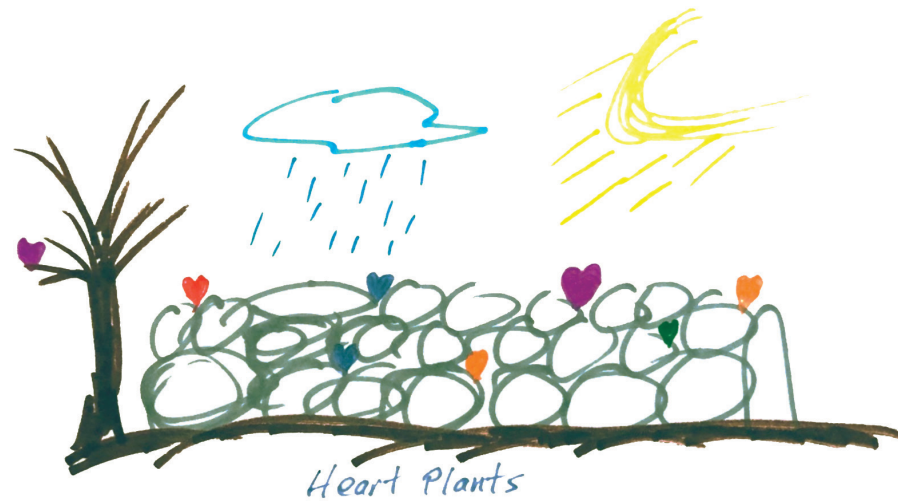
in the doing of small things
the touching of toes
the holding of hands
the writing of notes
the drawing of hearts
love returns

in knowing there are kisses that speak
what cannot be put into words
love returns

love is ...

the return to the other
after each one has grown

knowing in the return
love endures



i love when a flower
grows through a crack
in concrete or between rocks

is it courage
is it hope
is it the search for the sun
that makes beauty endure

how wonderful
that seeds can take root
in the dark



The child asked the elder
can my thoughts travel

yes child

how about my hopes and wishes

yes child

can they reach those departed

yes child

can they reach those who suffer

yes child

is that what prayers are for

yes child

when should i pray

your heart will guide you

will you pray with me

yes child



i jogged by a church
this morning a
parking lot full
of sunday parishioners

an elder gentleman
older than i at 70
walked slowly, awkwardly
bent over with a cane
toward the heavy doors
each step a labor

he must have a lot of faith
i thought

he looked up at me
smiled and said
enjoy

leaving me to wonder
if i ...
could look beyond
my own circumstance
to embrace a simple
joy of another

i looked back to say
the same
as someone else appeared
as if from nowhere

to help the man up
the stone steps



Spirit Heart

she comes from where
the sun touches the
moving waters
creating dancing sparks
of light

she welcomes and touches
souls whose tears have fallen
inviting you to join her
come, sit by me
she whispers
do not be afraid
to fold deeply
into yourself
like waves following waves
to the shore only
to recede back into the
next oncoming wave

stay as long as you want
when you're ready to unfold
lift your beautiful
weathered face and with
eyes closed
look deeply
through the darkness
where light begins

she reminds you that
the gift of grief is a great mystery
when we face it
when we allow ourselves to
wrestle with it
when we allow grief to flow
through us
it can release us to know

the rhythms of life
where strength and courage
can be found

she tells you
softly and gently
to open your eyes
to breathe long, slow breaths
knowing you're breathing in more than
the air you need to live



you are breathing
in all of what brought
you to this moment
you are breathing out
all the grace and anguish
that has been your life

with her blue hand of
sea and sky she
touches you so you know
you are of
stars, and moon and sun
you are sea and land
and will always be

as you leave her
grounded with each step
you both welcome
and release pieces of your
wounded soul

you kneel down
as if to begin
a dance of offerings and blessings
with palms open and
outstretched
holding stones
tiny stones of
grief and gratitude that
you will always carry with you

as you slowly rise
you stand tall with
an arm toward the heavens
the other toward earth
you no longer
have to say the words
good bye
you have found
the knowing
you thought was lost

For Esssie

(1919 – 2010)

Born the same year as Peter Seeger,
she too had faith in doing small
things in the Jewish tradition,
Tikkum Olam, to repair the world.



Essie and Pete Seeger
Cold Spring, NY



Essie

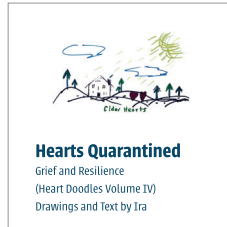
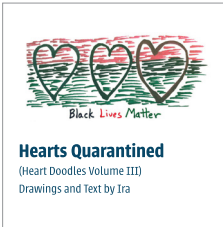
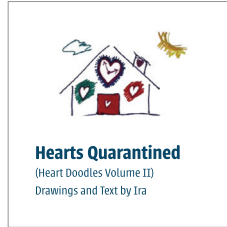


my mother would take
an old soup spoon
dig a hole in the dirt

put a root of ground cover down
refill the earth
pour a dap of water
step on it
as if patting
it on the head

everyone said
everything she touched
grew sideways
and
multiplied

Hearts Quarantined Series



“Through your writing, doodles, and voice you offer a clear and sensitive view of our world and a vision of what it can be. Thank you for sharing your heart and thus giving us space in which to share ours.”

Venice Peace Project

Venice, Florida

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A Night on Buddy's Bench Press
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