



## **Acts of Kindness**

### Healing Relationships

I enjoyed reading a title by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi & Ronald S. Miller, namely From Age-ing to Sage-ing. It provided the insights and the motivation for me, as a sage-in-training (which I call myself with a deprecatory smile), to complete an act of kindness. Using the terminology of the book, my act of kindness took the form of a 'life completion task'.

The particular life completion task that I chose was 'healing relationships'. To create the context of my task, firstly some backstory. For the last several years – I am not quite sure how many – I have had no contact with one of my brothers. This sorry situation came about because I had reached an impasse: no matter how hard I tried to avoid conflict and intend these planned catch ups to conclude amicably, I had not been successful. They ended always with conflict and more often than not, tears – mine. My tears were of frustration; I had thought through these encounters many times, charting each aspect of them like a map with the IED's (improvised explosive device) marked on it! These were the red flags signalling danger -please avoid! Unfortunately, the danger they signalled was at the level of my most knee-jerk responses, and in the moment, hijacked by my emotions, I would step on the bomb.

I came across my brother by chance this year. It was at a second-hand book sale which is the most likely place we would see each other. It is probably no surprise dear reader\*\* that we have so much in common, and one of our greatest loves is books. I was riffling through the books on the trestle tables and happened to look up. Across the large hall, I glimpsed the back of a person I knew immediately was my brother. He wore a hat and distinctive clothing which I recognised was characteristic of him.

I was with my daughter, to whom I whispered, 'There is Patrick' \* She, knowing full well the history, asked me what I wanted to do. I needed to take a walk outside and to think. Was I prepared to try again? How was I feeling? Had enough changed – the proverbial water under the bridge?

The answer was 'Yes'. He and I were now seniors – and the subtext was that I needed to start acting like one. The situation was ideal for minimising conflict: it was a public place, I had a witness/supporter in tow, and deeply within me was a desire to heal this relationship.

I re-entered the room, informed my daughter of my intention, and strode over to my brother...



That encounter was awkward, but it lay the first stone. He too had changed – grown – and was also evidently wanting to mend the relationship.

Fast forward to now, several meetings later. They take place in outdoor settings, among other people, for a short time. They are familiar places chosen by him and agreed upon by me. I have been able to talk of love – my love for him – and allow him to listen but not respond – at least vocally. He does respond. He is there, he stays, he talks.

How do I feel? Impossible to express in no more than words...

The power of a book with a provocation to shift an attitude, is demonstrable and revelatory.

\*name change.

\*\* with apologies to Charlotte Bronte for this affectation.