

My
Little
King 'om

My Voyage to Finding Myself

Majid Wachtarczyk

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Editor

Chris Whitney

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THANK YOU

To my husband, my hero, my love, Helmut Wachtarczyk

To my mentor, my friend, Mr. Chris Whitney

*To the wisest, most loving woman I know, Ursula
Wachtarczyk*

To our beautiful, caring niece, Dr. Stina Leinwather

To our best friend, the sunshine of our lives, Karin Reinartz

*I cannot count the favours you have bestowed, nor can I
thank you enough for the love, trust and help you have given
me.*

FOREWORD

The apparent romance of a life spent at large in the world notwithstanding, like Johnson's lexicographer, I have spent most of my work life in English language education as a harmless drudge. From idealistic fantasies of bringing to the world one variety or another of revolutionary truths, we of this vocation learn to yield to the more persistent message that an innocent child of the West has little that the rest of the world hungers for, except, of course, material excess and the nominal skills by which this might be secured, the very things we had to leave behind in order to lead such lives. Thus, it is not unusual that we find ourselves at odds with our host communities, which may be aggressively, even belligerently, anti-intellectual, tradition-bound, and unable to accommodate diversity or to embrace the free choices of a liberal worldview.

That worldview, at least for some of us, now consists of allegiance to the methodology and findings of the sciences (even if we don't always understand these) and an inclusive ethic for all peoples. This is notwithstanding perspectives which reflect the associations planted in our formative years, in my case of that beatific hippy affixed to Sunday school walls, the Apostles' Creed and

neo-Gothic stone masonry. In Majid's case, this would have been more of the character of visits to the local mosque, Ramadan fasting, and sessions with the local Jinn.

Shared liberal beliefs include the sense of peril faced by our natural environment and climate system, the irresponsibility and disastrousness of unbridled population growth, the superiority of open democratic societies, the essential virtue of diversity and its capacity to generate excellence through the multiple viewpoints raised in consensus-seeking, the rights of the individual to thrive, and our entitlement to a healthy realization of our essential natures. Women and men have equal rights to self-determination, and sexual orientation is a function of endowment rather than choice.

On the whole, the rest of the world is not much interested. Saudi students have learned that democracy is inferior to their reigning monarchy. Blasphemy laws in Pakistan justify the killing of students who ask uncomfortable questions. Women must be wrapped up in public, denied schooling, and otherwise confined to the home. Families of ten or twelve children are idealized. And, not even game laws are in place to protect the rights of homosexuals.

In much of the world, the three basic classroom taboos are politics, religion and sex. Consistent with this has been the long-standing professional practice of not enquiring into students' sexuality. In the case of female students instructed by male teachers, this helps to maintain the required professional distance. In the case of male students, this avoids having to keep secrets about the illicit practices of virile but repressed young men and it preserves us from the unmentionable awkwardness of the realities of homosexuality, whether practised by natural inclination or as means to provide the relief required by the inaccessibility of the female population.

A two-year stint at a college of technology in a small city in the Sultanate of Oman was just one of many such assignments. As with other such postings, the job thrust foreign instructors into an instructional environment in which the passion for learning, which distinguishes the aspiring student from those just putting in time or collecting stipends, was almost totally absent.

In my first semester, I had just one female student who showed flickers of promise. While her writing tended toward a youthful incoherence, she always had something worthwhile to say. In part, this was certainly because she had been ostracised by the other girls for

being too black. Indeed, on an occasion when she had come into the classroom in tears, she wrote, and more lucidly, about this very topic. Compared to her classmates, she exhibited a less constrained habit of mind and, through this, a capacity for intellectual growth. Satisfyingly, after she advanced out of the English program, she continued at the top of the class in her further professional studies.

In the following semester, I was given the four students who had placed directly into the advanced level. While all of them outshone their classmates, one particularly excelled. This was, of course, Majid, and his account of that semester (Chapter 11) is surely more engaging than any I could hope to relate.

These students, while limited by their environments, also enjoyed some advantages. In the MENA region, Oman stands out as one of the stars. Muscat, prosperous, glittering and human scale, avoids the grandiose excesses of Dubai or Riyadh, the violence of Tripoli or Baghdad, the poverty, addiction and screaming Imams of Sana'a, the intolerance of Quetta or Cairo, and the conflict that beleaguers so many of these states. Oman has successfully balanced cordial diplomatic relations with contesting regional powers. The Imams, at least sometimes, broadcast their prayers from the mosques in

a benign and musical manner. A level of prosperity is within the grasp of many Omanis. Members of other faiths are permitted to freely practise. Visitors are received with warm hospitality.

But, in common with much of the Arab world, Oman remains straight-jacketed by the so-called tyranny of the past. Indeed, enjoying one of the most successful leaderships of the Muslim world, the *lese majeste* laws in place have proscribed acknowledgement of the fact that the success of the nation has been the achievement of a Sultan who is himself, allegedly, homosexual. So, when we read Majid's account of his very difficult struggle for personal survival, we must see it against the backdrop of a society in denial. Long before he had to face the identity issues of a homosexual in a virulently, but hypocritically, homophobic society, however, Majid was outcast simply for being the vulnerable but enquiring child. Later, he faced rejection for having an achievement ethic, a creative drive and a capacity for doing his own thinking.

By 'doing his own thinking,' I mean just that. The tradition within which I teach focuses on training students to think rather than on imparting any particular set of ideas or body of information. That is, the focus is on skills rather than knowledge. Thus, I have

never counselled Majid, or any other student, on right or wrong or the specific bundle of beliefs that characterize my own outlook or background (aside from the usual classroom management imperatives!).

Of course, such an approach is anything but neutral. That specific details of our understanding are subject to revision, or falsifiability, when better information becomes available can itself be seen as revolutionary. Where belief is fixed and immutable, arguments in favour of one set of beliefs or another and requiring support by credible evidence are clearly a threat (which may be why a Saudi class of mine once got up and walked out on me when I asked them to do some free writing).

Beyond the rigours of argument, the enquiring student also comes to recognize the wealth of experience and imaginative richness contained in the world's stock of written storytelling. Ultimately, many a youthful explorer of world literature, however, while enriched by the stories of other lives and times, comes away saying, 'But where is my story? Where is the writer who has understood my life and captured it in words? Why are all these books about people so far away and so different from me?'

The answer is, ‘Until you find the words to tell your own story, it will go untold.’ Learning to write well constitutes the process of finding a writer’s voice. It stands as one of my rare professional satisfactions to have had the brief opportunity to work with a student of the calibre of Majid Wachtarczyk as he has striven to do just this. In these subsequent years, he has begun to unlock the promise of a talent so begrudgingly beaten back and the command of language critical to the telling of his story.

Chris Whitney

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I grabbed my papers, my pen and a glass of wine. I sat at the table and stretched my arms over it. I turned on the LED spotlight above my head. Beyond the spotlight, the room was dark. It was winter and cold, and I could feel the heat coming from the wood burning stove. My eyes looked at the empty sheets of paper as if I was looking at clear water with a school of fish swimming back and forth, uncertain which direction they must take. These were my thoughts going around in circles and making rings of nonsense. My eyes followed the path of my words, which I could see on top of those empty sheets, and my pen tried to capture them into itself. My words are my creatures. I made them, yet they did not obey me. The stove continued to burn, and the spotlight continued to shine. My paper remained empty, and I did not know how I should start, using those words. As I stared at the empty pieces of paper, my eyes became wet. The first drop fell, and the words stood still; or should I say, the school of fish in clear water suddenly stopped swimming. I could not write. I felt a quivering in my hands. My pen slipped away from my fingers, and my mind blocked. I stood up and went to the sofa. Loud and indistinguishable voices swarmed around

me. My body chilled as if somebody was pouring cold water over me. Through my tears, everything became blurred. The voices kept getting louder and clearer.

'You have failed us after we were proud of you. Homosexuality? There will be no acceptance of homosexuality. Stay where you are and enjoy being homosexual with Helmut. Helmut and you are a disgrace. You have disgraced the family's name. That's it. Enjoy your dishonourable life.' Those were the last words my parents wrote as I told them that I am a homosexual. Those words have stopped me from writing. The voices in my mind kept repeating them, over and over again. I was punished for telling the truth, for being honest to the people I love. I had lost their love and respect, and I still deeply longed for it. I felt how those words teleported me from the physical realm to an unknown realm, which dragged my past into the present and somehow chained me bodily, for it wanted to possess my body. I had no choice but to fight back, a fight condemned to loss, tears, weakness, anxiety, and the glaring contradiction within my character. My parents rejected me because of my apostasy and my homosexuality – I am no longer a Muslim or a heterosexual.

Why Me?

'Why me?' however, is a question that needs a long answer.

A customer entered our salon in Clausthal-Zellerfeld and wanted a haircut. This customer was not a stranger. He had been at the same language school as I. My first impression was that he was dissatisfied with his life and because I was convoluted with my own trauma, giving me the ability to see things from a new perspective. He greeted me. I greeted back and asked him to take a seat. He sat there, and, in the mirror, I saw a face drained of its colour, eyes singing only sad melodies, hair dulled by strain. I started my work and somehow tried to lure him out of his reserve. I had the urge to figure out what was wrong with him – with this look. There had to be something wrong, there was simply no other explanation. I asked questions that touched his private life, and he avoided answering, constantly changing the subject. Finally, our eyes met and filled with tears. The ice was broken. Reluctantly, he told me a little of his problems and difficulties, which evidently accounted for his current appearance. I put my scissors aside and listened to his words. I quickly realized that we were both living through the same family scenarios. He had been rejected by his family just

like I had. But with a difference. His life was a pile of rubble. Ok, I had been hospitalized for weeks and could not stand up or shower without help. He, on the other hand, was alone. I was not! For two weeks, he had been homeless. His family had dropped him like a hot potato. They had not paid him a penny, though he depended on their support. He was not a homosexual. Rather, at some point in his life, he had lost his faith and rejected Islam. So, he acted with honesty and told his parents: he wanted to live without lies – he simply did not want to lie to the people he loved.

It was difficult. No money, no job, no shelter, and no friends. He was homeless, and the pain regarding this loss disorientated him. He became drug addicted after he had tried several times to commit suicide. So, I offered him my help. I told him that he alone would not make it. He needed someone. All I did was speak to him. At that point in time, he had a room but was struggling with his addiction. He told his stories, and I told him my stories. He seemed very surprised that after all my challenges I was still alive and standing on my feet. Somehow, over four meetings, he came to better understand and work on his distress, and a healing process could begin. Over the next four months, he focused on improving his life and taking care of himself. It wasn't easy. The other day

he wrote to me, ‘I never imagined that my life would be so awesome. It’s just like a dream!’ I do not know which story, which sentence, or which method changed his mind, but he was able to overcome his addiction from one day to the next, and without any medication.

Why me? Because I saw myself in him.

I told him that in the end, I had been feeding a kind of evil strength which led me to try to kill myself three times. At a time when I felt I had no reason to go on living, a door opened for me. I was rewarded with a hero named Helmut, who came to rescue me from my miserable circumstances.

I know that many people, no matter in which society, whether heterosexual or homosexual, have problems finding acceptance. To be accepted by our families and communities is a noble goal. But to get caught into this web must not be at the cost of forgetting ourselves. To seek acceptance by denying ourselves is to suffer the loss of soul. We must, then, place the higher priority on accepting ourselves.

I want to send a message to all societies and people that there is always a way. Always! Even if you think you’re sitting or standing in a locked room with more than a hundred doors made of impregnable metal,

there's always a way! Even if you think there are no windows to bring light into the room, there is always a way out! But when a slit that brings light through a crack in the door gives hope or help, I'm ready to tell my stories in more concrete terms (from a person who was lost to a person who has become strong.) I would like to help others to take the first step, to open the door further and see what's behind it. I want them to experience an explosion of positive energy. I want to be there when they come out of the 'socks' with a drive that changes their future. After the first success, they enter the room because they want to sleep and rest. The next day, they open another door and experience paradise on earth. And the story of one person's success begins with a grain of hope. I want to be there and help, however small my contribution might prove.

Is this my motivation to write a book?

If with this book I can help others, I feel that the cost of sharing much of my private experience is worth it. So, yes! This is my motivation. At this point in time, I feel that I want to write, endlessly! I want to keep writing until I drop to sleep, and my head falls on my desk. I do not know what else I can do. I tried playing the piano to release the pain. I tried singing and writing

songs. I tried speaking with others. I tried crying and screaming. But there is something compelling about writing that has enabled me to illuminate every story and event in my life in detail. I feel some sort of power being delivered to me each moment I write. It is as if I am carried to another world in which I, my words, my papers, my pen and my glass of wine live. This little world becomes a reality the moment I start writing.

My words may seem wildly unreasonable and illogical, especially when my language isn't so proficient, or my vocabulary is not enough to make me sound like an accomplished writer. I had honestly thought that the pain, caused by the experiences I am to relate, would be gone, leaving only the scars, without a feeling of discomfort. Unfortunately, the pain of my childhood still eats at me, crumbling away at my foundation. I cannot control those emotions running circles in my mind. I do wonder how people find the right words to let others know how they feel.

I do wonder how a person finds the right combination of words to enable a reader to read to the end without asking: Why do I have to do this? But, the more I write, the more answers I get, and the more pain is released. I am writing my words with tears that have

been fearfully locked inside of me throughout my childhood.

I will let it flow and let my soul write its own words. The pen will start moving. The energy will start pumping itself into my little fingers. The empty sheets will lay it all out, the stones and mortar of the kingdom I am building. I will build a kingdom of papers, filled with nations of emotions and tribes of stories. Now I can go forth to my desk, take up my glass of wine and my pen and fill those pages with words.

For my first 21 years, I lived with people who trampled on my dignity. Three times, I had looked to kill myself in terrible ways, as I neared the end of my strength and saw no sense in going on. I saw darkness even where there was light. I saw only red, black, negative energy. I had experienced a lot. I was raped 14 times, I was stoned until the blood flowed, and I was abused both at school and at home. I experienced things for the first 14 years that I do not want to believe today. I was innocent, but after the age of 14, I changed into a monster. I hurt people I loved. I lost my humanity for nearly three years as I wanted to give back all the negative experiences just as I had experienced them. I lost my soul and plunged into a dark, red power that continually whispered in my ear to give pain. I sank deep

into an ocean of evil, humiliating and intolerable. I became mentally exhausted. I enjoyed my youth just as badly as my childhood.

Now, I am a completely new person. Now, I'm married to the person who means everything to me. Now, I can build this small kingdom. Now and forever I remain a blessed person. My husband is the colour of my life, the king of my kingdom. He gives me moments to laugh. He has raised me up from bottom to top. When I arrived in Germany, life was difficult because I had been deeply traumatized. My parents had said goodbye to me. The pain was unimaginably strong. The darkness of my mood affected our marriage, but my husband held my hand and walked with me despite all the dangers and difficulties. My husband is the most important part of my little kingdom.

And for now, I will step down from my ego-throne. I no longer long for sympathy because of the challenges I faced. I now have a higher goal: It is not about me, it is about the individuals out there, who might be afraid to speak out and fight for their rights.

Let us begin!