

I am at Cabrini Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation on Mother's Day. I arrive a few minutes before 10 in the morning and am greeted by two other Dzieci's, Zach and Golan. We wait for a few minutes as others arrive. There are six of us, dressed eccentrically in floral prints, vests and scarves and flowing skirts like a gypsy caravan from another time. We sit quietly in meditation and focus on presence work until we are lead by John, our music director, in song.

We then begin our rounds. It will be Dzieci's last time at Cabrini. The center is closing, being pushed out by a heartless landlord. Dzieci has been visiting and singing at Cabrini for over fifteen years. As the newest member, this was only my second visit, but it's a time I will never forget. We begin at the top floor and enter a room of an elderly black woman who lay cocooned on her side. She blinks several times, her eyes adjusting to the site of six unusually clad minstrels encircling her bedside. One of her eyes is covered completely in the white film of a cataract and she has perhaps three or four teeth. Her lips curl inward as if her face were receding into her body, like the shadowy foretelling of her body's sojourn back into the Earth. She looks up at as we sing and begins to weep. "God Bless you, Thank you, thank you, Halleluiah," she repeats over and over.

In our next room, we wake a man lightly touching his feet singing our Finnish and Swedish folk songs. As he stirs awake, his eyes widen, and mouth gapes a few times. "I don't know you," he stammers. We smile. "You do now," Matt the company director says. He is hugged and kissed and serenaded. "No one ever visits me," he says "They gave me this hearing aid but it doesn't work." His lips tremble as we conclude our song and he is so moved, he finds the inspiration after we leave his bedside to find his footing and his walker and follow us out into the hall.

We weave our way through the lunchrooms with our songs. Some Cabrini residents dance and clap, some drool and some simply stare with vacant expressions. This is an in-between place. Some will never leave Cabrini; some will return to group homes, some will die here. It is Hecate's crossroads. While it's a center for rehabilitation, some very clearly will never be rehabilitated. Their soul has chosen to cross.

On Mother's Day, some residents are surrounded by their families. Others - there are no families, no visitors or acquaintances. The nurses and the gentle drone of the televisions are their companions. In one room, we surround a

woman's bed and she is furious with us. She shoos us away with her hands but we stand and sing undiscouraged. Matt reaches out his hand to hers. She takes it then jerks it away in a cat and mouse game. She then grabs a back scratcher threatening to hit him and us if we don't leave. We get the message. When we enter, some forcibly ignore us, understandable so, a troupe of gypsies just walked into their bedroom uninvited. We're holding their hands, stroking their heads, under other circumstances, it would be completely invasive and yet for the most part we see touch and attention starvation and outpourings of gratitude.

We visit a room where two sisters lie side by side. Neither chooses to speak although the nurse informs us that they can. The nurse looks over at us and says, "You've been coming here a long time." "Fifteen years," Matt replies. She asks after one of the company members who was pregnant a few years back and had visited. "My wife," John says. "We have two boys, five and seven." Cabrini had been through the company's birth and birth within the company. As we stood here knowing it was our last visit the needle of sweet pain stuck us again.

On one floor we meet a couple that have been married sixty-three years and are sharing a room in the center. The woman, Rose, wears a short dark wig on top of her head with her shoulder length silver hair sticking out beneath it. "You can dance," Rose smiles as Megan spins in a circle, her skirt flying carefree around her. "I used to dance," Rose sighs, "But now I'm old, I sit." Golan takes her hands and helps her to her feet. Her husband Cosmo watches on approvingly as Rose begins to slow dance with Golan as we sing and whirl around them. Rose sits back down beaming. "Now you continue," she says looking lighter and younger than when we first saw her. We laugh and bow and proceed down the hall.

My first visit here, I was tentative, wondering, do people really want us here. Seeing the string of small miracles one after another leads me back to my own work and purpose of being here again and again.

A man in a completely non-functioning state after a minute opens his eyes. As we sing quietly around his bed he opens his mouth...slowly a sound comes out, and then another and then he is singing and we join him finding a harmony around his sustained pitch.

There is fragility all around. 'Dzieci' is the polish word for 'children,' and there is a sweet pain at seeing those at the end of their life cycle also becoming just that, children. Their bodies and emotional states recede into a place where every thing lives right on the surface – tears, loneliness, rage, love – all so alive. There are no emotional or physical censors in the body, just raw impulse. As wandering minstrels, we are as likely to get slapped as we are to be embraced by the visitors. We are in the land of impulsive child-like spontaneity and vulnerability. This work is the gift that gives Dzieci its fuel and helps us find the deeper levels of authenticity in our own work.

As I bike, home there is equanimity in my system, a gentle-groundedness in my spirit and a lightness in my heart. The day has been a gift and has been gifted. To the Cabrini, staff, thank you for all of your service work over the years and for including us in your family. To Dzieci – thank you for being my soul community and providing endless opportunities to experience daily miracles within myself and each other.

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