

Background article from Juno Magazine (www.junomagazine.com)

The Flower in the Desert

A beautiful allegory of what it means to be alive

I thought I was dying. It was as if I was in some sort of a rocket, my being and body surging out into the universe. I felt my beliefs, patterns and experiences dropping away into nothingness, I felt their profound unimportance, and I became the plants, the air, the earth, the moon and the stars. It sounds implausible I know, but for a short while (far too short as I was scared) I was everything.

It was the end of my wilful and stubborn refusal to see, of limiting myself to knowing who I was. It was also the beginning of living within an even greater uncertainty than the uncertainty I already knew so well – the uncertainty of living within the mystery rather than with the familiar, painful and perversely-comforting uncertainty that comes from a level of emotional neglect, from a perceived lack of love.

Twenty years later I still hear the echo of this experience. It is far away now, sometimes almost inaudible, but I hear it. Far too often I find myself consumed by the challenges, pains and joys of what is important to me on each day...yet somewhere deeper down I know that they are not important at all.

The story

*My new book *The Flower in the Desert* was born from this experience, and then nurtured by the unfolding of my life since – the changing rhythms, the very slow coming to terms with my many imperfections (I wish this would get a move on!), the gradual and growing awareness that there is so very much more than me and yet nothing more at all.*

The story in my book is simple. It is about a boy – a boy with many troubles, a boy who does not know trust – growing into a man, and a man growing up within and through his life. It is about the trips he makes into the desert and what he finds there...and, just as importantly, what he leaves behind.

The Camino

*Perhaps it sounds daft, but *The Flower in the Desert* wanted to be written...it had been waiting within me for many years. I somehow could never quite find the time to write it though. I was always too busy with my day-to-day journalism work, with simply living my life, and I just couldn't or wouldn't find the right space to open to writing it.*

*I eventually got around to writing the first draft during the weeks I walked the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, an 800-kilometre pilgrimage route across Northern Spain, with my partner Anna a year or so ago. The ancient path crosses three, or is it four, magnificent mountain ranges, rounded by age, and the Meseta, a vast open plain, bleak and beautiful in its open and exposed simplicity. The Camino is, in many ways, a long slow walk into this simplicity. *The Flower in the Desert* was written in this place.*

Becoming

This book is about that place of meaning, of being, of becoming, that all of us know, even if we're not always consciously aware that we know it. It is the mystery, and

each of us brings our own experience and heart to it. My hope is that my book helps to create a space where this place is felt more keenly.

*We each know that we need to step away from the extraordinarily destructive and life denying actions of much of our current human world into a place of greater love and reverence for life and our planet. While the head, our thinking, has an important part to play in this for sure, I do not think the change we so desperately need will come primarily from there. For me, the most profound and lasting change flows first from the heart. I hope that *The Flower in the Desert* speaks to the heart of every reader.*

Neil del Strother