

The Invitation

I wrote the prose poem, *The Invitation* one night after returning home from a party. I don't usually attend parties but on this occasion, berating myself for being anti-social, I made an effort to go and be friendly. I returned home feeling frustrated, dissatisfied with the superficial level of the social interaction at the party. I longed for something else.

Years before I had attended a writing workshop where poet David Whyte had given us a writing exercise, based on a poem of his own, where we began alternate lines with the phrases, "It doesn't interest me. . ." and "What I really want to know is. . ." Using this form I sat down and wrote *The Invitation* as an expression of all the things I really did want to know about and share with others. Several days later I included the poem in a newsletter I was sending to men and women who had come to do retreats and workshops with me. And from there, the poem took on a life of its own. People copied and shared it with friends and colleagues around the world, posting it on the internet, workplace bulletin boards and kitchen refrigerators. They read it at weddings and funerals, at conferences and gatherings in churches and boardrooms and universities. I began to hear from folks from all over the world—from Romania, Iceland, South Africa, New Zealand, Russia and from all over the United States and Canada. I couldn't believe how many people felt touched by the longing for deeper intimacy expressed in the poem.

As the poem changed hands a few individuals took it upon themselves to add or change some words. "Faithless" was changed by some to "faithful," "beauty" to "God" and—as I later found out—a man in Chicago, sure that I was an aged or deceased Native American man, put "Indian elder" after my name. Where possible I made requests for folks to share the poem as it was written and tried to correct the misrepresentation of myself as an "Indian elder." Although there are stories of Native American ancestors in my family history (along with stories of German and Scottish descent) I am neither old enough nor wise enough to claim to be an elder of any people.

In 1998, after being approached by Joe Durepos, a literary agent seeking permission to use the poem in a book by Jean Houston, I began to write the book, *The Invitation*, using each stanza as a structure to go more deeply into each of the desires expressed in the poem and offering meditations I had used to explore my own longing. As I write in the beginning of the book *The Invitation* is ". . . a declaration of intent, a map into the longing of the soul, the desire to live passionately, face-to-face with ourselves and skin-to-skin with the world." It is the story of a very human woman who longs to live fully awake. It is the story of the human heart's capacity and longing to live intimately with all of it—the joy and the sorrow, the hope and the fear.

The Invitation was published by HarperONE, San Francisco in the spring of 1999. It became a best-seller and has been translated into over fifteen languages around the world.