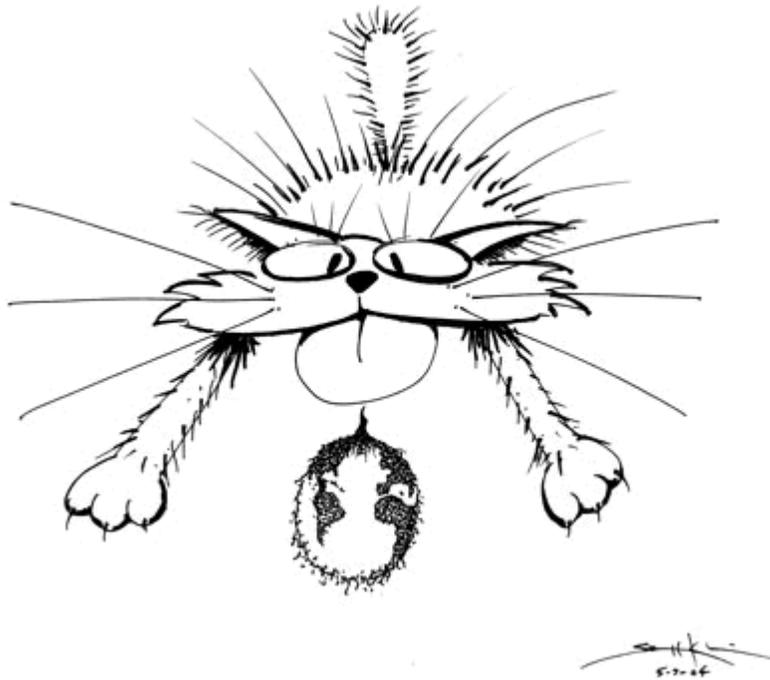


## Getting Out The Hairball - Why? part1



A lot of us walk around, go to work, come home, like zombies, because if we were honest and real we might look stupid, get fired or feel put down. Sometimes we end up with bad backs, become ill or tired, have affairs, go on spending sprees, give in to addictions, or whatever. Not that those are necessarily all bad things; it is just that getting the hairball out is so much better than substitutes. Toxic food, drugs, workaholism, a house full of dustballs, or whatever we do to avoid what's inside of us just doesn't invite health or happiness. I don't mean to be splitting hairs; it's just that stuffing is painful.

The only way I know to get my power, to know what I feel and to make connection, is to talk about what is going on. I began writing "hairballs" by getting out my feelings, as a way of saving my sanity. Friends liked them and so here we are. I guess I had a backlog of hairballs because they just keep coming. I have been surprised at how many people seem to want them. I guess being real, and telling the truth with authenticity are attributes still hard to come by these days.

Writing "hairballs" hit me in the head like a hardball, really came home to me, to the real home plate, when my mother was dying. She had emphysema. She was a feisty woman. I loved her more than my own life. I loved our passionate conversations, her honesty and deep compassion; and I loved her humor. But how do you tell the truth to a sick, depressed, old or angry person? When she knew she was dying, she was locked to a breathing machine.

I flew to visit her, and spent days there. As I packed to leave, she did something that had never happened before: she begged me to stay. She said, "I'm afraid. I need you. I've never asked you for anything before. Please stay." I was smothered as a kid and my therapist said I needed better "boundaries." I decided that I was not going to be "co-dependent." I was so drained, I thought I was doing the right thing by leaving, by not saying or blurting out too much, not hurting her feelings, not making matters worse. I stuffed everything. What happened then was that I couldn't breathe, either, with the hair in my throat ... so I left. I flew home. She died.

That was when I first learned about the horror and depression that comes with keeping words inside. I had lost a connection because I had not been able to say what I needed. I wailed alone. Before that it had never

occurred to me, with all my years in therapy, that to hold in my hairball, to press down on my fears and longings, would mean such separation. She died alone.

My deepest needs, most vulnerable wishes and fears stayed in my throat. Now I believe that having too many limits separates us and that boundaries are a substitute for the soul. We sometimes push people away, just when we most want to connect. If we could only speak of our needs and fears. I wish more than anything that I had let it out, but I was afraid of blurting out the wrong thing. I long, still, in every cell of my being, to say to her:

"Dearest mom, If you can hear me now, I want you to know, more than anything, I was afraid. I was terrified that you would not listen, you would not calm down and quit raging at me. I needed you to understand that I didn't want to leave. I was frozen, scared of making it worse, of saying the wrong thing, of having a fight ... so, I said nothing. So now, forever between us is this gulf: a cliff from which to fall, with no bridge at all. I was scared of listening to your anger, your complaints, your monologues, afraid of your fury, your criticisms. But most of all, I just needed you to hear my needs, to listen to me too. I couldn't say any of this. I did not know how to ask you for what I so desperately wanted. I was afraid that I would become exhausted and die too. I couldn't find a way to talk to you: about death, about dad being gone, about our relationship. I didn't know how to be vulnerable, speak of my fear and needs. The only thing I knew was to stuff everything inside, keep it in. I offer you now, much too late, this courageous conversation. "

The things you stuff, that you don't say, can dull a flame. The things you don't speak can become resentments, judgments, repulsion or unspoken fear that make you run, to not participate. Things unsaid turn to poison, separation, destruction, fear and loss. Most of the people I know, say that their fear is saying the wrong things and creating bigger problems, havoc and hurt. So, what to do? Telling the truth is challenging and scary. Learning to speak, but also to tolerate the anxiety of hearing unpleasant feedback is just as difficult as knowing when you are being abused, or unheard. Sometimes speaking is too wounding, so you have to learn to say, more skillfully, what really matters. I don't believe there is a perfect way to talk. I think you are better off getting out your hairball than letting it become a ball and chain, even if you do it wrong. I do recommend knowing what your intention is, and as often as possible, directing your emotions into vulnerable feelings, needs, and requests; otherwise, you just perpetuate more war. The world seems to be speeding and spinning, like a fast ball flying into left field. We need connection more than ever. One day, while shopping, I spoke to a man working in the store, who said he had just had a heart attack and had driven himself to the hospital. He described the waiting room. It sounded chaotic for the staff AND the clients. A lot of us are in shock, feeling overwhelmed by chaos or isolation, so we disassociate, detach, numb-out. The man went back to work as soon as he could, just to feel he belonged somewhere and could function again; anything is better than feeling lost in a fast-paced, cold environment.

Are we so speeded up we cannot connect? The more I talk to people, the more I feel that conversation is our only hope for changing the world.

The other day I talked to people in the radio business struggling to survive in media, with the owners of most stations in the hands of six main corporations. The week before I had spoken to a colleague who had sent a suicidal girl to a crisis center. The staff spoke to her in such abrupt, unhelpful ways that she spiraled down more. They appeared not well trained.

So many times when we reach out we find that people don't know how to talk to us in a helpful way. The point is, we are afraid to speak up and then, when we do we can say the wrong thing. So, what to do? If only we could listen more deeply and respectfully to our own and each other's needs.

I have days which are all too much for me. Sometimes I feel scared, trying to speak up in a dangerous world. I begin taking antidepressants again. Even with getting my hairball out, I still feel backlogged, frightened, frustrated, powerless. I can't tell if menopause or real feelings are my problem. I feel like a ball of yarn unraveling in the wind.

Then to really sink the 8-ball, my therapist forgot our appointment one day, so I called another one. When I asked how she was, she said, "Gosh, I just lost half of the material on my computer to viruses; be careful." I said, "I have spent over 1,000 dollars and hundreds of hours to get my computer to work." This world seems like a billiard table, with balls scattered all over it.

I talk to friends, doctors, teachers, therapists, realtors, even people in the legal system, and everything seems to be running amuck, moving at random, major decisions being made, like, "umm, chocolate or vanilla?" My hair stands on end hearing the way decisions are made in the courtroom regarding peoples' lives. Everyone's a bit off the charts, tired, confused, overwhelmed, drained, underpaid, stressed with health or emotional problems, feeling fragile, frustrated or disempowered. Why do we let ourselves get rolled over by the big ball, the globe? I feel like I'm swallowing a bowling ball.

Why don't more of us gather together in dialogue and insist on change? People seem to be struggling right now, either with health issues, relationships, jobs, money, sex or something else. I don't see much community, really. I don't experience enough teamwork. If we don't pass the ball back and forth, we're going to get "balled-over" by it all.

I wonder how people sit and watch TV, while we are told on TV that a lipstick and an exercise machine will bring love and self-esteem into our lives. We worry about getting fired instead of insisting on new policies. We wait at medical centers for an incompetent doctor. It's not even their fault; we're all overworked, underpaid and tired in mid-life. Why don't more people gather together and request changes in our world?

It's stressful to live with this high pressure. Yet, what to do? It's crazy. I'm juggling a lot of balls, but somehow missing the mark, losing track of what's meaningful and what matters. Do you have to fight to win, have balls to make life work?

I'm afraid a lot. It's all around. Fear of not having money is very real. The billiard table is scary: nobody knows how to get the balls lined up in a row. They think sinking them will help, possibly through war, but that's not real power. I cannot even get therapy for under \$80 an hour anywhere. So, how do I get support?

I feel powerless while I wait a long time at Kaiser. Then, I'm put on hold an hour to talk to PG&E. I commute long hours to work, in a steel box, with my coffee cup and radio which itself is controlled by 6 major networks for the country. I have trouble connecting with open and honest folks. Most are closed-mouthed, bound up, careful about what they disclose, relying on gossip or blame. So, I keep my stomach tight, numb, closed up, hold in my hairball. Don't know how to unwind-wind the ball of yarn in my stomach or back.

Why don't we connect more in community and in a global way? Are we riding the wrong wave, weighted down? We say it's a hard day at work, that we're in difficult relationships or depression. But, is there a collective feeling of despair or hair-raising anger because we can't take the ball, run with it, and make a home run? We get discouraged.

Women watch Oprah, for hope and insight; men go to ball games, repair cars or houses. What if we could meet and get out what we feel, in a safe way, and move together with momentum, like basketball players, passing the big ball, the globe, on to our children in a way that we value?

If only we could talk to each other and tell the truth about what it's really like inside -- in the congestion of the gut - and create a new world. Alone we're fragile; together we're a locomotive. Thoughts that pull the rug out from under us, such as: you should be skinny, working harder, retiring, "in love," less sensitive, less serious, less demanding, less clingy, more successful, all keep us running.

All of these impulses make us doubt ourselves, create comparisons and make moving forward feel like trying to move your leg, which is tied to a ball and chain.

Embarrassment and doubt make it really difficult to share this with anyone. What if I sound silly, inappropriate, bossy or needy? Who is it safe for me to talk to? Will I be judged? I don't want advice anyway. We are either afraid to say the wrong thing, uncomfortable about disclosing, or unskilled in conversation. Either I imagine that I am not okay, that someone is better than I am, or that I should be happier. It's like trying to get a golf ball out of a sand trap.

It's hard not to feel this way, looking at big houses being built, young women in magazines, or torrid romances on TV. I am agitated, just never quite feel like I'm all right. There has to be something more. Is the happiness we seek, like chasing a ball that's been hit outside the ballpark?

Some say meditate, some say take anti-depressants; one of my friends says the problem in relationships is comparison. She calls it the "couples' conspiracy," as though we bought into some idea that being married is so wonderful; then the hairball mounts as we stuff our horrible disappointment.

Even my wealthy friends are in some angst, trying to stay ahead of the 8-ball, not having the ability to keep their health, or keep relationships going. What we don't realize, as a culture, is that we are all out here feeling the same way, but not connecting.

Why is there so little movement to create change? When ants get together and carry something on their backs, it is not so difficult. Are we all too busy or distracted to make real movement, to have a hair-ball movement? Leaving a worthwhile legacy requires dialogue. As Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Telling the truth is difficult, and as long as we're quiet, we feel isolated, inadequate, old, fat, or like odd-balls, when we don't share our hairballs. I once said to a colleague: "I didn't sleep well last night; I have insomnia. I'm in menopause and unsure if my boyfriend and I will stay together." She said, "You mean you have that many problems?" I felt flawed. I shut down, which is like living in a coffin. I wish I had said, "I need to check something out with you: was that intended as a judgment?"

Do I lack the "balls," the courage to be more honest and active in making change happen? Do I drop the ball before I get to the goal line?

After writing all this, I just want to crawl up in a ball and go to bed. [KatyByrne'sHairballdaze](#)

Getting it out:

1. What stops you from reaching out and getting more support?
2. What causes you to keep your needs stuck in your throat?
3. What might block you from getting more involved in community movement?
4. What's one thing you could do to participate more actively in conversations with friends, family?
5. What would you like to do in your town?