

Daylilies

Emily A. Daniels

Dr. Daniels Academic Consulting

About the Work:

This piece is inspired by my experiences of academic mobbing at a college. It weaves imagery of violence and breakage into a narrative that is ultimately about resilience in the face of organizational toxicity. It is dedicated to all survivors of institutional trauma.

About the Author:

Emily A. Daniels, PhD has over 20 years of experience in teaching and training in private and public education in the US and abroad. Her academic publishing has focused on race and inequality within the educational arena and her interests include critical theories, women's leadership, and storytelling pedagogy. This piece is her initial foray back into the passion and joy found in creative expression.

Daylilies

The day lilies are blooming, and they come and go brief and beautiful- small, wrinkled envelopes discarded after furiously brilliant displays of speckled orange candy and obscene yellow stamens.

I re-read my journal of the violence that I noted two years ago this month at that college in Northern NY, where academic mobbing was not a term I knew beforehand.

(But I know it now).

I realized that I had hidden these memories away somewhere, perhaps stifled and silenced in that sadness and despair that had been multilayered- like an old well filled with silt and discarded cookware or pottery- years' worth of garbage- broken mugs and mottled crocks, sulfur-scented mud, the layers sitting, filling, accumulating until no water is left, and the well must be covered-thin plywood will do. Suffocating in silence.

Actually, I had forgotten, "Nothing to see here"- the pain-filled notes of rage and confusion, saved in a file aptly named "What the Fuck"... But when I read those sharp words and evoked those ghosts, some of my skin was pulled up and off, my arms, legs, my heart were revealed pink, exposed, raw. I shook. I bled.

The words and deeds and actions were not my imagination- they were true. But violence IS the norm in academia. As a woman I have been well-taught many lessons in shame, and it haunts me as I revisit this- "What were you wearing?" "What did YOU do to encourage them?"

(That mob. I did not. I was too good).

The violence and silence interconnected as abuse happens WITH and WITHOUT words- racist, sexist rants and knife-liar smiles by those who enacted pain on me and others- unhindered... and academic leadership responded "but there is nothing we can do"...

(BUT I am not unhinged, just cracked).

As the pottery was filled with gold in ancient Japan- the piece became lovelier and more priceless... Precious in its brokenness... beautiful in its survival. Tomorrow there will be shiny new daylilies...