



## Joy at the Depths of an Ordeal

by Guy Corneau

I was walking in Brussels one February day in 2008 in a park that had all the signs of an early Spring. I found myself under the branches of an almond tree in bloom. This blossoming of little pink flowers floating in the gentle Spring wind, dancing against a clear deep blue sky brought tears to my eyes.

This was life, pure life reclaiming its ground after Winter. This was the natural flow of things. The almond tree touched me that day because I myself was emerging from my Winter of cancer. Nine months of procedures, needles, examinations and chemotherapy. Nine months of worry and a stubborn threat that was finally dissipating. The results of the latest tests were good. I would survive. But I was still acting like a fox on ice, alert to any sound and the slightest sign of collapse.

This almond tree in bloom in all the splendor of Spring reassured me. It told me to believe in life, to dare to live. It didn't matter if another Winter would come, the flowers heralding new fruits were exploding with life.

I breathed deeply in its branches. I shared in its fresh life. I took it in and it felt good. Yes, I was still frail but I'd get strong again. I'd bear fruits again. Inspiration's sap would flow through me again and I'd be able to benefit from it as would those around me.

All in all, this Winter had not been so bad—quite the opposite. Deep in darkness, having given up all expectations because I was too weak to invent any, having given up my usual pretenses because my capacities were reduced to nothing, I still had moments filled with light. I even ended up saying to myself that it's in a full-blown disaster that can best summon our inner light.

That's when we can see it, so to say, touch it, fill ourselves with it, connect with it like we connect with the music we love.

It's easy to go on and on about happiness and the meaning of life when everything is coming up roses. But in the throes of an ordeal, when we have to cross the stream to a new balance or die, words aren't of much help. We have to collect ourselves and try to maintain some dignity. This is an ultimate choice. A choice is made in deep anxiety, in the early morning when we can't sleep anymore. We can make the crossing, moaning and groaning all the way—who would blame us for doing so? Or each day and several times a day we can cultivate serenity by connecting to the luminous part in us. In the end, it's all about looking for and finding the part in us that is happy, even in the worst situation. Especially in the worst situation, because there will never be a better moment to go beyond concepts and test our beliefs.

And sometimes, suddenly, against all expectations, we find joy. The pure joy of living asserts itself, distills itself in the cells or perhaps emerges from the depths of each cell like a bud on an almond tree gives its flower.

We finally understand how we have misunderstood life and filled it with duties and responsibilities, merits and recognition. We understand that that's not what life is all about. We were wrong about our mission. Life is about tasting the joy of living without any further purpose. Life tasting life. Life celebrating life with all of our being participating—at last acknowledging the obvious, at last tasting the essential.

Standing by an almond tree in bloom one Spring, I thought to myself: *so that's why I was so sick.*