

I Dance in Spring Wind

by Nancy Rich

Nancy Rich is a formerly incarcerated woman who is currently embracing the healing process of recovery, yoga and writing. She has read with Herstory Writers Workshop at St. Joseph's College, Stony Brook University, Suffolk Community College, Queensboro Community College and the East Islip Public Library, and was featured in a special bilingual interview on Radio Fiesta, WBON where her words reached 120,000 listeners in three states. She hopes to use her personal experience to empower people to promote change by the use of consciousness and spirituality and service to others.



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As I am gazing through my six-inch-wide window, I can hear in my mind the imagined sounds of Robbie Kreeger playing Spanish guitar, which leads into a wild Gypsy/Flamenco piece. The spring winds blow frantically through the trees and they begin to dance for an audience of clouds. I press my face close to the bars for a better view, but I cannot spot the yellow buttercups anymore. I just know that those little fuckers can dance. I imagine that they would be cutting up a rug if they were here. I like to pretend that they had escaped, making it past the twelve-inch chain link fence with the barbed wire on top, through the wire in the middle and beyond the next fence with the barbed wire on top. Although the harsh reality is that the buttercups were most likely innocent victims of the mower, I like to pretend that they found freedom dancing their way off the grounds of the correctional facility. I resent that they were cut. I mean, really, can't I even be allowed to enjoy the beauty of the yellow weeds dancing in spring winds. Why can't I just sit back in my chair, sip my drink and watch them dance for me? We would be two consenting adults enjoying the sensual freedom of the dance. Tiny buttercups have been born within the past few days but they are not yet mature enough to dance.

I used to have buttercups by the truckloads on the lawn at my cottage. It was a tiny three-room cottage, built in 1860. Just over an acre, it still had the original outhouse. I was absolutely fascinated by wildflowers that grew around my home. When I found out that the buttercup was really just a weed, I didn't care. To me they were beautiful. I mixed them with lily of the valley, which would bloom for only a few weeks every year in the early summer months, provided that the rains had not fallen too heavy during the spring. Their gorgeous fragrance would breathe life into my tiny home. I used to love to pick flowers. I was taught to ask permission of the mother spirit before plucking them from the ground. Although my roommate told me that by picking flowers I was disrespecting Mother Earth, instinctively I felt that it was all right. Looking back and knowing that I suffered from an "appalling lack of perspective" I do indeed hope that it was all right. My intentions felt pure and loving. I loved that sweet and sacred piece of land. My selective memory tells me that it was a magical time. I don't live there anymore.

Today, I live here at the Suffolk County Correctional Facility, in Riverhead, New York in a tiny cell. I have a six-inch-wide window. I wonder if the bar running vertically down the center of the six-inch glass gap serves some kind of purpose. It's not as if someone could fit their body through. There are also six-inch horizontal bars that lay across every two and a half feet. My thinking is that the bars are not really serving a purpose. Maybe it is just décor. Or maybe it's to obstruct my view of the landscape ever reminding me of my lack of

physical freedom. You know, when I used to work here at the courts I would gaze through the same two fences – same barbed wire – at the same skinny window and wondered what it was like inside here. Today I am inside here dreaming of what it is like out there.

When I worked here, I could never get here on time. I would leave early and lie to my boss about my whereabouts. It seems almost comical that today I can't leave because I live here, locked up. I worked as an advocate for women who were abused at the hands of their men. It is never okay to beat a woman. Inside here women beat women while other women watch, chanting barbarically. Women outside these walls fight for us and in here we fight each other. I can't help to wonder what we doing to our daughters. Although I hold it close to keep it protected it feels as if my spirit is breaking, hopefully it's just a bruise.

"I will break your fucking wrist if you touch that bread again." You see up on the fifth floor we were just supposed to help ourselves to our bread. Down here in the pods it seems that we need to wait to have it handed to us. Of this I was not aware. It was an innocent mistake. To have another woman tell me that she wants to break my "fucking" wrists over wheat bread? It hurts my soul. Had her daughter or sister sought help to escape an abusive partner I would have helped her in any way that I could. I swear . . . I would. I feel like it's my purpose and my duty to creator and just the right thing to do. We need to take care of each other. I could

not fathom ever intimidating another woman with violence. It is not my way. I go by way of love and I will not be afraid of women.

My sisters are destroying each other here in the snake pit. But as my beautiful friend Katie reminds me in her letters, I am standing in the snake pit with the antidote.

That officer can go ahead and break my wrist over a piece of wheat bread, but my spirit is not hers and it will not be broken. Today my body may be locked up my spirit is free to dance like a wildflower in spring winds.