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## From the mammoth hunter to tending the wild oats

by Olivia Sprinkel

*“A dangerous monster threatens our community. One man takes it on himself to kill the beast and restore happiness to the kingdom...”*

This is one of the three archetypal stories that John Yorke identifies, underpinning all of the stories that we tell.

But are the archetypal stories that are lodged deep in our psyches part of the reason we are where we are now? Are they responsible for the expectation that a hero will come to save us, when it is only by coming together that we will be able to thrive together? How do we transition to a collective story?

Rebecca Solnit, in her essay ‘When the hero is the problem’, points out how we ‘are not very good at telling stories about a hundred people doing things.’ She writes of how this is a problem for society, particularly when it comes to fighting dangerous monsters such as climate change. Or now, Covid-19.

The reason for the prevalence of the lone hero story, she explains, goes back to our hunter-gather days. Solnit references Ursula K Le Guin’s essay “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” where Le Guin describes how the stories of the women sitting around the fire wresting a wild oat seed from its husk couldn’t compete with the story the hunter tells of killing the mammoth. So arose the Story of the Ascent of Man the Hero. It already seemed to Le Guin in the 1980s that the story of the mammoth hunter was approaching its end, and that “some of us out here in the wild oats, amid the alien corn, think we’d better start telling another one, which maybe people can go on with when the old one’s finished.”.

In this in-between time, when we are waiting ‘to come out the other side’, if we are fortunate enough to be safe and well and are not occupied at the frontlines of helping others, perhaps it is an opportunity.

An opportunity to take the time to sit by our hearth and reflect on what the wild oat story would be that we can start to weave together. How can we celebrate those qualities that are found at the hearth, those tending and nurturing qualities? Rediscover those qualities in ourselves, if they have become buried under our own personal mammoth hunter story, as we've sought to fit into this society around us? Acknowledge our interdependence with the world of which we part. Allow ourselves to dream into being a story and society based not on the legend of the mammoth hunter, but on the wild oats.