

# *physical alchemy ruined my life!*

or *"What are you doing, Dave?"*

Two years ago, for reasons beyond adequate explanation, I unwittingly started practicing physical alchemy. I thought I had signed up for some stretch therapy, as taught by the illustrious master Kit Laughlin and interpreted by his anointed journeyman Dave Wardman. But, as it turns out, I was being secretly initiated, against my will, against all reason, slowly and cunningly into the arcane and mysterious praxis that is physical alchemy. Two years on, I still don't know what exactly that is (I'm not convinced Dave does either). The only thing I can be sure about is physical alchemy has ruined my life.

It seemed simple enough at the beginning. We'd stretch and talk a bit, but mostly stretch.

Then suddenly my boots didn't fit any more. Walking in them was uncomfortable, as if my feet were saying, "are you fucking kidding me with these awful things?" I should have seen the early signs of danger then, but I just bought new boots (which my feet really liked because they felt alive in them) and told Dave, who laughed.

There was another warning I missed. Dave laughing.

Before long, each of our fortnightly sessions were generously peppered with laughter, joined all too soon by that even more dangerous activity: play. Stretch, talk, laugh, play: a recipe for ruin if ever there was one. And it spread. Like a metastasising cancer, it spread throughout my system and my life. Ordinary activities like commuting were suddenly replete with opportunities for playfulness, from bounding up the stairs in twos because awakening legs just felt like it, or hanging a quick stretch from the hand holds on the train to loosen a few kinks, to breathing low and deep into "notcha" (that nefarious region that's notcha balls and notcha arse, which the less playful call the perineum) for no reason other than because you can and it felt good.

I could have stopped it there, but this shit is toxic and even the carefully prescribed chemotherapy of abundant red wine drinking could do nothing to stop its progress.

Soon two other activities reared their ugly heads: singing and dancing. Not literally, in the formal, taught sense that kills these activities, but in a playful everyday-sacred sort of way they too became part of the work. No stretch felt complete without some unconstrained vocalising to manifest the experience or a whimsical flourish on the exit from a pose.

And with that the mystical six alembics of stretch, talk, play, laugh, dance, and sing were in place, each distilling their living essence into the seemingly unstoppable ferment that would bring about my ultimate ruin.

I realise now I could have escaped. If only someone had made me see reason [sic], or encouraged me to take a long, hard, objective look at myself with the eyes the Cartesian God gave me. If only I had reduced and abstracted all this into a set of nice, containable concepts.

But no. Me bad.

I was having too much fun... and my body was responding to the work and it felt so good

And softly, in a voice I didn't recognise and I'm not sure I could even hear, I was being called.

Ooga booga.

There I've said it. Ooga booga. That is the unspoken force at work. It's never mentioned, it's not on the website, it's not even in the confounding and often windy descriptions of the praxis I was engaged in, but there is no longer any doubt that it's the secret, unspoken agent at work.

I don't know how else to explain what started happening.

I don't know how else to explain how one Saturday afternoon, in the middle of a perfectly innocuous hip-flexor stretch of the kind I had been quite happily doing for more than a year and a half, I woke up.

Sure, all sorts of old baggage and neuroses and other manifestations of the unresolved would spring up from time to time, mid stretch, and lead to minor bouts of unrest, insomnia, and drinking ever so slightly more red wine than the amount deemed acceptable by the uptight, but none of that prepared me for the simple, undeniable, life-ruining experience I had that day.

I don't know how to describe it, for it's the sort of thing that makes it very clear that the very act of describing it misses the point.

The point.

The point, it would seem is being alive.

And once that happens, everything changes, because most of it was an illusion, or a dream.

Ooga booga becomes your everyday experience, mostly it would seem, because denying it is facile. The normal [sic] activities of mind that kept you asleep or at least well anaesthetised cannot get a grip on anything when you're alive. They just don't stick any more.

Shelves full of books and boxes of treasure and old photos and all manner of once so valuable accruals just walked out the door. Open space emerged in all manner of of places real and imagined, space previously high occupied with the storage of carefully cultivated business. Old habits demanded change. Ordinary activities demanded my full attention.

Everything I thought [sic] I was [fully sic] demanded renewal. My life is over. Ruined. Gone.

What emerged, whether I liked it or not, was the now undeniable truth that life is not something you have. Life is not a noun. A verb is required. Living is something you do.

The verbs of the six alembics, the verbs stretch, talk, play, laugh, dance, and sing all ferment and coagulate into a seventh: live.

So that's what Dave was doing, something beyond his knowing, or mine.

The rest was just some shit to fuck me up so we could get on, secretly, with the real work.

Physical alchemy ruined my "life".

It transmuted my awareness so I could no longer deny I have no life, but a capacity to live.

Which I now do.

*Peter Fyfe*

*Erskineville, Sydney*

*May, 2016-b*