

## **RH1**

I am a writer. It is a process, every time – deciding what to write about in general, and then seeing if the words will indeed flow in such a manner that the thing I have decided to write about gets written.

I can afford to do that, since I don't actually get paid for the writing I do. When writing is your profession, then it is pretty much a case of once you start something, you had better finish it on time.

A great writer might spend their time only on the things for which they know they will be paid, but even so, most of them (with the exception of Harlan Ellison, I have read) write, then edit, and sometimes rewrite and edit again.

I will grant you that sometimes it is easy to edit something, as it is pretty bad to begin with. At times, however, there is a wonderful sentence, paragraph, storyline or even chapter which just doesn't need to be there. It is a wonderful set of words, but it doesn't do such a wonderful job when combined with all the other words on the page.

So the editor (sometimes it is you, but often it is somebody else) tells you to bring the text, along with your word processor or your pen, and hack at the underbrush. You didn't even realize there was any underbrush there, but you trust the editor, and bring this thing you have (hopefully) come to love to a hatchet job.

Sound familiar?

Poems are not people. Even prose isn't people.

Yet we can grow enamored of what we have created. And sometimes what we have created needs a bit of pruning, but we can't always see it.

Writers are often taught to look at their works as if somebody else had written it, and slash away.

Abraham is not given that option. He takes Isaac, whom he knows he had something to do with, to a mountain to start slashing – something.

What is there that needs to be slashed?

Abraham is not really a family man, in the sense we think of. He enjoys his family as they are the fulfillment of God's promise to him – but they are not the reason he gets up in the morning. God, and increasing awareness of God, is.

So let me tell you a slightly different story that could even have been the one meant to be here.

Sarah woke up for the tenth morning in a row, having had strange thoughts during the night. The only thing she could grab onto from those thoughts is that they had something to do with Isaac. On the eleventh morning, a phrase stuck in her mind. "It is time to let go of Isaac."

Let go of Isaac? What did that mean? How was it even possible to let go of your first, only, beloved child who was named because of what you did? In what way could this even happen?

Isaac saw his mother looking a bit more puzzled than usual.

“Mom, you look kind of puzzled.”

“I think I am trying to think of something, but I have no clear idea of what it might be. Well, you don’t have to worry about my puzzlement. I am sure I will figure it out eventually.”

“You know Mom, when Dad and I have trouble figuring out what we are thinking of, we take a small trip.”

“Where do you go?”

“That’s part of the fun. We never know until we get there. Maybe the two of us could go on the same kind of trip, and when we get to the right place, you can figure out what you are thinking of.”

So Isaac, who had some experience at this, gathered a lot of stuff to put on the donkeys for their trip. Sarah wound up bringing a few other things – just in case. An axe in case they ran into a bush, and some wood in case they needed a fire, and some rope in case one of them fell down into a pit somewhere.

Isaac saw all these items. After a while, he said, "You know, the stuff you brought? Dad usually brings it as well, although we usually also have one of the goats or sheep to thank God."

"Well, Isaac, maybe that will be our clue to know where we are supposed to go. When we find the right animal, that place will be where we should be."

On the way there was time for a lot of conversations. Some of them actually happened. At one point, when there seemed to be a bit of animal up ahead, Isaac asked, "Something has been puzzling me, too."

"What could possibly be puzzling you?"

"Nobody's really talked about it, and somehow we have always been pretty busy, but now we're just kind of walking."

"And ..."

"I hear I might have a brother."

"Did your father put you up to this?"

"So it's true. Dad had nothing to do with this, by the way. It has always seemed to be there in the silences and targeted looks between the two of you."

Silence, and the two of them walking together, still.

“Did he die? Is that what happened? Is that what is always in the tent between you and Dad?”

Silence, still. Now a bit uncomfortable.

“I think I definitely see the animal up on that hill over there. Let’s climb there and see if the answer I am looking for is there.”

“Mom, I don’t see the animal yet. Maybe when we get to the top of the hill, I will see it.”

Isaac, again, “Now that we’re at the top of the hill, could you maybe give me a hint about what happened? All this non-answering keeps feeling like a rope around my neck, squeezing tighter and tighter.”

“So now I choke you to death? I spend my life bringing you into the world and protecting you from everything and everybody, and you feel choked? That’s certainly a joke, and I guess I was always the unpunched punchline!”

As it happens, Sarah starts swinging the axe. Not really seeing what is around her, the axe punctuates her sentences, and then her single words – “You! Him! Why? Now? Now, enough!”

God’s messenger appears. He can tell it is no use to talk with Sarah yet. So he says to Isaac, “If I were you, I would go and check out the neighborhood of Penuel, and look into anything concerning Be’er l’chai ro’i.

Your mom is not going to settle down any time soon, I don't think, so now would be a good time."

Fortunately, God's messengers are not on a particular schedule, so the messenger could wait until after the long period of time it took until the axe stopped swinging. It is also possible that the messenger switched out the real axe for a metaphorical axe, so that Sarah's need for time to process the required internal psychological readjustments would not be shortened by physical exhaustion.

Eventually Sarah does stop swinging the axe, and notices that Isaac is gone. Then she sees the messenger.

"Sarah."

"Would it be anybody else?"

"Sarah."

"What?"

"Letting him go doesn't mean that you killed him."

"Letting him go is killing me!"

"It doesn't have to. You can survive this, too. It will be difficult, but you can. Just to let you know, after today, Isaac will go on and become an ancestor as well. Your children will eventually be people who will wind up helping others clarify who they are. Those who treat them well will also be

well. Those who mistreat them will wind up having no long term future. At least not as long of a future as your children will have.”

“Do I have to survive?”

“Here at the beginning of things, only if you want to. By the way, Isaac’s wife has been born already. One of his cousins is shaping up quite nicely. You have given your son an amazing capacity for love.”

In the end, Sarah felt she would just be in Isaac’s way. Now that she knew he would eventually become somebody his father never was, she was ready to let the story continue without her.

Thus ends my imagined story. Yet this binding and unbinding of Isaac – when a family is loving, doesn’t it repeat, after a fashion, all the time? We raise our children so that they can raise their children, and just as some of us sometimes felt our parents were stifling us, some of our children feel like we are stifling them – and if the world is a bit askew, this can go backwards through a couple of generations, where parents feel their children are stifling them.

I hope that none of us has our story stolen from us, as might have happened between Sarah and Abraham, and equally that none of us remains so attached to our families that their independence jeopardizes our lives.