

## ***Listening to the Undertow* by Jools Gilson**

### **What does the creative process feel like/ look like for you?**

It's where I live, in all senses of the word. It isn't a process that's separate from everything I do in my life. But when I do get the chance to make focused work, then it's listening to the undertow, following the things half seen. It's writing into the heat and heart and ache of things. It's moving into shadow and out into light, and back again. It's urging half felt things into presence. It's surfing, and delving. It's listening to rain falling, and wondering about the strange light behind the mist. It's rage and laughter. It's the sprinkling of red freckles under the leaves of the scarlet pimpernel. It's baskets full of elderflowers. It's all kinds of longings. It's cackling so hard I almost wet my knickers. It's the light on the water. It's the feel of the ocean holding me. It's brown bodies in my arms, and the yearn of them. It's gooseberry and elderflower crumble. It's Peter hugging me on the way to the car and saying 'you did us proud.' It's slow baths, wide Sundays, chaotic mornings. It's the grip and tension of not being able to cope. It's a cacophony of blossoms in the spiral garden. It's stripping hawthorns to make haw jellies. It's being raw and wide open enough to let the world happen to you, to listen to its stories, and the stories locked and creaking in our own bodies. It's in the voices that were bred here, and the ones that weren't. It's in the drip of elderberry juice, deep impossible black-purple. It's in the kisses of my children, the twinkle in my husband's eye. It's the long conversation, the hunger for connection. It's here. It's right here.

### **What do you do when you get stuck?**

Make tea. Eat cake. Walk. Sleep. Swim. Try again. Being stuck is always an invitation to walk away and look from a different angle, usually after tea. And cake.

### **How has having kids affected your creative process/ products?**

It has fundamentally changed the form. I had a performance production company called half/angel for ten years (1996 – 2006), which was co-directed by Richard

Povall and myself. Richard is a composer / digital artist. My work focused on choreography, writing and performance. We made dance theatre productions and exhibited installation work. We toured extensively in North America and Europe with performances, exhibitions, workshops and residencies. Making work like this takes over your life. Performance work, especially with professional dancers involves weeks of 12 – 15 hour days. I live in the countryside with young children, and the only way I could do this now, would be if I ceased doing pretty much any parenting at all. So I stopped doing it. Although it took a while to adjust to being a parent and not running around the world, or being in a studio till all hours, I'm actually happy to have stopped making work in that nomadic, hectic sort of way.

**How do you deal with the Crazy Woman (feeling angry, stuck, sad, needing to escape, feeling negative about yourself/ your work/ your family)– when does she emerge for you?**

I wouldn't describe negativity in myself in terms of archetypes in the way you seem to suggest, but I do, of course, experience these things. I feel bad usually because I didn't get enough exercise or have enough time to develop my own work. Or because I'm having a tough day with the kids.

**Have either of your parents had a large positive/ negative impact on you as a creative person?**

In thinking about what to write here, I'm reminded of Alice Walker's beautiful essay 'In Praise of our Mother's Gardens.' My mother, who left school at 15, has lived a life of exuberant ordinariness ever since, making a gorgeous garden, bottling fruit and making jam, giving gifts. Still sending me care packages, nearly three decades after I left home. My mother, like Alice Walker's mother embraced possibility in me, even when she had no map for it herself.



Jools Gilson is an artist working in writing, broadcasting and performance. She lives in East Cork with her husband and two children.

### **Biography**

Jools has a background in performance and writing, and is beginning to work in radio. Her work has been produced, performed and exhibited internationally, she has received bursaries and awards from the New York Festivals, Arts Council of Ireland, Arts Council of England, RESCEN (Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts), the Ésmee Fairbairn Foundation and others. She holds a PhD in Theatre & Performance Studies from the University of Surrey, and has taught performance at the University of Hull, Dartington College of Arts and University College Cork.