

Welcome to Limbo *By Eustacia Cutler ©*

Limbo [border, edge, in limbo, on the border] *...the abode of souls barred from heaven through no fault of their own... a place of confinement, or a place or condition of neglect or oblivion.* *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*

We've all been there: that abode where we struggle with the needs of our child caused through no fault of our own—or of our child's. A place of social isolation—a condition of neighborly neglect or oblivion.

Trapped, hedged in by a guilt that defies explanation, we accept what the world tells us we're supposed to feel.

"You must love your child," the world says, and intermittently we do. As my wise daughter-in-law said "It's easy to love people when they're lovable. Not so easy when they're not."

The inconstancy throws us off, floods us with a raging shame. Only in private do parents ask me do I ever get angry. "What do I do with these feelings" they ask? How do I take care of my child and hold myself together?"

They're old feelings, old questions. They turn up in Psalm XLII. "Why are thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou so disquieted within me?"

Long ago I thought the psalm was about those on the autism spectrum. Now I know that the psalm is about us. And with it comes another question: "How do I cope with the physical task of caring for my child and at the same time present myself to the world as the world says I'm supposed to be? The world says my child is a gift, a special gift that will transform me into a deeper more meaningful person. But it's not happening. My child is driving me crazy. My child is isolating me from the world.

So in order to join the world and have my neighbors think well of me, in place of love I will substitute glory. I will glorify my child, praise every step forward. I will tell the world my child is "special."

And our children, trapped in autism's self absorption, assume the assigned role. In truth we've given them no other choice. Out of our own need, we've created a role playing partnership: our children are "special," we are noble.

The neighbors, out of their need for approval, accept the partnership. They, too, find our children a handful. They, too, have feelings they don't want to say out loud.

Thus with mutual need we construct "limbo." We're all of us excused, we're all of us there through no fault of our own. The set-up feels safe. But it's not. Limbo's a static condition, a place where nothing grows, it only repeats.

Growth—real growth requires honesty, courage, hard work—and insight.

The set-up reminds me of an old dog racing story in the days when they used to race whippets. The oval track and starting gate were the same as that of a horse race – only instead of a jockey with a whip, there was a mechanical rabbit set to scamper just ahead of the dogs. Always out of reach.

In this particular race the bell clanged, the gates opened, and the dogs sprang out after the mechanical rabbit. All except for one dog. He stopped, looked at the track, saw that it circled around, ran around the other way, met the rabbit and chewed it up.

He didn't win. Race tracks are about making money on bets. But in my heart he was the winner. You don't have to chase the mechanical rabbit just because the other dogs are. Stop. Take a look. It could be your escape from limbo.