

'The Skull', some notes by Polly Agar (Written as part of Deepening Practice Course)

I am lying on the floor, my fingers exploring the back of my head. I have been reading about the skull, drawing pictures of the skull, colouring in diagrams and learning names. I chant my way through them like a mantra. Occipital, temporal, parietal, zygomatic, ethmoid, sphenoid, I can name all 22, I think, following with my fingers as I do so, struggling to define where one ends, and another begins.

I cannot feel the sutures that lace me together, that stitch the bones of my skull into this cranial vault and define the outward face of me. I don't know what I imagined before, I knew there was more than one bone in the skull - but 22 of them locked together in a perfect 3D jigsaw puzzle - I feel overwhelmed by the complexity of my skull.

I wonder how the muscles fix to this seemingly smooth bone, how tiny are the foramen which allow the passage of nerves and how big the foramen magnum through which the spinal cord passes. How do the ligaments stick, how thin is the scalp? How does it stay there balanced on top of the spine? I would like a working model; One to play with, to explore, to understand how it all works, how it all fits together. Elmo suggested we dig up my Dad. I'm not squeamish but I imagine it wouldn't go down too well!

I remember washing my dad's body after he died, smoothing his hair away from his forehead, wiping the sleep from his eyes and holding his head in my hands, heavy and cold, looking just like him but devoid of the essence of him. My dad loved word games. I start to play one now. Noggin, pate, loaf, poll, conk, think box, brain case, swede, melon, nut, bean, bonce, noodle, crown, dome, cranial vault. There are more I am certain, but I stop at cranial vault - I like that one. It brings to mind a place of beauty, lofty, yet warm and safe. For a moment I step inside my head. Into the smooth cradle of the cranial fossa and imagine my brain lying there. I poke around it, searching for edges, for the essence of me. It is here in this memory box, this treasure chest, home of love, house of the soul, this room inside my head, but it is illusive. I settle myself in the certainty that it is here that my mind and body meet. In the rigidity and safety of the osseous structure and the (hopefully) flexibility of my mind, I create an intention to nurture my skull. To delve into the beauty of the dark unknown and sacred space that is my head a little more often. I hope that one day I might do this sitting. With my skull perfectly balanced on top of my spine, my mind having let go of all the tensions that hold me unable to do so at present, but in the meantime, I content myself with lying down and letting go.