

Wonder, Surprise and Delight

What's it all about, she asks...an existential question that implies "how do I get in line with the best of life?" Generally I don't turn to answers suggesting a surrendering to divine purpose. But I have come to believe that there is a better perspective, a more supportive attitude and approach to living. Life, I say, is about the little things, one after another adding up to a full morning, a fabulous day, a series of moments experienced fully- rich, bright and fulfilling. "But how does one do that?" That question, thankfully she doesn't ask, as I would risk telling her the things that seem right for me, but maybe not necessarily for her. And yet I have some ideas, as I'm always looking for good practices. And I'm always looking for teachers.

One group of priceless teachers is a group that is a bit rare in the day to day world of Lathrop. But recently I've had a few delightful opportunities to be reminded of the lesson they teach, and it is the lesson of delight, wonder and surprise. This is the attitude of the young child, and I believe a worthy challenge for us all is to find ways to cultivate and keep that spark alive. I often wonder if we stop playing because we get old, or do we get old because we stop playing? I certainly am no biblical scholar, but I am reminded of the statement attributed to Jesus in the book of Mathew when he tells his disciples that unless they change and become like little children they would never enter "the kingdom of heaven." I for one don't give much thought to the after-life, so I am committed to finding this kingdom within my own heart or within the palpable connections between myself and others.

We know there is no going back to the simplistic magic of a child's experience, but can we learn to acknowledge the magic that is inherent in what surrounds us in creation? Despite how many times we've seen the flash of a cardinal amidst the hedgerow or heard the loon cry of a red tail hawk circling somewhere above, can we let it trigger that feeling of surprise or curiosity? Can we lose ourselves in the slow drift of pillowed clouds in the sky or in our fascination for some passing bug without falling into the trap of complacent familiarity, or worse, a review of our extensive dry stores of knowledge? The stage actor's art is to capture again and again "the illusion of the first time." As audience members we're best moved when we agree to believe that it is the first time. As humans we like novelty, and that is hard to come by when we become so worldly and experienced.

So how do we practice spontaneity? Can we set ourselves up for surprise? Just because we've seen something beautiful before, must it become less beautiful? The young child knows that Peter Rabbit will escape Farmer McGregor, yet never tires of the drama of the telling. We can't be children again, but I suggest we can re-learn to look outside of ourselves with curiosity and wonder, to allow ourselves to say "that's awesome, I love that!". That is a posture of open heartedness; and that is one of the gateways to the miraculous. It is the truly felt feelings that nourish the most. One of my favorite quotes from the yoga studio walls is "*Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.*" That's what I want to tell her it's all about. But I'm too busy watching the chipmunk playing his hide and seek game in the rock wall. She'll have to find her own way in.