

The 18-Toed Gift

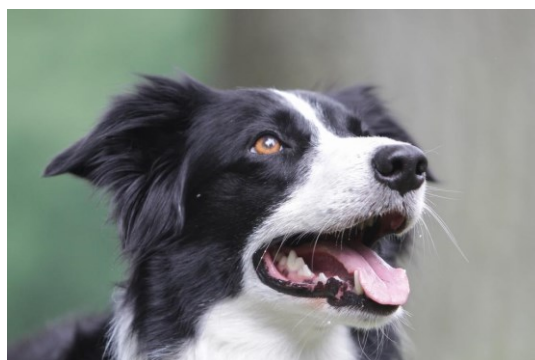
Sandi Meyerhoff

As an animal communicator I'm often asked questions reflecting everything from curiosity to slight disbelief about this work. I don't find it an affront or annoying, having denied and sequestered this part of myself for years. That is, until a warm Spring night nearly 30 years ago.... I'm sitting at a traffic light 10 minutes from home. The newly adopted border collie has curled up against the back corner of the car. She's a sorry sight, dispirited and broken, with a brutal history. Against all reason and advice, I'm determined that she come to know love and safety. She's been with me for about 12 days.

An explosion of sound erupts 2 inches from my face. It's so loud my ears ring. Barking and fierce growling. Sudden quiet returns until another burst of noise, this time at my left ear. A man shouting, "Are you ok!!?" "I think my dog just tried to attack me." He shakes his head. "Lady, there was a guy trying to carjack you. He had a knife. I saw

him raise his arm into the window. I saw the knife." His eyes shift from me to slightly past me and grow wide. He just points to the passenger seat.

The entire time, she's sat there silently. As I look, I see a small piece of dark blue sweatshirt hanging from her mouth, then slowly drop to the floor as her tongue flicks it loose.



Shyly lowering her head, she slithers to the back seat and over, to return to the smallest spot her body can occupy. I'd felt an instant connection with her, but we'd hardly had

any time together. How did this dog who was utterly terrified of all humanity know that I was in danger? She'd cringe and drop to the floor the minute anyone, including myself, looked in her direction. An angels' whisper to her? A sense of purpose, duty beyond any crippling fear?

From that day forward I started listening with my heart, not my head. We healed together, this dog and I. The lessons of following Spirit's leading and finding a purpose, not measured by outside approval or acceptance, continue to grow in my heart. A gentle knowing that I have worth

just as I am. That exploring my purpose is a daily calling and lifelong pursuit. And that discarded and unloved border collie grew into an inseparable friend with whom I am eternally grateful to have been gifted. She learned to trust, to shine. I'm still listening. Her name is and will always be...Jenny.

A Gift that Changed my Life

Chris Mitchell

It seems such a long time ago – May 1983. I had been writing for the *Columbia Flier* and *Howard County Times* newspapers for four years, mostly reporting on school board meetings and education issues. Then I was assigned the job of interviewing a Columbia woman who was a survivor of the Holocaust in Nazi Germany during World War II. There was going to be a gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Washington, D.C., and somehow we were able to get the phone number of this woman. She lived in an apartment not far from the *Columbia Flier* building and she worked at a department store at the Columbia Mall.

I called her and she agreed to be interviewed. Her name was Molly and *she* was my gift. Over many hours she told me her story in a quiet voice, still touched by a German accent. She spoke of hiding beneath a train with her baby in hopes that they would escape being rounded up and sent to a concentration camp. But they did not escape. When they arrived at the camp Molly was separated from her baby. The guards told her that the baby would be taken to a children's section of the camp. Later she would try to find that children's section, but it did not exist. The other women at the camp pointed to the smoke and ash coming out of the chimney of the

crematorium. "That's where your baby is," they told her.



Mattie Musser Holocaust Project

I visited Molly a number of times as she told me this story and many more. Before I wrote my newspaper piece I wanted to make sure that I got it exactly right. This was all new to me. In my school years there was no mention of the concentration camps and the Nazis' attempt to exterminate the Jewish people. My Dad was a veteran of World War II but he rarely talked about what happened during those war years. We never discussed how Hitler used hatred as a weapon of mass destruction.

Looking back, I see how courageous Molly was to let her story out. She was calm as she spoke to me. She had a tattoo on the inside of her forearm -- her number from the concentration camp. She even agreed to let one of our photographers take a picture of her arm ... with that number

forever embedded there. The photo ended up on the cover of our newspapers with the headline: "A Holocaust Survivor's Story." Inside the paper, we used Molly's maiden name and we reprinted an old photo of Molly as a young woman. To protect her identity, we did not include any present-day photos of her.

By the time the story appeared in print I felt drained. So much emotion had flowed back and forth between me and Molly. I visited Molly again to see how she was doing. She said a friend at work had seen the newspaper and asked if the story was about her. She responded, "Yes." Molly was strong and, a short time later, she attended the gathering in Washington, D.C. honoring Holocaust survivors.

A few weeks later, my boss Jean Moon and I were invited to a Columbia high school where a teacher had made the newspaper story, Molly's story, a class reading assignment. The students had many questions for us. I was pleased to hear that, unlike me as a teenager, these young people now had their eyes opened to what happened during World War II. Hitler and the Nazis fanned the fires of hatred. They then designed a methodical system which they hoped would annihilate every one of the Jewish people.

One of the students asked how the reporter was able to get the woman to reveal so much. Jean Moon spoke up. "Empathy," she said. "The writer had empathy for her subject." To me those words were another gift from Molly.

I continued to write for the newspapers, which became known as Patuxent Publishing, for 12 more years. I won a

journalism award for the Holocaust Story and for some others that I wrote, but by 1995 I knew it was time for a change. I'm not sure how I made the decision – perhaps I remembered that word *empathy* – but I decided to enroll in the Pastoral Counseling Program at Loyola College. I earned a Master's Degree and then went to work as a chaplain for Gilchrist Hospice. I spent my days listening to patients who were close to death and comforting the family members who cared for them.



Less than a year after I started hospice work, my supervisor, Robin, said she had gotten a phone call asking if someone could visit their religious congregation one Sunday to talk about what hospice does. Robin asked me to go. She told me that the name of the congregation

was Patapsco Friends Meeting. I agreed to go, and that visit again changed my life and my husband's life. Bill and I went together to Hebron House on the assigned Sunday morning and met many welcoming Friends. I talked about hospice and answered questions. We attended Meeting for Worship and stayed for Simple Meal and we have been coming back ever since.

Perhaps there is a thread in life that links us all ... Molly, Jean, Robin, me, Bill, Patapsco Friends. Perhaps that is the gift I should be celebrating. Everything is connected.

Do I have a Gift of Being a Great Listener?

Gabriel A. Cannon

Several people have told me that I am a great listener. Men and women have personally stated that they can talk to me all day. Is it a gift or am I aware that people sometimes simply need to talk to someone?



Do I simply like listening to people talk? I am little apprehensive to state such because I have a unique experience being incarcerated for nearly 23

years. While inside we (a small group of inmates) had a saying to each other: “Ok, you got five minutes.” In short, despite the fact that I might want to do something else or want to go somewhere, I would stop everything I was doing and I would simply listen to them ramble. The person would talk about his case, family, kids, staff or other inmates. I did not care what the topic was, but I would give them eye contact, listen attentively, nod my head occasionally and once in a while state, “Really.” I would not ask a question or give a suggestion without being asked. Sometimes I would notice 20 or 30 minutes had passed. Thereafter, they would say thanks for listening.

I thought I did this out of selfish reasons because I knew that occasionally I would need the same favor. Also, I was very lonely

myself. However, people still tell me I am a good listener despite being a free man for 18 months. No matter what occupation I had, co-workers, customers and friends tell me the same. Is it a gift? I don’t know; however, personally speaking, I have recognized today that it simply makes me feel good inside to know that I was there for someone who needed to talk.

Discerning my Gifts

Eileen Stanzione

During my childhood, I spent a lot of time writing. I was a quiet kid, an observer and a people-watcher, and I wrote about what I saw and felt. I enjoyed the assignments of my high school’s English teachers, particularly Mr. Baer, who had us write an essay each Monday, addressing some topic of his choice.

As a freshman in college, I was torn between majoring in English or Psychology. I chose to major in Psychology, as I was often the person friends turned to when troubled. By my Junior year, I grew tired of the then-hot topic, Behavioral Psychology, and changed my major to English. I spent much of my remaining two years in the library reading Literature and writing papers. I was in heaven.

Wanting to extend my love affair with books and writing, I decided to get a graduate degree in English—hopefully, to become an English professor. During the first semester in my Master’s degree program, I spent the majority of my days in Stony Brook University’s library. One night, while studying in the library’s “stacks,” I was startled to hear someone shouting out, “Why are we doing this? The world is run

by C students!” “Why, indeed,” was my thought! My English professors were counseling us to leave the field saying, “You will never get a job; there are already too many English professors!” I knew that to be true and went to the Counseling Center to seek answers and help for my ever-increasing ambivalence and anxiety. The Counseling Center is where I met my counselor—a young man with an agreeable disposition, a big heart, intelligent eyes, and a wealth of wisdom about youth and transitions. He asked me all about myself and I found myself telling him how much I loved people and that I was Spirit-led to lend a helping hand and a listening ear. We had excellent rapport, as he walked me through my decision-making process and assured me my current struggles were transient.



At one point, I asked him how he became a counselor, thinking in the back of my Psychology-oriented mind that I would enjoy doing what he was doing. He explained and then proffered this amazing gift. He told me he had a Masters in Social Work (MSW) and that it was very much a blended degree—a mix of Sociology, Social Policy, and Psychology, which could prepare me for clinical licensure, if that is what my

future-self chose. He leaned in and said to me, “You would be perfect in this field. Your love of people and your readiness to help others is fundamental to the profession. Plus, you wouldn’t have to specialize solely in Psychology.”

I applied to Rutgers University’s MSW program for the fall of the next year. While awaiting their response, I took one more semester of graduate level English classes at Rutgers—just to be sure. It was with some trepidation that I chose the world of Social Work after hearing once again in a different state and at a different university that there were too many PhDs in English and that jobs were scarce. It was an act of faith to once again alter my plan.

The Rutgers’ Graduate School of Social Work was a perfect fit. I enjoyed the classes, the internships, the students, and the professors. They were open to me and I found myself avidly learning the art and science of helping others to survive and thrive, if possible. I have been in the field for decades and have never regretted my choice. I practice my gifts and help others to do so as well. Ultimately, I did get my PhD—in Clinical Social Work.

Armed with humility and respect, I have taught many graduate students to become therapists and counselors. To this day, I am deeply grateful to Spirit, who guided me to the right place and the right time to meet the young man who helped me to discern my leadings and gifts. With his and Spirit’s guidance, I found a path to demonstrate my love and compassion for others and to assist in their personal journeys, however they might unfold.

My Gift

David Zeller

The gift I received was through my introduction to the “Friends” (Quakers) celebration and meetings on Saturdays at MCI-H in 2014 by Kent Brewer, my cellmate there at the time.



After several Saturday meetings I knew this was something I wanted to belong to and the people or friends I met there were offering me something I wanted to be a part of my life.

The Gift of Having Faith in Me

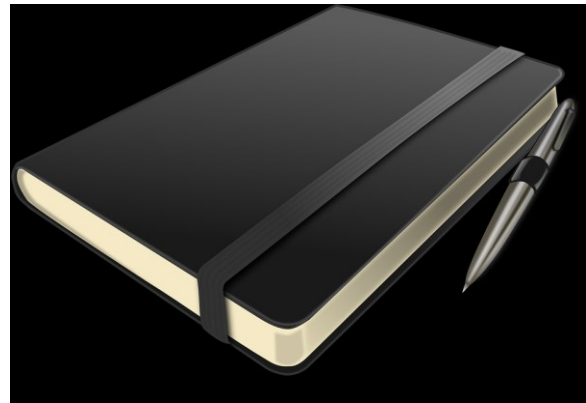
Jimi Ayodele

My mother’s sister Beverly gave me my first journal to write in when I was seven. It was a First Communion gift, a slim, spiral notebook with pale cartoon figures of a little girl and boy on the cover. It meant the world to me!

The family already knew I loved to write—I had started writing little rhymes about the moon and stars in first grade and Mrs. Offensend posted some on the wall. Aunt Bev was a middle-school English teacher for 40 years. Books, literature, writing, and learning are her passions. She honored me with this little book and showed that she had faith in my talents.

She encouraged me to envision a future for myself that included writing; this hadn’t occurred to me before. This understanding lady gave me a safe place to write down experiences and feelings that felt dangerous, during a turbulent time when I

lacked a confidante. I used the book for many years.



There was another time in my elementary school career when a mentor renewed my belief in myself as a writer. It was when I was in sixth grade and going through a time of bullying. I was sitting alone in one of those uncomfortable metal folding chairs that are staples in church basements and school cafeterias. Rehearsals were going on in the cafeteria/auditorium for a school assembly in which my class was going to sing, and I was waiting for them to call me my group’s part. I love to sing, but was embarrassed about my inability to stay on key and was dreading this rehearsal. The fact that our parish priest tossed me out of the children’s choir at church the previous year for just this reason didn’t help my confidence. I stared into space, feeling an



anxiety
snake
unwind
itself in my
stomach.

Suddenly I felt a large, cold hand on my shoulder. It was Mrs. Sword, my teacher from the previous year. She was a tall, lean, dark-haired, sharp-featured woman, severe in manner but fair, and sometimes surprisingly compassionate.

“How are you?” she said. She sat down next to me. I guessed she was between tasks because the music teacher was really in charge of the rehearsal. Maybe she was bored; maybe she saw a child sitting alone and wanted to help.

“I’m fine,” I said, giving the universal answer kids give to adults they don’t know well who ask this. It never occurred to me to share my various troubles. Maybe she read them anyway.

“Are you still writing?” I had sometimes shared a story or poem with her in fifth grade. She had always been cordial and encouraging, if a little cool.

I mentioned a poem I’d written recently. My heart warmed to her inquiry because it showed she still thought of me and cared about me.

“That’s good. Keep writing. Don’t ever let anyone stop you.” The hand was on my shoulder again, and then someone must have called to her because she got up and walked away.



Such a slight conversation, lasting perhaps three minutes. Such a simple, fleeting gesture that she probably forgot in a moment. Such momentous words to me,

engraved on my heart, anchoring me at moment of deep self-doubt.

I followed her instructions and never stopped.

Tuning to the Right Station

Jean Pfeffercorn

A radio station broadcasts its program to the world—and the radio set receives its energy. Like a radio set, I have received uncountable gifts throughout my life, starting at birth and continuing to the

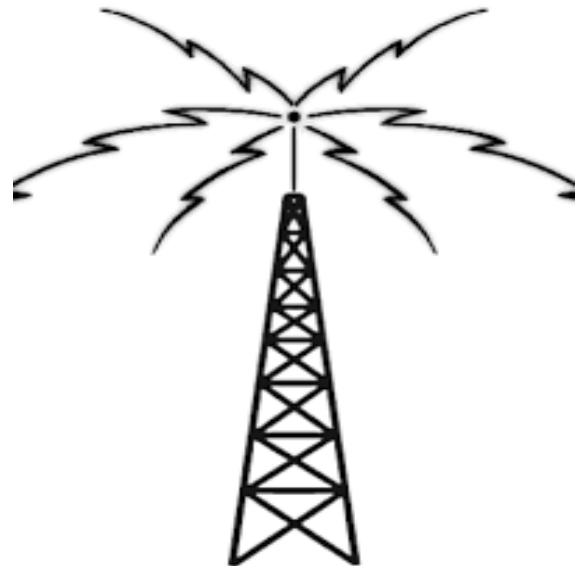


Image credit: Powerlisting.fandom.com

present day: a caring family and friends, enough materially that I have never known the pain of want; plenty of schooling, meaningful employment; spiritual gifts from Friends Meetings, from significant individuals, from writers and artists; the joy of a family of my own; birthing children and raising them to adulthood. And now, retirement, awaiting life’s next lessons.

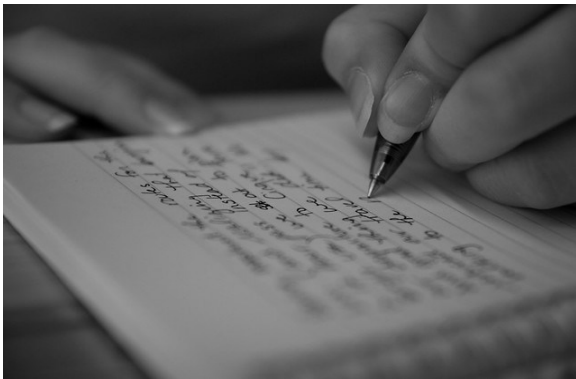
Spiritual gifts usually arrive when, in silence, I have tuned my receiver to the “right station,” putting into practice Jesus’s entreaty to “seek, and you will find.”

Participating in expectant waiting, recognition of and gratitude for gifts given lovingly and freely aids in their flow. When I receive a gift, I need to say, "Thank you."

The Gift of Writing without Judgment

Susannah Rose

My 10th grade English teacher, Jeannette Noble, issued an invitation that became a precious gift. It also brought me a close friend.



Mrs. Noble was young, maybe 25 or so; smart, caring, energetic, gentle, and totally unique. She was not conventionally beautiful, but I loved the way she looked – sort of a cross between wise Yoda and a pixie. She had worked in drama, and she actually took us to the school stage and showed us how scenes were blocked. While everyone else was reading Robert Frost, she introduced us to Ferlinghetti, the beat poet who wrote the unforgettable Christmas poem that starts, "Christ came down from his bare tree this year, and ran away to where there were no tinfoil Christmas trees..." and the long poem, intended for oral recitation, with the refrain, "and I am perpetually waiting/for the rebirth of

wonder." She read them to us aloud, helping us hear the power of the words.

She believed that you learned to write by writing. So she gave us a choice of writing projects – ungraded, but required. One option was a journal that could contain basically any kind of writing you wanted to do. I wrote poetry and short entries about what I was thinking and feeling. I was an unhappy kid with a home life that made me anxious and sapped my self-confidence. I wrote poems that were short and often rooted in what was going on.

For example:

She stood crying
Ironing
Starched
white
handkerchiefs.

But also:

The angel sits upon the desk
All soft and lighted and
She sings
The softest, sweetest songs
And mends
Her wings.

And – after my Presbyterian church fired its most powerful minister for being too embarrassingly prominent in the civil rights movement – this:

One day the stained
Glass windows
In the dead, dark church
Will break in pieces and come
Crashing, tinkling down, and
God
Will burst through

Mrs. Noble read everything and commented. I wish I still had the journal with her comments. The wonderful thing was they were NOT “excellent!” or “needs work.” They didn’t inspire me to work for some form of graded approval. They were specific. They might respond to something she heard in what I had written; they might be tongue in cheek. After a really over-the-top poem I won’t bother to quote, she simply wrote, “play nice, Susan.” Unforgettably, when I wrote about how I wanted to marry someone unpredictable so my life would always be interesting, my young teacher wrote, “when you reach my age, Susan, you may not want unpredictability staring at you over the cornflakes.”

My friend Dale and I got to know each other reading each other’s journals and savoring each other’s poems. We’re still friends. Jeannette Noble remains part of my internal family, one of the wiser and kinder inner voices. She helped free me from the tyranny of grades and simply find what I needed to say. She truly listened. I understand she died of cancer many years ago and I can’t tell her how much she meant to me. But I’m telling her now, anyway.

Tenderness of Heart

Kent Allen Brewer

What an exciting topic. I’m sure many participating in this writing assignment will write of biblical gifts such as discernment, speaking in tongues, and prophesy. Instead my thoughts go to those gifts having a “tenderness of heart” component such as gentleness, kindness, forgiveness,

inclusiveness, and a host of other human-based attributes.

Writing about these simple yet amazing and extraordinary gifts and the people who possess them will remind us all we have these very same gifts without ourselves. Yes, you and I have it without ourselves to change the lives of those who desperately need even a small drop of hope in their painful existence.



When you meet together at Patapsco, you will be mingling with those who “walk the walk” when it comes to quietly giving of their gifts to others. Most likely you are such a giver.

There are the individuals who silently endure great physical suffering combined with uncertainty while continuing to think of the needs of others.

How about those individuals who face exclusion simply because they live lifestyles others in their small-mindedness find unacceptable? What wonderful examples these individuals are for you and me. Or the individual who works tirelessly to improve the lives of those shunned by their

communities, showing kindness and love to those who need it the most. The impoverished and physically and intellectually challenged individual who stands alone but whose heart is overflowing with unconditional love for others: a being full of gentleness, kindness, and forgiveness for all. These are the people who have shown by example what it means to possess tenderness of heart and the many gifts which flow to others from this quality. These gifts – so simple and yet so priceless – are the most beautiful and meaningful.

A cheerful smile or gentle touch doesn't cost a dime – not a single solitary cent – but what an amazing investment, with returns beyond your wildest imagination!

I am so grateful for the many tendernesses shown to me by so many of you, which have been life-changing in countless ways. Use your tender gifts to touch the lives of others.

“When you comfort, hurt goes away.”

Gifts from my Parents

Ramona Buck

One wonderful gift my parents gave to me was their support and expectation that I could succeed. I remember once when I had an idea for the Quaker Meeting in Waynesville, Ohio where I grew up to sponsor an Arts Fair. At the Arts Fair, people brought pieces of art/crafts to display. We had quilts, paintings, writings, pottery, weaving, knitting etc. as well as workshops during the day on such things as making pottery or poetry writing. It was a 4-day event and was very successful. I could never have achieved it without the

support of my parents. My father came and hung all the quilts and art objects in the Meetinghouse, which I could not have done. My mother decided that having lunch each day would help so she planned, cooked and served meals for the event.

They both gave me encouragement as I went forward both for the first and second year. I remember at the second year I was concerned that I hadn't come home in time to prepare adequately for it. But my father said, “You have just enough time.” And he was right – with their help, I was able to do it!



I remember another time when I was concerned about the fact that we had just learned that the local swimming pool had turned into a “club” and was not allowing people of color to come there. I was a college student at the time and didn't feel all that strong yet, but I was very concerned. My parents suggested I bring this concern to the Quaker Meeting for Business. I did this and we then determined to canvass the town and try to get a number of religions to support a stance against the “club” concept. I remember I went to meet with a variety of ministers in the town and felt stronger as we continued. Again, my parents supported me and kept

me moving forward in a positive way. It was one of the many gifts that they gave me.

When my parents had died and my sisters and I sold the house and property where they had lived, several of my nieces and nephews were very upset. They didn't feel the house should have been sold, and they were even more upset when the new owners took down the house and built a new one in its place. I said to them, "I think what you identify with the house is the unconditional love you received there – it's not the house; the house was a symbol – the unconditional love is the gift you received which you can also give to others." So, unconditional love may have been the greatest gift I, and the next generation, received from my parents. I am very grateful for it.

A Lifetime of Living and Giving *Johanna Som de Cerff*

In late 2016, I was responsible to downsize my parents' belongings for an upcoming interstate move from a small, 3-bedroom with double garage to a 1-bedroom apartment in a senior living community. They would be having dinner in the community dining room, but we anticipated having a few family meals in their apartment. I was fairly confident in dividing their possessions into categories of keep, donate, or discard, consulting them on certain favorite things or in choosing between possible alternatives of items to take along.

I came to these delicate, etched goblets of which my mother was particularly fond.



They had a few chips from decades of use. I held one up and said "Mom, what about these?" Her reply (in Dutch) translates literally to "I received a lot of pleasure from

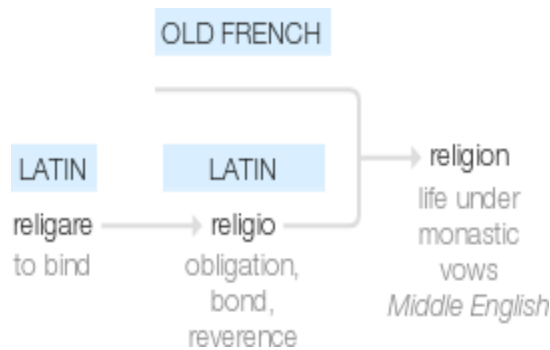
them, but I don't need to keep them." She had delighted in using the beautiful goblets at so many meals; she had the accumulated joy of shared hospitality and conviviality with family and friends over the years. She didn't need to hold onto the goblets themselves.

My initial reaction was relief at fewer items to pack for the movers. And my heart was warmed by knowing Mom had had those treasured moments. It was a gift to me that my parents, who were then already in their nineties, were not fighting the move or being resistant to giving up so many possessions. The downsizing process seemed to me like the unraveling of their lives. But no, the entire experience revealed a different picture and a much greater gift. In their willingness to let go of their material possessions and to donate to others who could use them, my parents revealed that the real treasure was in having used what they had and sharing it in love and joy with others throughout their lives. The small exchange about the goblets has come to symbolize that gift for me and to serve as a reminder to do the same.

The Gift of Language

Jim Rose

One of the most important gifts in my young life was from Mr. Joseph who, among other things taught us Latin and watched our progress from the sidelines. (*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres!*) Perhaps most important in my life was his interest in *etymology* (words, not bugs: that's *entomology*.) I began to learn that words had origins, that words evolved, that meanings shifted and grew, and that words spawned new concepts, new shades and new colors.



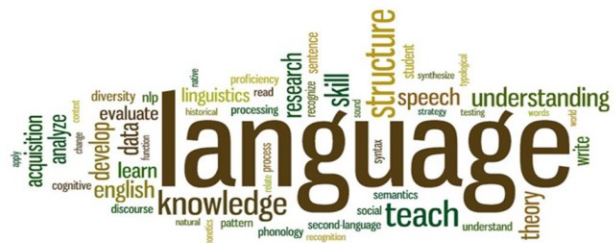
Did you know that the word 'religion' comes from "re-, back + ligare, to bind, bind together." Why "back, again, anew, once more"? Were we bound together previously? Are we revisiting a past state, one we dimly forgot? (At my age 'dimly forgetting' is a familiar state!)

The origin of words suggests a historic meaning, but also raises questions that are possibly important today. What do we mean when we use a particular word? Why not a close synonym? Why not modify it with a carefully chosen adjective? Why not use it as a springboard for a living metaphor?

I could say that it was misty (foggy, dewy, hazy, cloudy) this morning. Or, from the *Bookwoman of Troublesome Creek*, "A clean wetting mingled into woodsmoke and umbrella'd the tiny cabin." Such an expression catches my breath. Sometimes a well-crafted metaphor creates a complete picture in my mind in a dozen words. Poetry.

Indeed, today I unfairly judge a book not by the cover but by the skill the author employs in using evocative metaphors, in stretching the language to wrap around concepts or images that gives them new life. I find myself collecting authors: Kim Michelle Richardson, Amor Towles, Ray Bradbury, and others. Here are artists who use words to paint, who do more than write, they craft sentences which often are vehicles for a fantastic journey of the imagination.

But as words can give flight, I recognize that they can deceive as well. Words are tools I can use to approach the truth. I approach, but do I even get close? And do my words really convey the meaning I intend? Or when you interpret/translate my words into your own context, do those words convey something completely unintended?



Which brings me to the place where words fail – the ineffable: incommunicable, indefinable, indescribable, inexpressible, nameless, unspeakable, and unutterable.

For all that I am enthralled with the power of words, I have been brought up against again and again the reality that there are some things, concepts, ideas which cannot be encompassed in our language. A painting, a sunset, a concerto or even a chord. God.

And this in turn leads me to the recognition that there are no words that can capture the truth, the reality, the meaning of anything, any object, any idea completely. We each of us struggle to paint a picture of our world that comes close. Or, recognizing that we are unable to depict the whole truth, we select one aspect of that reality to emphasize and color and sound it out to the delight of our friends.

And then there are paradoxes, reversals, and contradictions; best left for another time.... It is clearly a game, and I have enjoyed the game of language for decades. An appreciation of words was the treasured gift of Mr. Joseph.

The Gift That Came Fast and Slow

John Buck

I've been gifted from birth with such traits as stubbornness and a fighting spirit. I remember becoming aware of those gifts when I was 7 years old. We lived in Oak Ridge, Tennessee on a quiet street called Ogden Circle. The street was in fact a circle with about 60 houses. At the entrance to the circle was a tiny grocery, and then next to the grocery a small drug store opened that had **comic books!!**

The Circle was home to a gaggle of kids, and five of us decided to earn money for comic books by putting big boxes in my red wagon and pulling it around the neighborhood to collect empty glass coke bottles. Back then they were worth 2 cents per bottle, and comics cost a dime or 15 cents for two. We visited many houses for donations and looked in bushes for throw-aways. Soon we had a very full wagon, which we unloaded at the back of the store. My memory is that we had \$1.08 worth of bottles. We walked in to the front of the store to collect our money, and the owner - a very large overweight woman - informed us that we could only have the money if we spent it on candy in her store. I could feel myself full of fire.



"Jesse," I said turning to one of the boys, "your father is at home, isn't he? Go run and get him."

The owner stood there arms akimbo. I put my hands on my hips, too, and glared back. After a few minutes, two of the other boys started to give in and selected some candy. I stopped them saying, "We'll stand here all day if we have to."

One of the clerks said, "Mable, why don't you just give them their money."

"No," she said, "they're going to buy candy." Looking at me, she said, "Take your candy or just get out of here." She and I glared some more.

Finally Jesse's father burst in the door and started yelling at Mable. We got our money, and I savored the thrill of victory.



As my life went on, I had other

victories and some bruising defeats in fights with arbitrary authorities and scoundrels and people I just didn't like. I also began to notice that fighting produced enemies and estrangement. And, slowly a new gift began to settle in me, one that I'm receiving from other people - not one that is innate. I've noticed that listening and engaging people often leads to another kind of joy - the joy of connection. What if I had given empathy to Mable rather than fighting with her? We might have gotten our money and made a friend, maybe even made some youthful business deals with her.

I'm continue to receive that slow gift. When I first heard that the early Quakers said they would not fight with outward weapons, I thought, "Yeah, they're saying it's better to fight with words and nonviolent protests. I'm good at that." Gradually it's occurred to me that fighting with words is also fighting with outward weapons. The early Quakers weren't talking about fighting at all.

Recently, a good business partner and I had some bumps with each other. This time, I was able to redirect my gift of fierce anger into fierce listening - both to her and my



own insides. This time I've been experiencing the thrill of the victory of connection. I notice that it's not ephemeral like the thrill of the other kind of victory.

Many of you have contributed to this slow arriving gift. Thank you!

