

7-3-10 Your Voice Keeps Us Informed

Driving around on a weekend morning for weekend kinds of missions offers such a great opportunity to listen to people. At the local transfer station I thanked someone who works there for swinging a magnet over the ground to check for nails and screws. First of all, it was funny because it wasn't really a metal detector. Rather, it was the circular metal shell of an old speaker with a large magnet in the center. Yankee ingenuity at work just has to be admired. He swung it with a well practiced stroke and look of concentration, as a priest swings the incense or a diviner looks for water. I thanked him for checking and for sparing me a flat tire. He told me he was checking for land mines. Considering the price I recently spent on new tires, nails and screws were the equivalent of land mines for my car, so I was still thankful, for the due diligence and the sense of humor.

Moving on to the local pharmacy, I had the opportunity to listen to just a bit of NPR's "This I Believe". The essay chosen for reading was by Maria von Trapp. She talked about living in the moment and being more like a child. She described so clearly the difficulty of being an adult; "While we are doing one thing, our minds are already thinking of the next." She suggested that we pay attention to what the moment at hand requires of us and in doing so we would find freedom and joy. I knew she had been a nun before taking on the role of mother to ten children by marrying Georg von Trapp but *The Sound of Music* had not prepared me for her Zen-like outlook on life. I think she is a saint.

Next on my list of things of things to do was to purchase a couple more plants for making a cheerful porch. Still under the influence of Maria's mantra, I was even more inclined to respond to the requirements of the moments. Of course, those can't always be predicted. You just have to be open to them. And sure enough, while at the local nursery, the owner was telling me that he had just watered the hanging plant I chose and we got to talking about flowerpots. He was thankful for the fact that the hanging pots now included a built-in saucer, holding a bit of the water. I added that it was important for the little space to still be there for drainage. Oh, yes, of course, he agreed. In response to my observation that so many ceramic pots had no drainage hole, he began to point out the many items that were made in other countries such as China. He wasn't blaming China but, rather, sorry that the care and knowledge was not there when U.S. companies simply went for the low price, forgetting about quality. That became the springboard for his concerns about jobs in this country. And thus, the moment unfolded into another.

He told me that his parents emigrated from Russia and arrived here without money, the English language or an education. Yet, hard work, spending little and saving whatever they could, allowed them to survive and thrive. We agreed that hard work and thriftiness were important qualities.

The conversation returned to the overseas work. The plant man said, “The president has got to do something about jobs in this country. He has to provide some incentives to staying here and returning here!” I agreed with him but added that I was also concerned about large companies changing the economy so drastically with overseas outsourcing that when they left, the people no longer had what kept them alive for thousands of years, whether it was weaving or farming. It does not take many years for knowledge to be lost.

He exclaimed, “That’s true! When the factories close, they sometimes leave the people without any jobs at all!”

I thanked the man for the plants and the conversation, promising him that I would feed and water them. Did I mean both the plants and the ideas? I didn’t intend it but once the words were out, I realized that, yes, I meant both.

Public health can only succeed when it is informed and knows what is needed. What do you need? What does your neighbor need? Can you afford to go the doctor? Can you afford healthy food? Does your legislator know what you need? We don’t have to be a singer or a saint to use our voice. We do have to speak to be heard. Keep the conversation going.

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