



Nature's Beautiful Face

If we can find our way to a closer relationship with nature this may help us rediscover our place in life. As we have moved into our concrete and steel worlds we have lost touch with what is really happening around us. We overlook the fact we live off of nature by eating plants and animals all safely purchased in our mega grocery stores all neatly and cleanly organized for us. We no longer kill what we eat directly. We may not even be consciously aware that what we eat has been killed. In not fully conceptualizing this, we are separating ourselves from the world and do not see things as they really exist.

This separation from nature causes us to lose context and interrelatedness until we receive one of life's surprises. We forget what life is all about. We lose the wonder and beauty of life by separating ourselves from nature.

For What You Eat

Give thanks

For you are what you eat.

What you eat

Gave its life for you.

For your good health.

Whether animal,

Fruit or vegetable

Sentient beings all

Give thanks for each

And every one.

Know this

And remember to

Give thanks.

Someone once gave me a watercolor of a bluebird reminding me of my father's love of bluebirds. We put up 27 bluebird houses in the early spring and observed 50 fledgling bluebirds leaving the nests. What an absolutely beautiful experience!

The other part of this nature story was full of what might be called pain and suffering. Of the 150 eggs that had been laid that season, many never hatched as they were either poached by competing birds or hungry snakes. At least 10 of the baby birds that hatched, were eaten or killed. We found one parent bird, dead on top of the nest with its head bitten off. So, from 150 eggs lovingly laid by their parents, only 50 made it out of the nest.

By separating ourselves from nature, we have forgotten how it works, our connection to it and our participation in it. We no longer directly experience its beauty, pain and suffering, nor the lessons that it holds for us. As we live closer to nature we may no longer see these events as good or evil, but rather as an uncomfortable reality, a natural part of life.

Listen

*The next time, in the busyness
Take the chance to
Listen, with all of your love,
For the singing of the birds,
For the flying of the insects,
For the rustling of the leaves.
You may hear clearly,
A memory from the ages,
A story of great deeds,
The stillness of it all.
You may even hear,
The love of life's spirit,
The answer to a prayer,
A cry in the wilderness.
All is possible when you listen.
Take the time to listen.
Really listen*

Some of us have a fundamental attraction for things to be as simple as they can be. We may have been terribly confused by one of life's events that defy reasoning. There is a certain beauty in a simpler answer, a simpler life, a simpler moment in history.

As I have grown older, I crave simplicity in everything. I don't seek the complexity in things. I like things to be as simple as they can be, much like they seemed to be when I was very young.



A caterpillar searches for a winter resting place in the barn's courtyard.

Simple is

*As simple as it is
No simpler please
That is what we seek
For the ego loves the puzzle
The master of complexity
A storyteller, who
Lives from the crowd's reply
To stoke the ego's fire
But this is just the magician
Hard at work again
Pulling the rabbit out
Good for a laugh
Part of the distraction
The illusion of it all
If we only knew that
The reward is
The simplicity found inside.*

The lesson of Occam's Razor informs us that the simplest explanation for a complicated problem is most likely correct. When we were growing up we probably learned the old saying abbreviated as KISS to "Keep it simple, stupid!" We were taught that the shortest distance between two points is a simple, straight line.



A Walking Stick – common sight here on the farm.

Yet, we have also been taught that if something is too simple it risks being not smart, even stupid. Not many egos can survive a portrayal of stupidity. Unfortunately, this can lead us astray toward overly complicated thinking and solutions.

Simplicity has its own purpose and beauty. The secret to simplicity in words is first separating what is true from what is not true, and then separating the relevant part of the truth from the irrelevant. Simplicity demands us to speak the truth and what is relevant within that truth. This brings us back to removing illusion, falsehood and the lies that surround us.

For me, the central theme of nature is its simplicity. It comes to us without illusion, without falsehood, without lies. It is not complicated by judgment. It is not complicated by personality. In its purest sense it just is. The simple beauty of nature is its magnificence, its majesty. There is no more symbolic activity for me than a walk in the woods. There are many lessons of life for us to discover in nature. What if our everyday life could be redesigned to approach nature's simplicity?

Are the Trees Really Singing?

*Nothing makes the trees
More beautiful
Than a gentle breeze.
As the air blows
Through the leaves
It creates a whistling sound.
Reassuring to one who listens.
Each tree leans into the next
Almost shaking hands
Or hugging its neighbor
In love and joy.
If a tree could only smile.
We can just imagine
How the tree must feel
As the trunk and branches
Get a chance to shake out
Any lingering stiffness.
Like a gentle massage
From a loving planet
In recognition of its unique
Contribution to the world.
Maybe the trees are
Encouraging the rest of
Earth's sentient beings
In every shade of green
Singing the tender refrain
SSSHHHSSSHHH.....!*

When I was growing up in the 1960's it seemed there were greater wildlife issues than more recently. Actions taken since then may have made a difference. I see a plentitude of wildlife each and every day. This has been an inspiration to me. The animals seem to have simpler, more graceful lives than many people I know.

A few years ago, I loved to watch the blue heron cranes come to fish on our pond. My dad loved to watch the osprey come in from the Chesapeake Bay and fish there as well. We had mallard ducks, wood ducks and Canadian geese. Every year they would lay eggs and raise their young. It was like a movie theater of nature.

Last year I had to stop the tractor to let a family of woodcocks cross the back driveway, the mom, dad and four little round ones. There was also a nest of red tailed hawks; I witnessed the mom



training the two babies during the late summer. There is a den of foxes close by; I see them out and about at least once a month. We are practically overrun with deer.

Besides bluebird houses, I have put up bat, owl, woodpecker, robin, and chickadee nesting boxes. I used to monitor and record them weekly, but now just clean them out at year end.

As part of the landscape, many plants were selected for their ability to attract butterflies, and has that ever worked out well. There is so much to learn about these beautiful creatures.

I identified a Monarch butterfly, recently, and learned the story of the Viceroy, Queen and Mimic all similar in look to the Monarch. Because the Monarch eats primarily milkweed, it is poisonous to birds. These other butterflies use the Monarch as cover and enjoy greater freedom from birds because of their similar pattern and color.

I used to see an exceptional coyote every few months. He had an orange stripe across his back; it looked like a lightning streak. I worry about him and the dogs, but he hasn't been around now for a while.

Last spring I watched the flower beds around the house heave. Shortly after, entry holes appeared in the mulch, some of the smaller plants were uprooted, and I knew the voles had arrived, a common pest in Virginia. My neighbors had recommendations, I reviewed some of the source books, but all of the ideas were not appealing. And then while going down the steps, I saw a large black snake moving through the grass. The next day I saw a garter snake in the beds. A few days later there were no voles. I didn't need to buy anything, didn't need a government permit, just nature working its magic.

There have been several bear sightings outside my house. They have each occurred right after I have been outside and have re-entered the house. I can only surmise that the bears are very cognizant of my patterns. They know when the coast is clear, not wanting to encounter me any more than I want to encounter them.

Last year, I saw a 300 pounder that stood over 6 feet tall out my side window about a minute after I came into the house. I didn't have my camera at the time, but there is a permanent picture in my mind. While he was frightening in size, he was truly magnificent,

beautiful. A few days later, there was a significant berry scat pile (two foot oval, one inch deep) next to the door that was ripped off the chicken house.

I wonder what to do if confronted by a bear. These are truly strong fierce animals. Every naturalist will tell you how dangerous and protective a mother bear is of her cubs. I am not sure that I would fare any better with a male bear without cubs.

This year a younger bear, maybe 75 pounds, appeared about 30 seconds after I came in the back door. He stuck around for about five minutes watching me through the window taking his picture.



A young black bear watching me at the back window.

The Bear

*Came again to my dreams.
Feroocious in his intent
Angry, nasty, mean.
Why to me?
Maybe, a projection, or a
Metaphor from daily life
Into my restive sleep.
Maybe both of us
Lost in paradise
Cast in each others dream
Unable to find our place
Or a friend not met?
But remembering
That glare of contempt
Thank goodness just a dream.*



Ruby throated hummingbirds.

Just Another Friend

*There is a hummingbird
Sleeping in the tree
A dawn redwood.
Apt, in my mind's eye
An ancient, sleeping
In the arms of an ancient.
Vulnerable, yet strong
No bigger than a thumb
But enormous in her departure
The flight of the hummingbird
Zip, zip, zip and back again
Noisy with her
Dolphin like chirps
Whistling yip, yip, and yip.
Curious about me,
Not seeing danger
But as just one more
Friendly flower of nectar
Another member of the
Hummingbird love club.
Brilliant feathers
Arranged in unison
I try to stop my mind
To appreciate her splendor
Truth in the mind's eye.*



Blue Ridge Mountains from the front porch.

The Mist

*On a cool fall morning,
A fine mist appeared
Just off the lower brook.
A delicate set of vapor ribbons
Moved in parallel sheets
By a gentle wind.
As if leading a wild band of
Ancient horses
Softly by in search of pasture.
The water droplets suspended
In the air as if by magic.
A ghost in vapor vestments
Now visible to material eyes.
And then, suddenly gone.
Another miracle of nature
Doing its work in
Quiet solitude.
No expectant audience,
No cheers, no bows.
A silent voice crying
In the wilderness?
A message from afar?
Or just a hushed whisper
Of love and happiness
In the moist coolness?
Dreamlike, brilliant
One is honored
To have witnessed
Such an extraordinary feat.*

As I have progressed in my ability to live primarily in my original mind, I have experienced profound changes. Beyond the peace that I have found within, there are others. When I listen to the sounds of nature, I can hear the sounds beneath the sounds that are beneath the sounds. I can see more clearly the stark contrast in all the different shapes and shades of color. My depth perception has significantly sharpened. Everything is more beautiful and extraordinary as each day becomes a new day for the greater aliveness and presence I experience.



A mud dauber nest; these spider killers are prized neighbors.

Be Thankful

*An infinite variety
Different Shapes, Sizes,
Colors and Textures,
The Matrix of Nature
The Web of Life
All is perfect exactly as it is.
This will all change
In the next moment
That is for sure,
And then it will be perfect
Once again.
Be thankful for everything
Exactly as it is*



A hornet's nest on the shed.



My neighbor has honeybees near

The Beehive

*There is perfect order
In a hive of bees
Tens of thousands
Of individuals
Acting in the concert
Of the beautiful music of life
Conductorless
Yet with total order
Each musician plays its part
Without direction
Acting as one being
Majestic, magnificent
But how can this be?
It's simple they say
As they have achieved no mind
No personality, no illusion
No ego, no training, no prize
Each doing its duty
In its parallel of the universe
Beauty in motion
The treasure of their pursuit
Is the much sought nectar
Of the hive
All in a simpler world
A world without words
With only action and result
Persistence and sacrifice*

The Nest

*The nest is a special place
A place of safety and comfort
A place of love and attention.
Yet, exposed
Available to the elements,
The wind, the rain
Available to predators
In the night.
A habitat of both
Safety and danger
Built in love, it stands true
Bulwark of strength and trust
Vulnerable in a real world.*

Into the Wind

*As a mighty north wind blows
The young tree bends.
With brother rain's
Conspiratory gesture
The young tree leans,
At a precarious angle.
With life's loving caress,
New roots anchor
The awkward perspective,
Oppository branches
Rebalance mother earth's pull.
Then all is right, once again.
Different, yet beautiful
Sturdy, graceful, strong
Perfect, in its new embrace.*



A tree swallow looks from her nesting box in front of the garden.



A hummingbird on watch.

The Sentinel

*There is a lone sentinel
Sitting high in the tree
Watching, waiting
For the coast to clear
Purposeful in intent
A hummingbird on duty
Within his parallel world
To make the call, the all clear
To feed at the offered nectar
So that all can safely return
Yes, I know him well
A hero of mine
I try to cooperate
With clear intent
And transparent actions
A sentinel for his kind
A small brother of mine
In a simpler world
One without words
With only action and intent.
Acceptance and respect.*