

Early November 2010

Dear friends,

I've just returned from a brief getaway to the central coast. We stumbled across the small town of Cambria on a drive on Highway 1 many years ago. I don't remember which way we were going - probably south after a visit in Monterey... but we stopped and fell in love with the town, and most importantly, with the beauty of that piece of coastline. This is a community of artists and writers as well as the wealthy retired and many hard working young people all committed to preserving the beauty they share. This is a place that is hard to get to and well worth the effort for both our souls and our bodies.

We found this place serendipitously, and as often happens under those circumstances, it restores and heals in many ways. We always stay on Moonstone Beach, with the ocean outside our front door and sunsets that can make you awestruck by the power of the light. We watch pelicans soaring together over the waves and sanderlings running on their little legs to catch whatever it is that the receding foam leaves for them. We somehow find the seagulls delightful (which is certainly not the case when we are home) and we walk the wooden boardwalk along the bluffs and wonder at how lucky we are to have found this paradise.

Driving home yesterday I realized that the red rocks of Sedona and the cliffs and incredible blue ocean of Cambria each serve me as a holy place. I have been offered two places that give me strength with their natural beauty - and I am so grateful. Part of it, of course, is just getting away from the routine of life so that awareness is heightened in a myriad of ways. Part of it is nature showing off at her best - at least for me. The air is more pure... the landscape is amazing... and the people who have been charged with protecting the land have understood what matters to those lucky enough to spend some time in these mystical places. We're going to Sedona in February - so I'll focus on what Cambria gave me on this trip -because gifts like this are worth sharing.

The range of physical activity I am capable of performing has changed as my body has. Hiking up hillsides, clambering through rocky inlets, walking for hours or just balancing on narrow trails with gigantic drops on one side are no longer part of my spiritual/physical life. Finding their replacements so that the "thank you" that I offer to God/Nature is as powerful as it once was has been a search for both Michael and myself. I feel blessed in so many ways to be on this path. We take too much for granted. We find something that we love, and when we lose it we pout and never see that there are always other options. We must refuse to pout. Our life now is committed to trying new things that give us joy. We are both unwilling, however, to give up the healing power of the places we have returned to again and again. Once that awareness became a conversation, we began to find new ways to love old places. We move more slowly (well, I do). We sit on comfortable rocks along trails and nibble on apricots and see the tiny creatures and unusual plants that we might have missed if we'd been hiking at the speed that once was possible. I spend a long time visualizing abstract sculptures that pop out at me from trees and rocks and clouds. What we do now is different - not worse. We miss some of what was - but we are in motion, unwilling to stop our evolving lives, unwilling to give up, unwilling to miss out on moments of incredible bliss.

So many people find that once an obstacle becomes permanent they are stuck. This means that they are unwilling to find a way to climb over, under or around what has blocked the way. An obstacle is not a dead end. An obstacle is something that you live with, learn about, and make part of your life. It may not be what you would have chosen, but few of us live our lives obstacle free. Frankly, if you think your life has been obstacle free, you probably aren't paying attention. Options do abound when we confront the reality of what we now live with and what we are going to do about it.

What we need to do is not look backward at what once was. That part of our lives is over. We can't have a static life - our souls, minds and bodies reject that concept. Every day is different. Every encounter is different. Every moment of every day changes us and our responsibility is to welcome the change, work with the change, and if possible, celebrate the change. We need to examine what makes us feel stronger, better, more in tune with what is in the moment. Then we will understand that awareness is the only way we can heal the aches and pains that climbing around the obstacle may cause. We need to work with what we have now.

A life that has a grounding in gratitude - for nature - for family - for friends - for life itself - is a life filled with power. The power is not the power of a Samson - it is the power of the heart. If you can look at your life and realize that possibilities are always available if you have the will to uncover them - then life can bring joy even when it is truly hard. If you can accept that the pounding waves of the ocean are there for you to embrace- for their sound, their exquisite multitude of colors, their energy - life is better. If you can walk through a eucalyptus grove full of butterflies, and rather than walk the five mile trail you walk two and then sit amidst the color and movement, the gratitude is the same. The experience is just different.

Different isn't bad. It's just different. Regrets about change are a waste of energy and spirit. Cambria is a place in our lives where words sometimes fail us because we have none to truly capture what it feels like to want to write a thank you note to God. I have a tendency when unable to say for the hundredth time "incredible" to applaud. I admit it's a little strange - but somehow it's become the back up for me when I am overwhelmed with the need to express the healing beauty of the land. I am starting to believe that when the soul is fed, and the heart is fed, amazing things can happen to the whole you.

That's just a part of the journey... but even today, sitting at the computer writing to you, I can see in my mind's eye the sunsets, the moonlight reflecting on the water, the pelicans teaching their chicks to hunt for food, the cliffs at Ragged Point and the hand hewn benches of Cambria, set in place so you, too, can applaud.

I hope you have a place that takes your breath away.

Still dreaming of peace,

Barbara

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