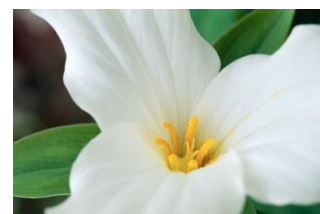




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Volume 33 Issue 3 – Founded in 1982

April 2016

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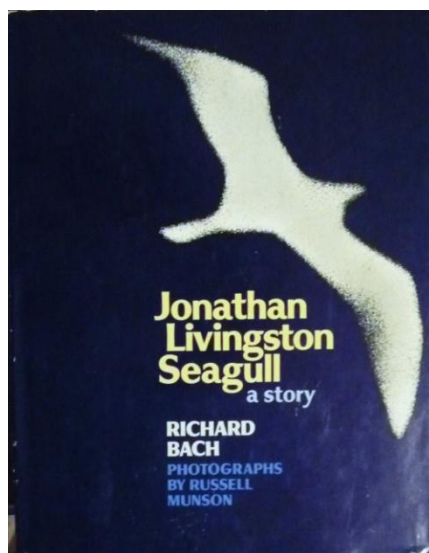
THE RESTLESS HEART

Novelist Richard Bach once wrote a short story about a bird called "Jonathan Livingston Seagull." The book struck a resounding chord in the hearts of millions of people. The story is very simple: Jonathan is a gull who is not satisfied with being a gull. Driven by an inexplicable restlessness and a desire for a freedom and a transcendence that he himself cannot fully understand, Jonathan wants always to fly higher, fly faster, and fly farther than he or any other gull has ever flown. The force in him is relentless. He can find no lasting peace or relaxation as he relentlessly pushes, always straining to break out of the narrow limits within which he finds himself.

This book's astounding popularity testifies to Bach's original hunch that there is a good amount of Jonathan Livingston Seagull in each of us. Everyone identifies with Jonathan. We are that gull, restless and dissatisfied, driven by a perpetual inner disquiet (dis-ease) that we do not always fully recognize or understand, always pushing harder, to fly faster, to go more places, to break through, to break out of the asphyxiating confines of our place and condition in life. Jonathan's loneliness is our loneliness, our restlessness.

Many people suffer from what might aptly be called "moral loneliness." Moral loneliness is a very particular kind of restlessness. What exactly is moral loneliness?

Within each of us, at that place where all that is most precious takes its root, there is the deep sense of having once been touched, caressed, loved, and valued in a way that is beyond anything we have ever consciously experienced. In fact, all the goodness, love, value, and tenderness we experience in life fall short precisely because we already know something deeper. When we feel frustrated, angry, betrayed, violated, or enraged, it is, in fact, because our outside experience is so different from what we already hold dear inside.



Perhaps the old myths and legends capture it best when they say that, before being born, each soul is kissed by God and then goes through life always, in some dark way, remembering that kiss and measuring everything its experiences in relation to that original sweetness. To be in touch with your

heart is to be in touch with this primordial kiss, with both its preciousness and its meaning.

We all have this place, a place in the heart, where we hold all that is most precious and sacred to us. From that place our own kisses issue forth, as do our tears. It is the place we most guard from others, but the place where we would most want others to come into; to be known and still loved in that precious place; the place where we are the most deeply alone and the place of intimacy; the place of innocence and the place where we are violated; the place of our compassion and the place of our rage. In that place we are holy. There we are temples of God, a sacred ground of truth and love. It is there, too, that we bear God's image.

But, to be in truth, this must be understood: The Image of God inside of us is not to be thought of as some beautiful icon stamped on the soul. No. The image of God in us is a share in His/Her very life. It is Divine energy, a fire, an objective reality. It is the prism through which we see, understand and interpret everything. Thus we recognize goodness and truth outside of us precisely because they resonate with something that is already alive inside us. Things "touch our hearts" when they touch us here, and it is because we have already been touched and caressed that we seek for a soul mate, for someone to join us in this tender space.

We measure everything in life by how it touches this place. Why do certain experiences touch us so deeply? Do not our hearts burn within us in the presence of any truth, love, goodness, or tenderness that is genuine and deep? Is not all knowledge simply a waking up to something we already know? Is not all love simply a question of being respected for something we already are? Are not the touch and tenderness that bring ecstasy nothing other than

the stirring of deep memory? Are not the ideals that inspire hope only the reminder of words somebody has already spoken to us? Does not our desire for innocence (and innocent means "not wounded") mirror some primal unwounded place deep within us? And when we feel violated, is it not because someone has irreverently entered the sacred ground inside us?

When we are in touch with this place within, and respect its sensitivities, then

we are feeling our souls, God's very life (Grace) within us. At those times, faith, hope and love will spring up in us and joy and tears will both flow through us freely. We will know that we are good and fully known and fully loved by our God. What a breath of fresh spiritual, emotional air!! Genuine joy and peace and happiness will bring us to our knees. With Jonathan Livingston Seagull, we will finally be able to soar in FREEDOM.

THE DASH

I read of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend.

He referred to the dates on her tombstone from the beginning to the end.

He noted that first came the date of her birth and spoke of the following date with tears,

But he said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time that you spent alive on earth...

And now only those who loved her know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own; the cars, the house, the cash.

What matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard ... are there things you'd like to change?

For you never know how much time is left. (You could be at "dash mid-range").

If we could just slow down enough to consider what is true and real.

And always try to understand the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger, and show appreciation more,

And love the people in our lives like we've never loved before.

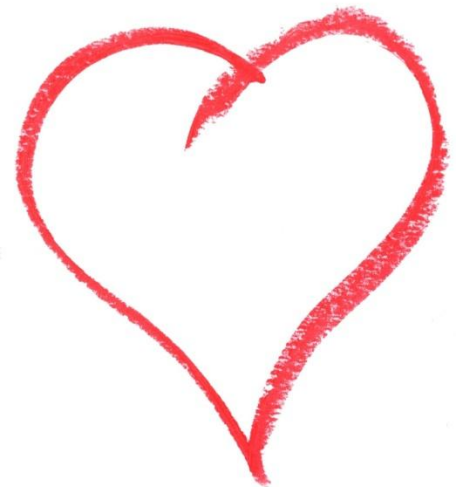
If we treat each other with respect and more often wear a smile...

Remembering that the special dash might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy is being read with your life's actions to rehash...

Would you be proud of the things they say about how you spent your dash?

If you always DO what you've always DONE, you'll always GET what you always GOT.



Vision and Reality

Children are “Hardwired” for God and Community OR "how have we left our children down".

A study, “Hardwired to Connect - The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities”, conducted by researchers from Harvard and Dartmouth Universities has concluded that children have two profound needs: a deep connection with others and moral and spiritual meaning in their lives.

Two of the researchers, Dr. Katherine Kovner-Kline from Dartmouth Medical School and Bill Stanczykiewicz, CEO of the Indiana Youth Institute, were interviewed on Good Morning America. Noting that one in five American children now has emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, or hyperactivity, were asked whether these conditions are related to the absence of spirituality and community. The researchers said that there is evidence that the brains of children are hardwired with the need for **community, morality and spirituality** and that the children who have these gifts are often protected from emotional problems.

They discovered that levels of stress hormones are lower in children whose lives have these resources, the researchers said, and the lack of these supports can *adversely affect a child's physical and emotional well being*.

Noting that most children used to grow up with some religious training and family support, the researchers were asked when things started to change. Bill Stanczykiewicz said in the last 30 to 40 years, or two and three generations there has been **a serious decline in parents and schools sharing such resources**.

Asked what parents can do to help children meet these needs, Dr. Kovner-Kline said that in order to have quality time with one's children, there also needs to be **quantity time**. What is needed, she said "is a particular form of engagement that is both warm and nurturing and affectionate but also has **expectations and limits**."

Mr. Stanczykiewicz added that, since 96% of American teenagers say they believe in God, **parents need to acknowledge their children's perception of a higher power guiding their lives**. Not to do this is **parental malpractice**. If parents do not meet the need for God and community, this natural impulse is *diverted to other, far less satisfying and far more dangerous ends*. -and so our failing culture! It's the school/teacher's fault!

If God had a refrigerator, a magnet with *your picture* would be on it.

If God had a wallet, **your picture** would be in it.

If God had a car, a bumper sticker with your name would be on it.

If God had a calendar, **your birthday** would be circled.

If there is a tree in heaven, He's carved YOUR NAME in the bark.



We know He has a tattoo, and we know what it says. "I have written your name on my hand," He declares. - *Isaiah 49*

God made me and God doesn't make junk. God is love. Mercy is His. He forgives and FORGETS. He loves you NOW, the way you ARE. God lives in YOU and in the person next to you. FEEL IT!! ENJOY IT!!

"O God, help me to believe the truth about myself no matter beautiful it is."



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NO EXCUSE SUNDAY

"Humor is a proof of faith." - *Charles M. Schulz*

To make it possible for everyone to attend church next Sunday, we are going to have a special "No Excuse Sunday." Cots will be placed in the foyer for those who say, "Sunday is my only day to sleep in." There will be a special section with lounge chairs for those who feel that our pews are too hard. Eye drops will be available for those with tired eyes from watching TV late Saturday night. We will have steel helmets for those who say, "The roof would cave in if I ever came to church." Blankets will be furnished for those who think the church is too cold and fans for those who say it is too hot. Scorecards will be available for those who wish to list the hypocrites present. Relatives and friends will be in attendance for those who can't go to church and cook dinner, too. We will distribute "Stamp Out Stewardship" buttons for those who feel that the church is always asking for money.



One section will be devoted to trees and grass for those who like to seek God in nature. Doctors and nurses will be in attendance for those who plan to be sick on Sunday. The sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies for those who never have seen the church without them. We will provide hearing aids for those who can't hear the preacher and cotton for those who can.

Author Unknown, From the Joyful Noiseletter

