

Generosity and Glimmers

Contemporary poet Pat Schneider¹ wrote:

*It is a kind of love, is it not?
How the cup holds the tea,
How the chair stands sturdy and foursquare,
How the floor receives the bottoms of shoes
Or toes. How soles of feet know
Where they're supposed to be.*

*I've been thinking about the patience
Of ordinary things...*

Life is indeed generous. When ordinary things morph into big noticeable moments, one is reminded that life is wonderfully full even during periods that feel like proverbial “glass is half-empty” times. The term for a glimpse of joy in ordinary things is called a “Glimmer.” Glimmers are micro moments that begin to shape our nervous system in very gentle ways.² Have you ever experienced a Glimmer?

I remember one occasion, an especially poignant moment, when I got a glimpse of several Glimmers. I was thirty-three years old and going through a divorce. I was so blue. However, I was committed to a running practice because. It was one area in my life where I felt like I had some control.

Early one morning, I took off for a long run. As my feet rhythmically hit the pavement in a rural area outside my small town, my mind was churning. I kept thinking, “I can’t travel for my job anymore. Money is tight. I’m worried about my son. I am such a failure!” The mental loop of troubles went on and on. Then, for some nearly miraculous reason, my eyes landed on a dark purple leafless vine. It clung horizontally to a fence lining the road I was traveling.

I stopped and looked back from where I had been. The purple vine had no beginning. I turned to the horizon in front of me and watched the vine continue on until I couldn’t see where it ended.

Since I had not been present to the beauty around me up to that point, I stood in awe. The sun was just burning the autumn haze off the meadow. The multi-colored leaves on the trees

¹ Coined by [Deb Dana](#), a licensed clinical social worker who specializes in complex trauma, in her 2018 book "[The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy](#)," "glimmers" refers to small moments when our biology is in a place of connection or regulation, which cues our nervous system to feel safe or calm.

² <https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christianity-blog1/the-patience-of-ordinary-things.html?rq=generous>

located just over the fence were dripping with dew, each droplet a sparkling gem. I felt like I was part of an impressionist painting!

OK, I admit it. Some people might claim that what I had experienced was a natural high prompted by endorphins, the chemical released when one runs. That may be true. But, when I returned home after that experience, I continued to see things differently. For example, I noted the lovely walkway to my newly rented home. I opened the door and saw the wood floors, the leftover triangle piece of toast on the table that my son had left before he went to school and the graceful curve in the cork of my Birkenstock shoes perched awkwardly by the door. I felt so fortunate to be surrounded by the beauty in mundane things.

Nothing about my life had changed that morning. The troubles were still present. I still had to address my finances, nurture my aching heart and see to the needs of my young son. However, my ability to notice the precious wonders surrounding me provided a generous balance to my perspective. I began collecting the tiny but huge gifts in my life and soon determined that I too, like the purple vine, would carry on. (Incidentally, the fence was an important metaphor too. I began seeking support systems like my family and counseling to help me.)

Today, I have a Glimmer-collecting practice. My concerns are different than when I was in my thirties but that doesn't mean they are less worrisome. If anything, much of what keeps me awake at night at this time of my life are thoughts on situations that are outside my control. And yet, there I am in the darkness of my room counting to myself:

Glimmer #1, the child in the cart at the grocery store who waved at me;
Glimmer #2, the yellow leaf with a red center that I spotted on the ground this afternoon;
Glimmer #3, the news story about medical aid that finally arrived for people in a war-torn area;
Glimmer #4, a phone call with my mother, a grieving widow, who still laughs when I tell her a funny story,
Glimmer #5, a tiny bird, a Tufted titmouse, who landed on the Hibiscus plant outside my patio and shared my view of the sunrise this morning.

As we reflect this month of November on the theme of Generosity, may we take note of life's many treasures and in return, find ways to be generous back in a multitude of ways to a hurting world. Even offering a smile to a stranger can be someone's Glimmer.

With you on this journey, Rev. Amy Kindred