

**Joan Nelson, 8/1/2010**  
**Dwindling Toward the Precious**

A new neighbor asked me this week why I don't have a sprinkler system in my yard. I explained that I have deliberately chosen to hand-water as a form of "spiritual meditation." He looked at me kind of funny, rolled his eyes, and walked away.

He didn't realize that I've been practicing this WAY OF APPRECIATING THE CYCLES OF LIFE over many summers. That is: Appreciating the life that comes from the seeds I planted in the spring.

As usual, about this time of year, I've started watering a little earlier in the evening than I did in the middle of June. Yes...the days are growing shorter.

My acute awareness of the annual diminishing of daylight has always coincided with my birthday on August 1. When I was a child, even my most festive birthday parties and gifts were shrouded in the awareness of the inevitability of the "dreaded" end of life as I knew it: The end of summer which would terminate on "doomsday," the first day of school.

My birthday (give or take a couple of days) also brought the annual nocturnal thrum of the crickets. I've always loved the serenade of the singing insects.

And hated it.

My hatred of their incessant chatter was associated with its doomsday portent. I also hated the nagging doubt that the crickets, like Pinocchio's Jiminy, could tell what I was thinking.

Mostly, I loved the crickets. I didn't understand why, at the time, but I loved them for exciting my awareness of

**the interconnectedness of it all:** These creatures in my suburban New York yard were sending signals to their kin all the way to the Jersey Shore, and to the Adirondacks and Poconos. The magic was in the orchestration among, crickets, cicadas, and katydids. (“Katy did. Katy didn’t.” Did. Didn’t.) The ultimate pure bliss of it all came with the addition of fireflies. (Katy did. Spark, Spark. Katy didn’t. Katy did. Spark Spark. Katy didn’t). Did. Didn’t. Did. ...Not.

For 34 years, now, I’ve spent my birthdays in Marin... at about the same distance from the ocean (Pacific, this time). I miss the katydids and fireflies. But the crickets sound the same on the West Coast as those on the east coast. When I hear the cricking, I feel pulled...and pushed. I would not choose to live anywhere other than my present house with its drought conscious (nevertheless still somewhat thirsty) yard. Nor would I choose to travel to visit any place to try to recapture the magic of the fireflies and katydids.

I have finally learned—really got it—in my bones—that you can’t recapture the past. That was then. This is now. It will never be then again.

Nevertheless, this getting-close-to-September thing reminds me of a day when I was about 10, when I heard “September Song” on the radio. Frank Sinatra. Believe me: age 10 was NOT too young to melt and swoon at the sound of that voice.

He sang about “Days” that “dwindle”... “down”... to a “precious few.” I told my mother that the song made me sad, because my vacation (with its precious insect symphony) would soon be over.

Then she told me that the song was not about the seasons of the sun. The song was about seasons of life:

About growing old, and loosing your future, like my grandma and grandpa were doing.

Well...here it is again, my birthday: a decade into a whole new century. August 1 still comes bout half way between the summer solstice and the fall equinox. Once again the days are beginning to get shorter. But this time, I'm as old as my grandparents were back then. And I'm looking at my dwindling allotment of days.

Because of this awareness, my days and hours are actually becoming more precious. And my life is enriched with the passing of each one.

Why? Because I'm deliberately choosing to enjoy hand-watering as a form of "spiritual meditation."

Because I'm harvesting the second round of strawberries from my garden. And literally thanking them before I eat them. "Thank you strawberry!" And thanking the Swiss chard, and squash, tomatoes, mint, chives, peppers...that I planted last spring. I always thank the lemons that just keep on coming all year long. "Thank you lemon."

But yesterday, I had to apologize to some lettuce for making it bitter by letting it grow too long.

Well...it's cricket time again. And I know what this could mean: Six months from now: Doomsday: I'll be eating parsnips, turnips, kohlrabi, and rutabagas.

Or not. I don't really like kohlrabi and rutabagas. Not even as a spiritual practice. So... given that the days are dwindling, I think I'll just choose to pay careful attention to the hours and moments... You might want to do this as well. And thank the moment, for everything it holds. Because the moment—this moment—is really all there is.

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