

8/August/More Than
Gail Balden
Word Count: 678

Almost everything is more than it seems. The garden in riotous bloom in August is more than a colorful artist's palette or a place to pick zucchini. It's a vehicle in which to learn how to grow, both the plants and oneself. In the garden, we learn to pay attention, develop patience, and care for living things. In return, like a stage play, from opening night until the show closes, the garden gives us a grand performance.

Putting out birdseed each morning is more than just filling the feeders. It's programming joy into our daily lives, a way to bring us pause and the simple enjoyment of creation. Feeding the birds reminds me that we are connected on this planet and whatever action we take, individually or collectively affects us all. A few inches away from me, a hummingbird comes to a hanging basket buzzing with honey bees and begins drinking from the purple petunias. I hold my breath and relish the miracle as I watch him sample every blossom, his wings beating furiously to keep his position. It's more than feeding birds.

The hillsides of our coastal communities are more than just a lovely backdrop for small towns edged by river, bay and ocean. The forests, home to wildlife, crucial habitat, an important component of our weather system and ecological environment, provide respite for the eye along our scenic coastal highway for thousands of travelers. Clear cutting, slash burning and the use of herbicides threaten all living things in the area. It's an assault on sensitive water ecosystems, our well-being and the future of our communities. It's more than just the next step in forestry practices.

The North County Recreation District is more than a place to house the Aquatics and Fitness Centers, Youth Department and Senior Center. It's a reason some women get up in the morning so they can go to water aerobics as they have for the last 20 years. It's a place for generations of kids to learn how to swim and develop confidence in their abilities, for community members to become fit and flexible, to connect with neighbors and friends. It's a place for little ones to be safe, to learn the skills that will outfit them for life. It's a gathering spot for celebratory events, movies, college classes, cultural activities, card games and foreign language practice. It's more than a building. It's the heart of the community, its' lifeblood.

Neahkahnie Mountain is more than a mountain or a place to experience the exhilaration and accomplishment of reaching the highest point on the coast range. "Home of the Gods," Neahkahnie, where my dog Buddy happily hiked the trail hundreds of times with us, is the jump-off place for Buddy's spirit to soar into his next chapter. Neahkahnie Mountain trail will always be a reminder of our dog's joyful enthusiasm for life. It's more than a mountain.

Earlier this month, I went to my mailbox and there, posted by a friend, was a poem. No other message accompanied the small slip of paper, just the words of a poet in

a small pink envelope. I sent a poem right back. I took joy in each of us reaching into our mailboxes to receive a little gift of words—tiny missives flying through the air landing in the palms of friends. The poems are more than a collection of words. They're a slender gossamer thread connecting us.

Each day we have choices. Like Ethel Romig Fuller in her poem, "Today," I try to live each day as a poem. It all counts, and it's all more than it seems.

Today
I have spread wet linen
On lavender bushes,
I have swept rose petals
From a garden walk.
I have labeled jars of raspberry jam,
I have baked a sunshine cake;
I have embroidered a yellow duck
On a small blue frock.
I have polished andirons,
Dusted the highboy,
Cut sweet peas for a black bowl,
Wound the tall clock,
Pleated a lace ruffle...
Today
I have lived a poem.

Ethel Romig Fuller (1883 - 1965).

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