

6/June/Two or Three Things I know for Sure
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Word Count: 669

More and more lately the world feels out of whack. The economy is a mess, gas prices continue to rise, everything including food costs more than it used to and often is suspect as to safety. The war goes on. Friends die too young, floods wash over the land, earthquakes and tornados end or change lives forever. We struggle to accept relentless and seemingly accelerating change and find something to believe in.

On a recent trip to the Midwest to teach a writing retreat, I asked my students to write for ten minutes on two or three things they know for sure. Many ended up writing that the only thing they know for sure is that nothing is for sure. Maybe it's true what our parents told us: the only things you can count on in this life are death and taxes...maybe bad weather.

Faith, family and friends—that's what I count on. Visiting my Michigan hometown, I plant a purple ivy geranium on my parents' grave, trusting summer thunderstorms to give it what it needs to thrive after my return to Oregon. While in town I visit Mrs. Smith, the mother of a classmate. We've written letters to each other for over forty years, and she still signs each one, "Love, Mrs. Smith." She remembers her daughter and me tromping through her garden at age 12 with butterfly nets and the time I walked four miles to her country home to have a piece of her angel food cake served on plates she got from the Jewel Tea man.

I visit my Aunt Arlene, who at 93 is my mother's only remaining sibling out of 11. We reminisce about our times together, our trips to Colorado in the back seat of my father's Plymouth. Before I leave she says, "What's your name again?"

Friends from the "Class of '60" come for dinner and we laugh and tell stories of our lives. It feels good to have a few people left who share the same memories, who are part of my life history.

I plant a garden with my friend whom I've known since I was 4 years old. She bakes bread every day. She has a passion for it and treats each loaf with patience and honor. She rejoices in the fragrant bread that emerges from the oven, a miracle out of flour, water, leavening—"every loaf a soul," she says.

All of these--placing flowers at the grave, visiting old friends who share my history, planting a garden, baking tawny loaves of bread in the oven to share with friends—all are signs of hope. And what is hope but courage to face what we have to face. The storms continue to rage—thunderstorms, fire storms, political storms. But acts of kindness are signs of hope and purveyors against the storms of life. While in Wisconsin, I walk the labyrinth at dusk with two women. I use a flashlight and still, I feel like I'm off the path. But I forge on hoping my light is not disturbing the others. *Trust the process* I tell myself, a mantra I use in writing class. The next day, one of the women tells me she is

glad I turned on my light as she, too, was uncertain of her path. “Your light was enough to show me the way,” she said.

A wise woman in my class, a Dominican nun living out her days at Sinsinawa Mound, told the class that her life experience had taught her that all she can do is focus on the present moment. And so I settle for this--a friend’s smile at the gift of a slice of chocolate cake, a blossom emerging from the grave of my beloved parents, a loaf of bread rising, a bloom on a tomato plant, laughter ringing in the air, a cake frosted with pink rose petals and shared with my brother. It is enough. This I know for sure.