

Keeping Up

Gail Balden

You have arrived. Rosie, my so-named GPS navigator tells me that at the end of every trip, but she's not always right. Rosie's never been able to figure out where I live. On each return trip to our house in the country, her *You have arrived* comment echoes throughout the car about a quarter mile short of the driveway.

Last year, on an overnight stay at the north rim of the Grand Canyon, Rosie literally froze up and didn't come to life until mid-morning. She doesn't like it when I veer off the route for a cup of coffee. *Make a U-turn at your earliest convenience, she says. Recalculating route.*

Once Rosie took my husband far a field for a funeral he was to attend. He had not taken a map since he had Rosie, but he accidentally programmed Rosie for the town of Happy Valley rather than Portland, so she led him astray. My advice is to never depend totally on a GPS or any other electronic device. I always carry an Oregon map in every car door pocket just in case Rosie gets off kilter. My cell phone doesn't work in dead zones, and often runs out of juice in the middle of a call. The camera battery gives out at the moment of the great shot; the hard drive crashes before I have a chance to save that important document; email systems go catawampus and an important message gets lost in gray mail--you get the picture--there goes your life.

At this age, I'm barely keeping up. I find I have less of a need to know. I don't know what the latest fashion is, or the names of today's celebrities. I can't tell you the name of a recently released movie. I'm not sure who won the World Series or even when it's played. Football mania starts so early that when I finally come in from the garden to sit by the fire and watch football, a game I do understand, the season is almost over. Wars? Who won? Does anybody ever win? If a mechanic opens the hood of my car and we both look in there, he better be the one who knows what everything does. I just want the car to get me from A to B with no trouble.

I'm more a scholar of wonder, the garden and the earth. I relish the sweet memories of my life that drape over me like a warm shawl, and I try to fill my days with what brings me joy—the poetry of life. On a recent bike ride on the Banks-Vernonia State Trail, the glowing golden apricot of yellow ash

that fluttered over the 80-foot high Buxton Trestle dripping gold coins on us was pure poetry. So was “The Blast,” a luscious BLT extreme eaten afterwards at Black Bear Coffee Company in Vernonia. I can get lost in poetic reverie each morning simply watching the flash of the yellow finch in the serviceberry bush. With the turning of the seasons, the red maple I planted in memory of my once-in-a-lifetime-dog Buddy shows her glory. The anticipation of a crackling fire warms me before I even strike the first match, and I look forward to hunkering down during a rainstorm. When the skies clear, I get lost in the wonder of the full moon--I cherish it all, especially in light of the wisdom and discernment that accumulated age brings.

A look at a typical To-Do list reveals the poetry of my life:

- Send nature books to grandchildren.
- Remember red roses and note for Mrs. Smith, 90!
- Call my sister, then the dentist.
- Thank my brother for the painting; Wow!
- Buy more dog biscuits for Bailey and Leche.
- Dig potatoes; prune the hostas, plant bulbs.

Time marches on, and as Dolly Parton says, eventually you realize it’s marching across your face. Luckily, I still have the original parts I came with, most of my teeth, no artificial joints, few complaints, but I fully realize I have less time above the earth than below it, so I make every moment count.

Rosie, meanwhile, keeps at it. *You have arrived*, she says. No I haven’t. Not yet.