

There's Never Two of Anything

Gail Balden

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A nostalgic story that strikes a chord in me of a bygone era, a time of a secure childhood uncomplicated by adult responsibilities is *A Christmas Memory* by Truman Capote. It's a largely autobiographical story that takes place in a small rural town in the 1930's. It tells the tale of seven-year old Buddy and his elderly cousin Sook, Buddy's best friend, who drag home in a baby buggy what they consider to be the perfect Christmas tree they've found in the woods. Along the way, a car stops and the rich mill owner's wife calls out "Giveya two-bits" for that ol tree." Sook shakes her head and says, "Why, we wouldn't take a dollar." The mill owner's wife persists, "Goodness, woman, you can get another one." In answer, Sook gently reflects: "I doubt it. There's never two of anything."

Never two of anything—that's something to ponder. That's certainly true when one considers a moment in time, a person's life, an era. As another year begins, those of us who've been on the earth long enough to have seen our share of woes and acquired some long-sought wisdom, recognize the deep truth of that. The past year has been filled with enough oil spills, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and floods to remind us. People are politically divided, angry and hurting. We continue to hope for better times even as gas prices rise, the lack of jobs and home foreclosures continues, wars rage. A beloved writing teacher and mentor in our community dies; a neighbor is murdered. We grapple with unexplained random violence that can take any one of us at any time. Even blackbirds, thousands of them, fall out of the sky in an unexplained phenomenon. It seems harder to trust life with such random loss and suffering. It takes courage. Eventually we come to the realization of how brief and fleeting life it, its ever-changing nature, and the fragility of it all.

But is there any other way to face life than head on? After a recent fear that I was losing my

vision, skillful doctors in successful eye surgeries were able to restore my eyesight. I rejoice in the precious gift and vow to use my clear eyes to stay awake, pay attention and search for the grace in life. Ordinary and extraordinary things restore my faith in the human family, like learning that 20-year old Daniel Hernandez rushed to aid Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords when she was shot in the head and held her hand all the way to the hospital. Like the outpouring of support from the nation and Tucson, Arizona, my previous home, upon the murders of innocent people like a child of such promise, Christina Green, or esteemed federal Judge, John Roll. Sometimes all we can do when those around us are suffering from horrendous loss is to be a place of refuge, to reach out and let someone know they are not alone in what they have to face.

As I put up a new calendar for the coming year, I cling to hope in our uncertain world. I remind myself of the fluid, ever-changing nature of things. I open my eyes and heart, always, to possibility and the beauty still to be found, in people, in our communities, neighborhoods and families.

Ordinary things steady me. A bald eagle flies over the Nehalem River as I drive by, and with my improved vision, I can clearly see his white head. Daffodils are poking up through the soil in the garden. Spring comes eventually. A new art show, an explosion of vibrant color by local artists, opens at NCRD gallery. Neighbors and friends come out on a windswept rainy night to rejoice in it, hug each other, stay close. We know life is precious. We greet each moment of beauty as a gift and offer thanks. In the end, it seems, it really does come down to how well we have loved.

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