

Moving On

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One of my favorite authors of all time, Gladys Taber, who wrote over fifty books on her love of the outdoors, her pets and country life once said spring in New England was so close to heaven she wondered how preachers managed to keep the eyes of their people turned to the future life.

Spring is finally here in the Pacific Northwest too. Though the new buds and shoots tell us we've moved out of winter and on to the next season, some of us gardeners aren't so sure. Still, it's hard to not appreciate the sensual delights of spring. Apple and cherry blossoms burst forth with promise. The gnarled and twisted cherry tree split in half along the North Fork Road flowers each spring, a reminder of endurance and survival. Tulips show their stripes, and on my hillside, daffodils I planted last fall pop up and wave to passers-by on Anderson Road. Coal Creek, fringed with ferns and burgeoned with rainfall tumbles and surges its courses. Purple violets thick enough to walk on pepper the lawn. In the woods, trillium and fawn lilies abound alongside the stalwart skunk cabbage.

At the Nehalem Bay Garden Club sale held over Mother's Day weekend, women gathered up fresh bouquets of lilacs heavy with fragrance, the first sprigs of spring, in honor and remembrance of mothers. When I plant lilacs in my own yard, I do it not only for my myself and my mother, but for whoever will enjoy them long after I'm gone. We can all plant something. Even one geranium will give us a gift. I like the quote attributed to Martin Luther: "Even if I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would continue to plant my apple trees."

Now that the fire of our local elections is over, the community moves on as well.

What builds community? Volunteers come to mind. Volunteers make the world go round, especially in our small towns. Volunteers keep the parks and church grounds beautiful. It's volunteers who give freely of their time and efforts to serve on boards and committees, who drive the Dial-a-Ride van, donate plants and books and set up community sales. We take comfort in knowing we have each other's books on our shelves and plants in our yards. It's volunteers who form neighborhood watch programs and phone trees and learn first aid and attend emergency preparedness classes. Neighbors volunteer to watch our houses when we're gone, feed our pets, and call if something is amiss. Moms in classrooms assist to keep the little ones safe, read to and befriended; volunteers give their time to Alder Creek and Cartm and the Hope Chest.

Through these efforts of giving and small kindnesses, we fulfill one of the most basic needs we all hunger for—connection. We connect at the Manzanita Writers Series when the open mic allows for people to share their stories. We connect with members of our community whenever we roll up our sleeves and prepare a meal for someone in need, carry their groceries to the car or stack their wood. We connect when we give someone a ride to the clinic or take them home from church. We connect at the pool, which is more than a place to swim. It's a place where we care for one another.

Work builds community. It gives us a reason to exist that is larger than ourselves. When we work for others, we give of ourselves, not just for our own good alone; it's our gift to the future. The dignity and importance of meaningful work is a gift that nourishes community. Perhaps our greatest fear is of being good for nothing, so we strive for meaningful work.. And when we become hopeless and despairing as I think many of us have lately, it's good to remember the power we have to make a difference in the lives of others and that we build community in the process. And to remember the wise words of anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world." "Indeed," she says, "it is the only thing that ever has."