

# *Life Centered in the Heart*

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In “Write from the Heart,” a class I taught this month, I asked writers their goal for putting their words into the world. “I want my grandchildren to know who I am, and how wonderful my childhood was,” said one. Another, in her mid-70’s said, “Though no one seems interested now, I hope someone in the future will be in how we lived our lives.” These women are keenly aware that their grandchildren will not remember rotary telephones or a life without television or cell phones; still they press on capturing the sweet memories of their own youth. Others said their goal was to preserve an era. One 80-year old woman, a columnist for the local paper recounted one such memory:

"In the years between 1942 and 1947, our three-room apartment was on Lincoln Way in San Francisco. The streetcar line ran past our apartment. The water heater, with pipes protruding from top to ceiling was in the kitchen by the stove, and the radio was set on top of the water heater. Every time the streetcar rolled by any program we listened to was interrupted by static, so my father connected wires from the radio to the hot water pipes. As the streetcar rolled by, one of us would get up, jiggle a knob or a wire and that would clear up the problem."

In a lecture the next day at the library, I was pleased to see these seniors trying to wrap their minds around social media, blogging, twitter and Facebook. They know if they’re intent on selling their stories and want to drive readers to their book, they need to know that 88% of American adults are on Facebook and 87% are on Twitter, and that with Smart phones, 50% of cell phone users have constant access to the internet. Still, it was mind-boggling to most. The woman next to me said, “I’m overwhelmed with all this technology. I can’t even wind a cuckoo clock!” To which a grandchild would probably ask, “What’s a cuckoo clock?”

Still, we creative spirits hunker down with our memories and resolve to capture what we can on the page for a future world. Most of us think folks are hungry for connection. That’s what we writers are all about in our little communities--connection to ourselves and each other. We seek out handmade goods like the necklace I bought at a Farmers Market here in Arizona. The Indian artist tells me he makes each piece of jewelry with love. When I tell him I need to come back with the proper amount of money, he tells me he will hold the jasper pendant for me. “We’re good people,” he says. When I compliment him, he says, “Thank you for the blessing.”

While reviewing Marc Barasch’s book called *Field Notes on the Compassionate Life, a Search for the Soul of Kindness*, Dr. Jonathan Dolhenty talks about the sad state of affairs the world is in and concludes with the words: “For how many centuries does humankind have to knock its head against the same wall of malice towards others until it comes to its senses? Maybe we ought to try a little compassion, a little kindness, a little benevolence toward our fellow human beings and see if that works.” Barasch says he wrote the book because “it felt urgent in a world turned colder to find a life more centered in the heart.”

What would a life centered in the heart look like? March is Women's History month. It's also Red Cross month. Maybe we can pause to remember the struggles women have endured for the betterment of all of us and celebrate their centuries of progress. Maybe it's time to determine if we're off the path and return to the soul of kindness as a way to be in the world. Organizations like Red Cross remind us that it's volunteers who make the world go round, especially in small towns like ours on the Oregon Coast. Perhaps it's through our volunteer efforts where we expect nothing in return that we have the greatest opportunity to live a life more centered in the heart.