

The Path of Hope

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In an elm and holly grove on the grounds of the National Academies in Washington, D.C. a 12-foot bronze statue of physicist Albert Einstein resides in a memorial designed to recognize the great scientist's contributions to the world. A map of the universe spreads out at his feet, and Einstein quotes are engraved on the steps including one on his *joy and amazement of the beauty and grandeur of this world...*

Since my return from the capital of the United States to the Pacific Northwest where spring has finally arrived, I've had many opportunities to experience that joy, amazement and grandeur. My first day home, it's raining, not the usual droplets from the sky, but cherry blossoms. Pale pink feathers drift and float to land beneath trees in giant downy circles. On the trip from Portland to the coast, I see undulating fields of rosy red clover carpeting farmland like a red ocean. In my backyard, rhododendrons rule the roost, their white and pink clouds of cotton candy climbing as high as the roof.

On my first kayak trip of the Nehalem River this season, I'm thrilled to see an otter swimming across the river periodically popping up to take a look at little ole me in my yellow plastic boat. Soon after, I spot a bald eagle soar above, getting a free ride on the thermals created by our luscious warm days.

More joy came in mid-May when our community turned out in great numbers at the annual Nehalem Bay Garden Club gathering. Neighbors and friends rushed in to find the perfect plants for their gardens. Little ones clutched a basket of flowers or lugged a huge Hosta plant for their moms. Everywhere, smiles were the order of the day as we women carried tomato plants and bouquets of lilacs reminiscent of our childhood to the checkout. We left laden with hope for the beauty and bounty that waits.

Then there was the making of the quilt. Twenty-five friends, twenty-five squares. Pure beauty embellished with fabric, buttons, embroidery thread, hearts, words of love and peace all threaded

together in a tapestry for our friend Lola Sacks. In presenting this gift to our mentor at the Center for Contemplative Arts, those of us gathered could feel the power of friendship that binds us in the net of life that holds us in this community.

By the time I visited Washington in early May, the cherry blossoms were gone, bloomed out in an early spring. But grandeur could still be found in the Capitol building that houses our government, in the Lincoln, Jefferson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorials which continue to inspire people from all over the world, and in the nation's place of worship, the Washington National Cathedral.

In contrast, it was impossible to not be moved by Arlington National Cemetery where the sheer number of America's military men and women who have died in their country's service reminds us of their great sacrifice. Combined with World War II deaths, Korean War deaths and the names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall, it was a reminder of the astounding, enormous human toll of American warfare. Even more sobering, according to a recent *Newsweek*, is that veterans are committing suicide at unprecedented rates with 18 veterans taking their lives each day. The number of U.S. soldiers who have died by their own hand is now estimated to be greater than those who have died in combat in Afghanistan and Iraq. Shocking statistics.

It should give us pause. On Memorial Day we remember the tremendous sacrifice of so many and the human cost of war. For some modicum of hope, I grasp the words of Franklin Roosevelt, as appropriate now as they were 70 years ago:

In these days of difficulty we Americans everywhere must and shall choose the path of social justice...the path of faith, the path of hope and the path of love toward our fellow man. We have always held to the hope, the belief, and the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon.