

Finding Hope

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Finding hope is a daunting task in today's world. Yet, I'm determined to find ways, paths and moments, there if one pays attention.

Having just returned from the wide-open beauty of the Southwest Sonoran Desert, I'm awash with the glory of spring in the Pacific Northwest and green pastures in our county where we have more cows than people. The grass is miracle enough, but there are the swelling buds of the rhododendrons and lilacs to give me hope as well as the honking of Canada geese in their V-shaped flight pattern above. In the garden, seedlings uncurl; the forsythia blooms and songbirds arrive with their Hallelujah chorus.

It's hard to feel hope in a world where bad things happen to good people. A new normal seems to be evolving. The unthinkable happens, and we have no lifeboat. Experts say we now have a generation who has no idea what it's like to fly on an airplane without first taking off shoes and going through a metal detector. After the Boston Marathon bombings, newscaster Brian Williams said, "In times like these, we all need a comfort dog." I agree. I miss my dog Buddy, the silky-eared, brown-eyed loyal companion, who with his presence alone convinced me that all was right with the world, at least for a moment.

In Green Valley, Arizona, a community where I've had the opportunity to live and teach over the last few months, one of my students said of us retirees that we're all "getting to the end of the runway." We may be, but there wasn't much sign of slowing down in that community where the over-60 crowd put a new face on aging by kicking up their heels at the follies, hiking steep mountains, writing their memoirs or creating art. That was in addition to giving their time to an array of causes from preserving historic ranches to saving horses. Equine Voices Rescue and Sanctuary, dedicated to saving abused and abandoned horses, was one place where I volunteered weekly. Each time, this group of "end-of-the-runway" volunteers inspired me. They raked stalls, filled water barrels and feed troughs. This cadre of kind people spoke to these horses in soft unthreatening voices calling them by name--Smokey Joe, Taylor, Rio—in an effort to gain trust where none had existed before.

I found hope in a group called the Green Valley Samaritans who are passionate about giving humanitarian aid to migrants crossing the rugged Arizona desert in search of a better life. Over 5,000 men, women and children have died in the desert over the last 15 years with an estimated 200 to 500 dying yearly, mostly of exposure to the elements.

While I hold hope that our country continues to work on the root issues associated with immigration, the humanitarian crisis continues and is visible on the desperate faces of those deported to the Mexico/U.S. border daily. At an aid station in Nogales, Sonora called el comedor, I helped serve 150 hot meals to the men, women and children deported to the border that day including a ten-year old boy with two sprained ankles. Most migrants would sleep in the cemetery that night, their only option. As we passed out a change of clothes and a dignity kit filled with toothbrush, toothpaste, a comb, and bar of soap, it was in the anxious faces of these people, in their patience, politeness, and gratitude for a meal or new pair of socks, that I found hope.

As for the problems of today's world, I consider the words of Gertrude Stein:

*There ain't no answer. There ain't going to be any answer.
There never has been an answer. That's the answer.*

Maybe. So I rest in the mystery and do what I can, where I can. As I write this, bees cover the shrubs outside my window, the rhododendron explodes in an umbrella of creamy peach, and pink cherry blossoms drift in the breeze to land softly on the earth, carpeting my path. Spring comes, and with it hope.