

Florida's Special Spring

Caryn Hacker-Buechel reflects on a season that exists here, but in a more subtle way.

A crisp arctic chill lingered in the gray and white shadows while a shimmering powder of snow quietly clung to limbs and branches. The images of winter continue to exist in the still of my Northern childhood memory, like a carefully crafted scene in a favored snow globe. As much as I enjoyed the season, I always loved when the barren quiet of winter gave way to the beauty of spring; February's snow blanket melting away to reveal the sleeping Earth that quietly lay beneath. The newness of possibility pushing forth from the earth as sleeping bulbs awakened and, once again, birthed a miracle. Tulips, hydrangea and crocus dotted the landscape as powerful reminders of nature's surprise.

Our seasons in Florida are not quite as dramatic, and yet they are bursting with distinctive beauty and emanate a palpable potential all their own. Each year, we transition between summer's balmy, humid days with skies of pink and blue, to the cooler chill of winter and an occasional white frost on our tropical vegetation. But as we enter March, the breezy, tepid winds of spring blow, our orchids and hibiscus flower and our lush surroundings return to their vivid hue of green.

Our earliest settlers, the Calusans of Southern Florida (800 C.E.), learned that this wonderful land of sand, earth and sun could yield not one, but two crops of corn per year, unlike their northern counterparts. Since Native

American tribes traveled extensively, they became proficient at quickly adapting to their new territory in an effort to utilize the area's astonishing offerings of agriculture, wild game and natural beauty. Larry Zimmerman explains, in his book "The Sacred Wisdom of the American Indian," that our area's first inhabitants remained hunters and gatherers and lived off the plentiful edible fruits, wild nuts and abundant game that were offered in our region's forests, open country and rivers. Our other first inhabitants, the Seminole Indians, developed different aspects of the Florida lifestyle, as they lived in open-sided dwellings thatched with palm branches and, according to Zimmerman, were particularly proficient in



the use of herbal medicines. The many important historical influences from both groups remain as vital aspects of Florida's original history and supplied the foundation upon which our present culture is built. The historical threads of Native American cloth are interwoven into many areas of our Floridian way of life.

To see their beauty, their history and their significance, we must remain open to those possibilities. We must keep our awareness set to the drum beat of gratitude and honor for all those who came before us. As Americans, we know our personal histories are varied. As a "melting pot," we have become adept at creating the societal soup of sameness. Our true beauty, however, lies in our fabulous differences. We must desire to see them.

Seeing, like listening, exists at various levels and depths. One can see (and/or listen) on the surface, as an observer; the bare necessities to only glean basic information, or enter into an esoteric discussion for the sake of intellectualization and ego aggrandizement only.

However, the true challenge is to "see" or listen with great depth and awareness. Jack Pransky, Ph.D., explains in his remarkable, yet simple book, "Somebody Should Have Told Us (Noteworthy Truths for Living Well)," that we need to develop the ability to feel our way through problems, instead of thinking them through, and that deeply listening to others instead of our own feelings gives a richer life experience. This is also true when related to sight.

To appreciate the beauty of a budding flower or wispy fern, it takes a quiet moment of open awareness. The

details blur on a quick busy and noisy drive-by. The beauty and possibilities of nature's surprises are enhanced in a moment of active awareness of sight and sound. The challenge is to find the beauty, potential and astonishment of spring...every day.

Here are five suggestions to enhance your awareness and enrich your life:

1. For three minutes, while breathing slowly and deeply, quietly look at a plant or flower. Notice its colors and shapes, as if for the first time. Have an awareness of the sounds around you: the wind, birds, the water, etc.

2. Really look at the faces of the people around you. Strangers on the street, at the grocery store or in line at the movies. Note one feature that is beautiful in each face.

3. Offer one true verbal compliment to five people in your circle relating to something personal about them.

4. Consciously look into the eyes of the waiter, the bank teller or the check-out guy at the grocery store when you speak to them.

5. While breathing deeply and slowly, remind yourself of five aspects of your inner self that you love about you. Surround yourself in that warmth and let it enter every cell of your being and nurture your energetic potentiality and grounded wisdom.

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