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Rich Pickings from Berry Cottage

little steps towards a lighter existence, through reflection and
voluntary simplicity.

by Anne Howe

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We plan our lives according to a dream that came to us in our childhood, and we find that life alters our plans. And yet, at the end, from a rare height, we also see that our dream was our fate. It's just that providence had other ideas as to how we would get there. Destiny plans a different route, or turns the dream around, as if it were a riddle, and fulfills the dream in ways we couldn't have expected." ~ Ben Okri

This book would not have been possible without the inspiration of a few special people :

Nathalie for introducing me to blogging.

Tom , Scott and Ben for giving me an ipod, leading to a love of podcasts.

Becky, for asking the questions.

Anna from The Engaging Brand for her unflinching belief in the potential of social media.

Heather from WigglyWigglers for inspiring me to take the next step in using the blog to use my voice.

Last but not least, a thank you to Roger, the man who shares my life, who constantly reminds me that there is a slower option to take and that less energy does not mean a lesser life.

In 2007, Downshiftingpath was nominated for 4 blogging awards :

11100 list of Wonderful Women Bloggers

Change Begins at Home

Thinking Blogger

Bloggers for Global Change



The fleece whisperer stories

I submitted this and it has not been published, but I share it with you anyway. Constructive comments welcome.

A Pair of Full Fleeced Highland Sheep Grazing on the Grassy Shore of Loch Na Keal, Scotland¹

Beware the fleece whisperer*Do you speak knit? Do you have a song to sing? What does your knitting say about you? Historically, the way people clothed themselves was an expression not only of their heritage, the materials available to them but also of wealth. Silks and linen,*

spicy, warm colours would arrive from the East having travelled by boat or on horseback. Only the rich would be able to sport a garment woven from silk and thus their garments were an expression of whom they were, their status etc. Wars were fought and people perished for the feel of silk. At some point in our lives, we start to express our own individuality by the clothes we wear and present ourselves to the world in our clothing language. There are phases, or trends, such as the gothic black period that many of us go through before we discover our song and learn to sing a song with colours, shape and texture. For us now, it is both simpler and more complicated to learn that language. The clothing available to buy in many stores is

not only machine made, using manmade fibres in a variety of toxic colours but has also travelled miles across the globe to get to us and is cheap. Each fibre has the ability to be created in an individual yarn, by the way it is spun, the way it is plyed, the way it is washed. Names such as Merino, Bond, California Variegated Mutant, Cormo, Corriedale, Polypay, Drysdale, Elliottdale, Lincoln, Exmoor Horn, Llnwenog and Southdown sing in my ears and invite me to hear its song. I personally do not have the space to look after these animals but fleeces speak to me. At my local guild, a Jacob's fleece was laid out on the floor and drew me in. The colour mixtures of fawn to dark brown spoke of autumnal earthy tones. Each fleece I work with has a song to sing. I would not dare to dye a Jacob's fleece as its colours sing their own song. Sometimes the crimp in the fibre makes me want to make it into a blanket or socks that not only will keep the person warm but give them a spring in their step. The fleece of a sheep is a gift, soft downy hair, covered in lanolin to be spun into a thread that will hold, that can be knit with or even woven with. The tools of the fleece whisperer are quiet. The spinning wheel not only makes a whirring soothing sound that has the ability to lull babies into a contented sleep and mesmerise small children, it creates a magic twist of the fiber. While the baby sleeps in her cradle, my hands spin and ply the fleece into a yarn. Big pillowcases full of cream, white or coloured fluff will stop an unsteady toddler from falling over. The kitchen smells of waffles and cookies often mingle with the magic of the dying pot. A giant vat stands on the stove and bubbles away. Plant materials are grown, ground, torn, stewed and hanks of yarn cooked in their liquids. Drawing them out of the pot with long wooden tongs never fails to create a magical spectacle. Dying with natural dyes is unpredictable and unique. The hand dyed yarns available now sing like sirens to many of us. Like every language, the sounds we hear, are sounds until we understand their meaning. When we understand their meaning, with repetition we utter

small words.....ball, hank, fleece. With the years our vocabulary grows to include verbs such as spinning, knitting, weaving and even crochet. Later again, we can include descriptive language such as knit, purl, basketweave, lace, intarsia. New words such as clapotis enter knit speak and although non native knitsibs may not understand the significance of clapotis they soon will when we take the patience in our knitting circles to explain patiently both how to speak clapotis, its meaning and how to produce it with the simple tools of sticks and string. Whenever clapotis is spoken, you will get a different individual expression of the original vision created by its creator. There is a possibility for each of us to discover knitspeak, adding new words to our vocabulary so that we can create individual items whose colour, texture and yarn sing their song. The background music is provided by the animal that gave its fleece, rhythm by the whirring of the spindle or spinning wheel, as well as the clicking of the needles that enable this song to flow free. The unique way it shapes itself, it begets life, is what makes the knitting process a conversation between all elements. When the fleece whisperer's words are heard, it not only calls; feel me, buy me, make me a shawl but it calls to the magician in you to respond, sing your song and bring a warm glow to our hearts. The fleece whisperer is around whenever you meet with other knitsibs. Sit closely to someone who understands and shares your knitspeak and togetherness will happen, an intertwining bond and warmth will envelop you. The individual songs you create with knitspeak will not always be understood by uninitiated recipients but something in it, whether it be fleece, colour or texture will get a response. Do you speak knit and what does your song sound like, let's hear..... let's create waves of songs..... songs of love and symphonies together to soothe the world and lull it into the peace it craves.©

Angora 2007

Thu May 31, 2007 | 09:44 AM |

Don't buy the feeling.....

The definition of fun is

Fun: Playful release of energy to achieve healing through balance or transformation.

A children fun was part of our vocabulary, actually most things we enjoy bring us some kind of satisfaction. When we are told what we should, ought to, must, do.....then some of the fun seems to miss from the equation.

The implications of doing something we enjoy are that chemicals in our body, endorphins are released that make us feel happy and contented. If we do something that we have to do, but actually do not enjoy, we release negative chemicals into our body and this can lead to toxicity , illness and disease.

Many of us make decisions not for what is good for us as individuals but what we need to do to keep up with the trends that are sold to us via the media. Every advert for 4 x 4 cars is about adventure, fun, climbing sandbanks in the Sahara desert, mountain climbing as where most people with a 4 x 4 drive them in the city, maybe hankering after that adventure that will make them feel good. So when you are persuaded to buy a product, you buy into the feeling of having the product and so, you must have it. Scary thoughts.

The question is what can you do that makes you happy, is fun and comes from your inner soul. My children still have a sense of inbuilt fun, but as an adult I often hear myself say things like ' well that sounds like fun, but I am too old for that orI really ought to go and do this or that'. I am not talking about being irresponsible and having nothing but fun in your life, we all have responsibilities but what I seek is a balance.If to feel good, I have to buy something that costs me a fortune and means that I need to go and work for another 4 years to pay it off, then that seems to create a spiral of discontentment. If on the other hand, a walk on the beach, toes in the water is going to make me feel connected and doing something that I consider fun, then I can do that, I have the time, I am 3 miles from the beach and why not take a picnic and make a day of it.



It may be that some little root of the sacred tree still lives. Nourish it then, that it may leaf and bloom and fill with singing birds.

Black Elk

Chicken safety

Avian flu arrives in the UK and no one seems to be clear as to how it is being spread, apart from speculation that wild birds may have something to do with it. An outbreak was discovered at the Bernard Matthews 2farm and factory I cannot help but reflect on the reasons why we still encourage large scale meat production of this kind.

The cost of cheap meat may not be immediate but you get what you pay for and poor living conditions, and stressed birds are going to reduce the bird's immune system and leave it wide open to virus infections, just the same as humans.

There is a requirement to register flocks of 50 or more birds with Defra, so that they have an idea of where each chicken is (on satellite probably). I understand this to be a sensible measure, probably involves a lot of bureaucracy and form filling, that enables the government to tell flock owners at risk. The usual procedure is mass extermination of the birds and complete disinfection of the areas they occupied. Strangely enough, owners nearby the site3 have not been contacted and the question is, why would they say their birds are not at risk. Has it got to do with the fact that they roam free, have excellent hygiene and feed them when they want to...i.e. the birds are less stressed? Some people have panicked and killed all their chickens even before there was an outbreak.

It seems ridiculous that they want to know where each chicken is, but they cannot find criminals or illegal immigrants or lost children. It surely is a matter of time before we all get computer chips in our bodies and they can find us with sat nav. New passports have a chip implanted for that particular reason I am sure. There has to be some computer somewhere that tracks human movement across the globe in the interests of national security. So, soon, all animals, humans and anything that moves will be registered and seen from the sky.

Practically there is little I can do for my birds apart from making sure that they live in an excellently clean henhouse, have clean water every day and have plenty of good food to eat. If the outbreak gets closer we will have to monitor what happens.

Thu Feb 08 09:27:00 GMT 2007 |

1 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/index.htm>

2 <http://www.bernardmatthews.com/?ppc=1>

3 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6332781.stm>



TIME

The link between time and reality is insoluble. We can divorce ourselves from time only by undoing reality, or from reality only by undoing the sense of time. Categorical time is measured by clocks and calendars; existential time is that which is experienced, lived in, rather than observed.

The concept of time studied in a normal group of children ranging from age three to six years old, found that when they learnt to tell clock time, external factors became increasingly important in establishing time sense. Prior to this age, with many individual variations, to be sure, diurnal rhythm, the concept of the day as a unit of 24 hours, was described in terms of personal experiences.

These first included physiological functions, such as bowel movements, sleeping, and eating, and later said factors as interpersonal and play activities. The seasonal time, with its enormous and often unpredictable variations, was poorly understood in all the children studied.

The emergence of the concept of time in children is the result of the interaction between the child with his private experiences and his own rhythmic needs and an external world with external physical forces (lights, dark, cold, and so forth) and significant adults, both of which have rhythmic patterns of their own. They postulate that the sense of past, present, and future follows a hunger feeding satisfaction sequence that necessitates an adequate mother- child relationship as well as physical need satisfaction.

Mann, J Time-Limited Psychotherapy (1973:4)

The world may be speeding up, or is it really. Is this a sense within ourselves that we are working a 9 to 5 job, hurtling

rightly the world as it is, the business world, may not function if we do not have a sense of time, chaos would prevail, but it is my opinion that the way we use time and the clock currently is not compatible with the body and mind we have at the moment. This in principle is the cause of stress in many our lives.

A friend told me recently that her father had been discharged from the hospital and sent home to be cared for by his wife, because they decided he had only about 6 weeks to live. The fact is that the man is still alive 6 months later. It is obviously not yet his rhythmic time to stick to the 6 weeks given by the doctors. (what gives them the right anyway!). In the meantime, the daughter travels every weekend and spans 300 miles in a car to visit home, and this is showing signs of stress as it is not compatible with looking after her own family and holding down a full time job. The mother who is looking after her husband, is suffering stress and a variety of physical symptoms, not only because she is facing the death of a loved one, but because apparently no help can be provided as he is not going to live longer than 6 weeks.

This example to me highlights how we are living in a time managed environment and at the same time, what should be the ending of a life, in its own time, is being scheduled in.

Here on the homestead we also have time, but my experience of it is that it does not rule my mind and body to the above extent. We get up and the children go to school, but for the majority of the day we can make decisions as to how we are going to spend our time. We have rhythms and actions that take place every day, such as dog walking, feeding the chickens etc, and yet within that is some movement for unexpected events. We are more aware of downtime in winter and up time in summer, how our bodies need rest in winter and can spend longer out during the summer time. Plants grow when the light and heat conditions are right and with climate change this too is

changing. Just because the packet says, plant in February, may simply not be feasible in the future. With climate change comes an awareness that our perception of time and its seasons, the expected patterns are changing. We may be able to still control our clocks and calendars but they are based on what we perceived to be certain facts and rhythms. These are changing.....could this be a coincidence?

If you need to be at a meeting at 9 am, the train you want to take is delayed, you might get stressed out. I have observed people in a bus (the train was not running) being furious at the railway system for causing a delay.

Slowing down is incredibly difficult to do as many people experience when they go on holiday, and yet, I am convinced that we are not yet adapted to living in an environment that speeds up on a regular basis, we may not quite have evolved for that. Being pushed by time, challenging our physical and mental abilities, speeding up has an impact on our personal experiences and the world that surrounds us.

Not so long ago, man was in touch with nature and the natural rhythms.....a clock may be ticking

Mon Feb 12 09:58:00 GMT 2007 |

Eye candy

The weekend was spent with friends. Winter seems to offer us the opportunity to meet with friends we have not seen for a year (as they are too busy). We enjoyed some laughs, some good home food and the boys had time to explore their world together.

Yesterday, we were entertained and introduced to more people in our community. Some we knew, some we did not and we enjoyed lunch with 25 other people. The reason for

our invite is that I have been spinning the alpaca blanket for the hostess, which she proceeded to show off to many at the party. It suddenly dawned on me that maybe this would increase word of mouth about what we do, in a way that advertising just simply would not achieve. I met artists, men who paint, people who do lectures on local history, someone building an eco house, an actor who played in the local pantomime and someone who plays the accordeon and is a wealth of knowledge on folk songs and local customs.

It is a change from the and functions we attended in the past, where there was a definite outcome, a definite way to be dressed, be seen lunches etc. How refreshing to relax in good company, with people who have stopped pretending to be someone and actually show exactly who they are and what they do.

Mon Feb 12 10:00:00 GMT 2007 |

Slow cooking

Long winter days, curled by the fire or busy days out in the garden or walking in nature, the stove can be found cooking my slow food for dinner.

A classic beef casserole serves 6, is magically cooked as follows :

1 1'2 lb beef skirt

1 oz seasoned flour

1 tablespoon of vegetable oil

1 oz butter

1 large onion

3 carrots, thickly sliced

2 teaspoons on mustard

3/4 pint of beef stock

Cut the meat in large cubes and toss in seasoned flour. Heat the oil and butter in a large frying pan and brown the meat on all sides. Drain and place in a casserole dish.

In the heated pan, saute the onion and carrots until the onion is just starting to colour and slightly soften. Add to the meat. Stir in the mustard into the pan and scrape the residue from the base of the pan before stirring in the stock. Stir well, bring to the boil and pour over the meat. Bring to the boil and transfer to the simmering oven for 4 to 5 hours, or electric at 140 CB. Thicken gravy before serving if you like.