

CobaltSaffron

A FREE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Life relevantly lived

“The imagination and intentions displayed in your newsletter are all well and fine, but I can’t help but feel that it’s completely obscure. For the average person trying to move along in life, your ideas seem irrelevant and like just more naïve, self-indulgent philosophy alongside the road.”

Which road is that? The one that goes to the job, the bank and the shopping mall, then directly to the cemetery?

I always cringe when in the presence of those who view curiosity and imagination as either irrelevant or an expression of naivety. Not so much because of the tone of “worldly-wise” superiority, as if maturity is learning to get beyond imaginative curiosity (from which all roads were created) to cynical criticism. Not so much because of the blatant disregard for those who applied imagination to create the things we benefit from (including the chair you’re sitting in, the computer you wrote your opinion on, and the words you used to do so). Not so much because all problems we encounter personally or as a community depend entirely upon curiosity and imagination to resolve them. And not so much because those who are compelled enough to actually risk envisioning something other than the common road to already-known destinations are seen as the enemy. But mainly because of the ignorance and naivety fueled by hubris that causes the unquestioned presumption that one already knows not only what to pursue, but also what others should pursue.

What can be more naive and irrelevant than to not have noticed that one’s life has been spent pursuing things that made little or no difference to anyone, even to oneself?

The greatest persons I have met have been relentlessly opposed throughout their lives, not because of the specifics of their imagination or vision, but simply because they had imagination and vision. I’ve been witness to my children’s struggles to maintain their curiosity and imagination within an educational system that has no plan or program for keeping these alive. I’ve worked with thousands of persons whose primary suffering is caused by trying to keep wonderment alive in a world that demands its annihilation so as to fit in.

In my naïve opinion, for “the average person,” as you put it, obscurity and irrelevance is the personal experience that comes from having lost wonderment and fascination for life. Self-indulgence then becomes the preferred technique for recuperating some residual sense of joy. The end result is finding yourself on a road you never even wanted to be on. You haven’t noticed this?

It may very well be that my articulation of these ideas is obscure. That’s probably a fault of mine in trying to find an original and effective imagery to convey their essence. But the qualities themselves—true passionate curiosity, imagination and wonderment, and ultimately awed fascination—are the source of every creation and discovery. So, they are relevant, at least to those interested in creating and discovering. They may be intimidating and overwhelming in their implications, especially when we consider how difficult they are to really locate and live according to. In their absence, however, what’s left over that’s truly relevant?

Perhaps these qualities themselves strike you as being naïve? As though they’re reserved for small children and those who can’t handle responsibility and the requisites for success in life. What then, exactly, is success? And what are our real responsibilities?

When I think of my responsibility and what success would really be for me, my mind immediately goes to providing something essential to those I love, such as my children. Certainly you’ve heard of the idea, “What I really want for my children is for them to be happy.” And you can probably imagine that to do that well, to aid someone else in being happy, is not an obvious and easy thing to do. In other words, it would take some imagination in considering how to go about it. One would need to be passionately curious about what makes up happiness, for example.

“What then, exactly, is success? And what are our real responsibilities?”

Is this still relevant? Or is it naïve and obscure to consider how to help make a loved one happy?

So, I’m thinking of what makes for a happy person. Perhaps there are clues sitting around somewhere. Common periodicals and books present the results of research made into the nature of happiness. For example, there are no consistent patterns of deeper happiness amongst certain age groups, gender, levels of income or education, location of residence, type of job, or specific belief system or religious preference. So, I’d cross those off the list and look elsewhere.

What are the signs of happiness in persons I’ve met? Well, they laugh a lot, listen well and are consistently generous. They’ve realized that being right doesn’t make a bit of difference. There’s also a certain noticeable fearlessness, as if what they’re compelled by is more appealing than security and the opinions of others. It’s as if they create their own answers instead of living out others’ answers. They’re passionate about what they do. Somehow, they’ve kept alive some sense of vital wonderment. And finally, they all have a deep curiosity, as if mystery and discovery are always more fascinating than just knowing.

Then, if I were to take this responsibility seriously, the one of helping to make loved ones happy, I suppose I'd then make choices to promote the qualities described above. And I'd probably try to keep these qualities alive in myself so that I could show how they function, give examples of their value, and share in their expression.

I'd also probably need to identify and work to protect the loved ones from the many forms of violence that seek to destroy these qualities, at least until they could protect themselves. So, I'd have to learn, for one thing, how to guard against everything that demands that they shrink to fit into the obligatory, irrelevant monotony of the unimagined life, the one without any passion, curiosity or wonderment. I'd suggest to them from time to time to remember to not follow directions from someone who could not discern the difference between relevance and irrelevance. Also, that they avoid those who complain or criticize without offering an envisioned solution. And that they never trade away their fascination for a lesser thing.

“They never trade away their fascination for a lesser thing.”

If I could achieve that, I'd look back on my life with the sense that I had succeeded, that my primary responsibilities had been fulfilled. That would be a life relevantly lived.

Perhaps, though, as you say, these ideas are just naïve and self-indulgent. What would you propose so that I better understand how to move along in life?

Darrell Calkins
May 2005

Comments

Thank you for your comments about the April issue of CobaltSaffron. Excerpts from a few we received:

“Hilarious newsletter!! Like a tsunami (of laughs) taking you by surprise! I enjoyed it very much...”

G.M., France.

“I don’t know if it works the same way for everybody, but I notice that when I have more time on my hands I find more things to complain about. So, I go into a snowball of projects and work so that I don’t have the chance to even sleep. But then again, I still have room to complain and I don’t have time to do something about it...! Does this ever get to a different place?”

M.B., California.

Upcoming events:

Getting Your Ass Over the Bar

June 25 & 26, Los Angeles

Enduring Essentials for Living Well (in an unwell world)

July 9 & 10, San Francisco

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We welcome questions, comments and complaints.

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