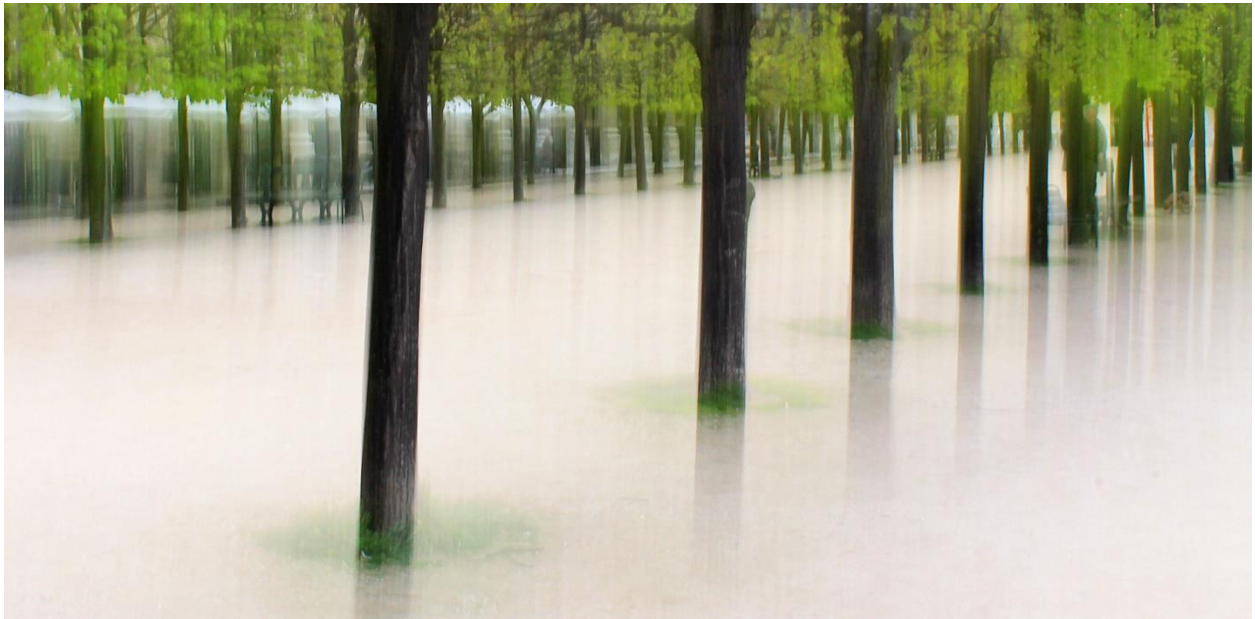


IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS

Periodical Letter #11
January 2020

from
FREEMAN PATTERSON



In the courtyard of le Palais Royal, Paris, France



I made both of the preceding photographs on the same morning (entirely with my little Canon Rebel, except for cropping to produce the dimensions that I wanted when I composed the images.) Both of the pictures haunt me, although in different ways. Each one evokes a sense of mystery, of the unusual, of the unknown. For example, the first image asks, “How can it possibly be icy winter and vibrant spring at the same time?”

As I’ve stated in previous letters, when we are creating photographs, paintings, gardens, or other art solely for ourselves, allowing ourselves to feel “our feelings,” we are telling our life stories with enormous accuracy. And the fact of the matter is that, more than usual, my life recently seems to have been a juxtaposition of icy winter and vibrant spring. Here’s why.

It’s a new year and a new decade! Today I am celebrating (vibrant spring), because January 2020 marks the 20th anniversary of my two liver transplants and, as far as my doctors and I can tell and my quarterly blood tests show, I’m in superb health and quite fit. I’m also grateful beyond measure.

Little did I know what lay ahead when I received the call from the transplant clinic at 10:40 p.m. on January 25, 2000. All I remember about that night was being strapped to a gurney in the Saint John, New Brunswick airport an hour later, being wheeled out into the frigid, black night to the small Medivac plane, and thinking as I made the 35-minute flight to Halifax that, as millennium projects go, a liver transplant was definitely “a biggie.” There was a “frisson” about it, all the danger and excitement of skating on thin ice. Little did I or anybody else know how thin the ice really was.

Canada is divided into regions for transplant purposes and normally the donor and the recipient come from the same part of the country. In my case, as my donor’s family experienced the sense of overwhelming loss of their husband and father in one room of Halifax’s huge Queen Elizabeth 11 Hospital, I was filled with hope in another room not very far away. And then, injected with anaesthetic, I was wheeled off to the operating theatre, but I did not wake up again until early March, because my millennium project failed. My body rejected the liver and, as organ after organ ceased to function, I was placed on life support, where I remained for five days. Basically, it seems to have been my heart that saved me; it never missed a beat.

As the transplant team had replaced my barely-functioning liver with one that did not function at all, it put out a cross-Canada call for another medically compatible liver and, five days later, after considering whether or not I had any hope of surviving, they gave me the second liver and put me into an induced coma, where I remained for six weeks. In March, shortly after I was beginning to wake up

again, Dr. Vivian McAlister, my transplant surgeon came by with a message for me. “Freeman, he said, you’ve had two transplants, not one. You’ve won Lotto 649 five weeks in a row; you shouldn’t be here.”

But here I am! And all I can do is rejoice and celebrate! I’ve had twenty years I never counted on and, by virtually every measure, the best and happiest years of my entire life!

Now comes the icy winter. One of my closest friends was diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus in late October and informed that there is also cancer in his stomach and a spot on his liver. This news rocked him, his partner, and many friends. These days hearing such news and living with all its realities and implications is a common experience, which does not change the pain of each particular situation.

Knowing that this is their trip-of-a-lifetime together, my friend and his partner are being both realistic and hopeful. They aren’t “fighting” cancer, but rather living with it, doing all the necessary and good things they have to do in the hope that the radiation and chemotherapy will achieve the desired result. They cry unashamedly and can laugh hilariously. They pay attention to the quality of time.

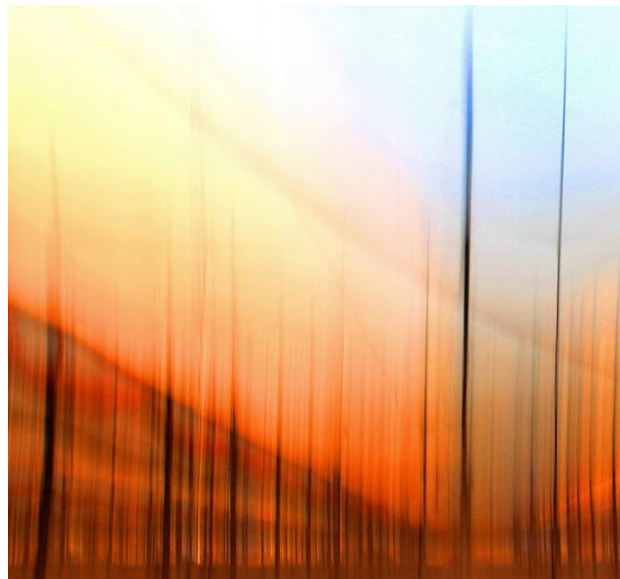
Worry and hope! Sadness and pure joy! Winter and spring!

.....

“Scriptures do not offer rational certitude. They offer us something much better, an entirely different way of knowing: an intimate relationship, a dark journey, a path where we must discover for ourselves that grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness are absolutely necessary for survival in an uncertain world.... People who live in this way never stop growing, are not easily defeated, are wise and compassionate, and frankly, are fun to live with. They have a quiet and confident joy. Infantile religion insists on certainty every step of the way and thus is not very happy.” *Richard Rohr*

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Richard Rohr’s statement (above) brings me back to the many photographs I’ve made that ask as many questions as they answer. I puzzle over **WHY** I made some of them and usually come to the conclusion that it’s too early to know, so I tell myself to be patient. It’s in the wondering and the asking that I often learn something about myself that’s useful to know. In that respect, art is very like scripture.



Lines repeated at regular or predictable intervals (rhythm) are essential to the overall composition of my three preceding images. As in a great many musical compositions, rhythm in visual constructions gives a sense of order and a unity of impression. It ranks right up there with the organizing principles of balance, proportion, and dominance. To see 10 compositions that depend on rhythm, click [RHYTHM](#).



Backlighting maple trees after an ice storm

Because the short, slightly curving lines in the above photograph aren't repeated at regular or predictable intervals, they can't be called "rhythmic." However, they do produce an overall unifying effect. Obviously, I created them with quick short camera movements at a slow shutter speed. Every photographer will guess that I repeated the movement several times, compared the results, and then selected the images I prefer.

Observing the backlit trees through a window of my house was the first step in making the compositions, realizing that I wanted to convey something of my feeling response was the second, and deciding on the direction and amount of camera movement (if any) was the third.

I make most of my photographs, not as a result of going out looking for "things" or "situations," but by making a habit of observing what's around me wherever I am and then, hopefully, being able to get my camera quickly when something captures my attention in a special or particular way. It's a bit like being fluent in a language - when you're ready to say something, you open your mouth and the words simply flow.



“People are always talking about spending ‘quality time’ with their kids, or their friends, or even with themselves. I don’t get it! All time has quality. I just wish they’d specify what kind of quality they are talking about!”

Emma Jones

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Yes, Emma, I spent good quality time with the maple trees, the ice, and the sunlight. A lot like dancing!

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“... traces of the sacred are everywhere before our eyes ... our task ... is to find these sacred moments, hallow them with our attention, and raise them up as a celebration of the mystery of life. We must take the time to stop and listen, knowing that the voice of the spirit speaks more often in a whisper than a shout. ...”

Kent Nerburn, The Hidden Beauty of Everyday Life

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Recently I received an advance copy of Philip Lee’s RESTIGOUCHE: The Long Run of the Wild River from Goose Lane Editions, the highly-regarded Canadian book publisher located in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Lee’s book, which is on their 2020 spring list, will be released in April. The copy came with a request from the author and the publisher: would I be prepared to write a “blurb” of 50-100 words for promotion, use on the cover, etc.?

Although I’ve never met Lee, who teaches at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, I’ve long been aware of his high-quality, in-depth journalism and his interest in environmental issues. Even so, I was unprepared for, but thrilled by, the incredibly rich experience that this book has provided me, and I’m having difficulty not being “carried away” to the point that nobody will believe what I have to say.

This is what I want to write: “In this love story about one wild river, which is also a compelling metaphor for all love stories about wild places, Lee describes the intricate and intimate discoveries, the profound caring, and the deep pleasure of a long-time relationship and, in the process, connects us with All That Is.” The publisher may feel that’s “over the top” and put an editor to work. One never knows.

However, I can safely say that even if you’ve never heard of the Restigouche river, you’ll find this book highly informative not only about the specific river, but about how most rivers have changed radically because of human impact. So, in addition to the love story, I recommend this book strongly for its rich educational content presented in a way that made the book “non-down-put-able” for me. You can pre-order the book from <https://gooselane.com/products/restigouche>.

Also, I’d like to draw your attention again to David Maginley’s award-winning, BEYOND SURVIVING: Cancer and Your Spiritual Journey. This bestseller is for patients, family, friends, caregivers, and medical personnel, but it’s both practically and spiritually illuminating even if you don’t know anybody with cancer. You can order from a local book store, Amazon, or David at www.davidmaginley.com. David and I co-facilitate the annual INSCAPE workshop in St. Martin’s, New Brunswick.

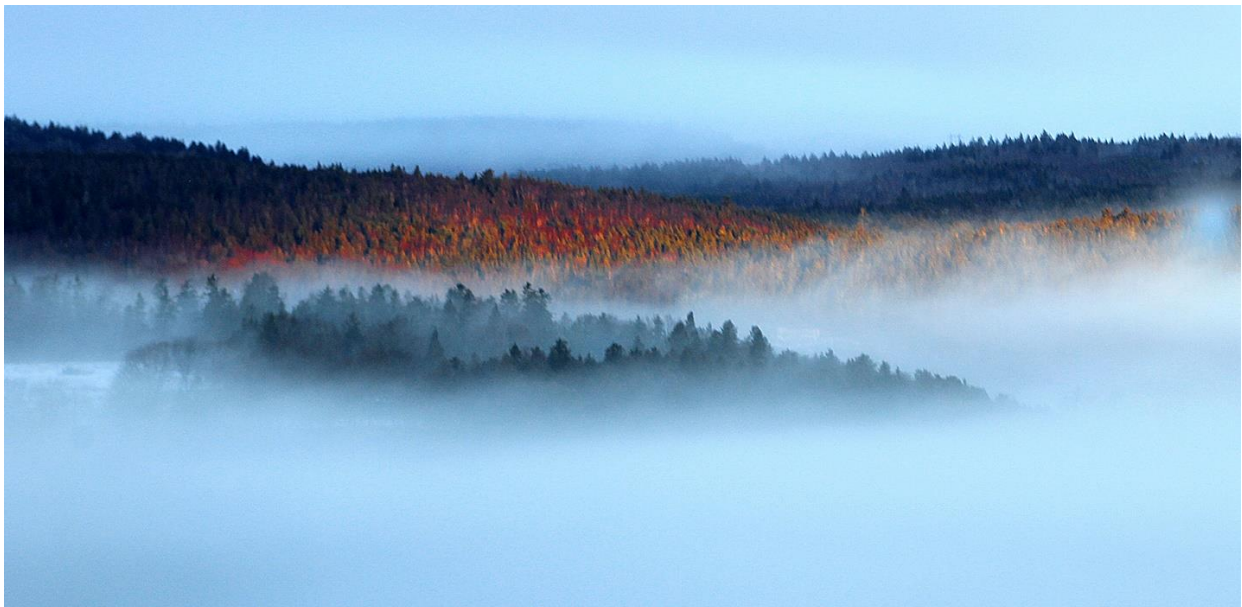
And, you may recall that in IMAGES, IDEAS, and REFLECTIONS #8 I wrote about WHY WE SLEEP: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams by Dr. Matthew Walker, a professor of neuroscience and psychology at the University of California (Berkeley), the director of its Sleep and Neuroimaging Lab, and a former professor of psychiatry at Harvard. One person who read the book after I’d recommended it wrote to tell me that he then went out and bought five more copies and gave one to each of his children. This was certainly the most memorable response, but by no means the only one.

Since I've been writing about both rhythm and health, I'd like to call everybody's attention to organ-and-tissue donation. Obviously, I speak from a biased perspective, but the fact that I am speaking at all depends on two families who, through their generosity at a time when the normal rhythm of their lives had been turned upside down, turned my night into day.

During the seven weeks I spent in physiotherapy at the end of my long hospital stay, I often worked in the gym in close proximity to patients recuperating from unbelievably horrible burns, and I asked questions. Only then did I come to realize how important skin and bones are in transplant programs. I was strongly reminded of this recently when reading about the huge amount of "banked" skin that was needed for the large number of persons who were so horribly burned in the volcanic explosion on New Zealand's White Island. New Zealand had to order more from Canada and the U.S.A.

I'm very happy to be listed again as a possible organ-and-tissue donor and I'd like to encourage each of you to speak to your family and your doctor about this as well. Depending on where you live, you may also be able to indicate your wishes on your application for a driver's licence or a health card.

Thank you!



Autumn and winter mists – from my front deck

Today, New Year's Day, as I fly high above the clouds en route to Vienna and Tel Aviv, I have the perfect opportunity to celebrate quietly all the good that has come my way, which is abundant, and to consider carefully my omissions and mis-steps of 2019. One thing I like about a long flight is the opportunity to withdraw easily from the active world, perhaps to listen to some superb music for a while, and then to meditate, to contemplate, and simply to be.

It's in these moments and when I am alone in wilderness that I often feel most intensely connected to All That Is, to the whole of Creation. My mantra, if you will, is simple: "Creation creates. Creation created me. I live in Creation and Creation lives in me." Or, if you don't mind the terminology, "I live in God and God lives in me." The two are just different ways of saying the same thing.

The longer I live the more deeply excited I feel about the magnitude of the mystery of which we all are part. Science and theology have everything in common.



Happy New Year! FREEMAN

freemanpatterson2@gmail.com

www.freemanpatterson.com

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