

Fine-tuning

By Norie

When the bush warblers start singing in early spring their song is unsteady, off-rhythm and even missing a few notes at times. As the season draws to an end, their song steadily becomes stronger and more beautiful and melodic. I've heard it said that, as with cicadas and doves, this fine-tuning of their song is fostered by their community and when the song is right, it's a sign that they're thriving in it.

**Nature poets can't walk
across the backyard
without tripping over an
epiphany. -
Christian Wiman**

Just like the songs of these birds and bugs, I feel the song of humans and all living creatures is the same.

When I lived in the once bucolic suburbs of Englishtown, New Jersey as a child, I sang often - on the swings under the willow in our backyard, as I rolled down the hills and as I played with the fireflies and ladybugs. Any activity had a song and I'd make up the words as I went along.

Then, my family moved to an area in the center of Tokyo where although greener than other urban areas, there were no more hills or backyard swing sets, and the sole purpose of trees and shrubs was to define borders. Tokyo was still a relatively new city, as it had been devastated many a time, by air raids, raging fires and earthquakes. There was nothing to preserve, nothing to hold as sacred.

**I do not understand how
anyone can live
without one small place
of enchantment to turn
to.**

-
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

Contact with nature became less frequent as I was forced inside to do schoolwork, and as TV became a more attractive mode of passively interacting with the world around me. Bedtime stories of jungles and prairies and lullabies of fairies and flowers were of a distant world, a world I had been severed from by life urbana.

Summertime in my grandparent's lush garden and

wild woods overflowing with flora in Ohio was my only connection back to that magical world. But years passed quickly and as I grew older, nature became like an enigmatic other - I had transformed into an urbanite au complete.

After school, the college I chose was less for the pursuit of studies than for the search of a place where I could again be surrounded by greenery, back in a place where it overwhelms. I was in love with New Orleans - it brought me back to the trees and back to the earth. But success in school and the professional world beyond became the leading priority, and again, I became severed from a life harmonic with nature.

Eventually, I returned to Tokyo to work and reached the place I wanted to be in my career as an architect, but at the same time, my body crashed. Looking back, it's no wonder. I hadn't

sung for years and I was indoors for most of my days and nights. All around me, the concrete jungle was closing in - covering every last bit of earth without leaving even a hint of her richness. I sympathized with the dandelions that had burst through the cracks in the pavement, but it was a losing battle.

I had no choice but to move away from the city I loved because it had shaped my identity. I finally realized it was taking the life of me and the life of all I loved.

Connection with gardens, even small ones, even potted plants, can become windows to the inner life. The simple act of stopping and looking at the beauty around us can be prayer.

-
Patricia R. Barrett, The Sacred Garden

Fortune led me to a house with a garden alongside a preserved natural wooded area, where I am blessed by the community of many creatures of the earth and the coolness of the woods. And my soul is singing again.

- Ecosis
May 21, 2007

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