



By Margaret Evans, Editor

When you're a woman of my rapidly advancing years and particular interests, chances are you've ingested the thoughts of so many great minds – again and again – that those thoughts are now part of your *own* mind, mixing and melding into a kind of spiritual background music, the soundtrack of your solitude.

Some days – while folding clothes or watering plants or frying an egg – you might hear a strong melody of CS Lewis or JRR Tolkien, with harmonies provided by GM Hopkins or Madeleine L'Engle or Thomas Aquinas. Other days, Emily Dickinson might carry the tune, while Walt Whitman sings bass and Dylan Thomas warbles a descant. It sort of depends on your mood.

Every now and then, however, a motif will rise to the surface of your mental symphony/jam session, and you'll realize: "Hey, I'm quoting myself! / said that!" And then you'll blush with modesty . . . and a wee bit of delight.

This happened to me recently when I was out for my morning walk, which took me down

Park Street, as it often does. I was watching a couple of cardinals flirting in mid-air, and wondering about the vultures circling overhead – where was the road kill? – and it occurred to me that the oak trees along this street were looking really good. Suddenly, a phrase popped into my head – “from spectacular to spread-eagle” – and I remembered a column I’d written about these trees a while back . . . more than *four years* back, I discovered, when I got home and found the piece online. The excerpt in question went like this:

“... the beauty of the neighborhood was staggering that morning. As I walked along, I could almost see the dogwoods blooming in slow motion, the wisteria materializing from vapor, the azaleas willing their bright blossoms into the world . . . But then I turned onto Park Street, and I saw *them*. The trees. Like a hideous monster invading a sweet dream, the carnage shook me from my reverie. SCE&G had been “trimming” trees in our neighborhood – something they do every five years, to accommodate the power lines – and so far, Park Street had gotten the worst of it. That’s because Park Street has some of the *best* trees – an impressive strand of gargantuan, wide-sprawling live oaks. These majestic beauties had been mangled but good – scooped out, gutted – and now looked like gnarly old women doing splits upside-down, their remaining limbs awkwardly straddling the power lines. In a few fell swoops by men on machines in hardhats, these centuries-old oaks had gone from **spectacular to spread-eagle** . It was borderline grotesque.”

Well, that was then, and this is now. I’m happy to report that in just over four years, the oak trees of Park Street have reverted to their “spectacular” state. The bad news is that SCE&G will probably cut them back again soon. (Every five years, remember?)

It’s really not such a tragedy, I suppose, now that I’ve seen their resilience displayed with such staggering aplomb. Not that I ever really doubted it.

That’s nature for you.

I’ve become slightly obsessed with nature, as you might have noticed, and that obsession is manifesting itself not only in this column, but in my newfound hobby of photographing the natural world – especially obscure, unobtrusive life forms I scope out while strolling through my neighborhood and beyond. I often post my favorite images on Facebook, and folks seem to enjoy them. I’m always pleased when people comment on these pictures, and especially when they’re compelled to share their own.

The other day I posted a new batch, with the following commentary:

“As I took my walk this morning, I noticed tidy, well-tended gardens in yards of all shapes and sizes and was thankful to have such neighbors. But for some reason, my camera lens is always drawn to the stragglers . . . the little things growing and flourishing between houses . . . on corners . . . in ditches . . . behind trees . . . in the pluff mud at low tide. Life springing up where nobody cares, or even sees. These hidden beauties touch me in some deep place where joy and sorrow live side by side. They give me hope.”

The album included photos of weeds, wildflowers, and a few quirky mushrooms I spotted behind a log.

My friend Tommy from college commented, “I’m always drawn to Life’s ability to find a way. Its perseverance, its tenacity,” and posted a photo of a pretty plant sprouting from some concrete steps.

Tommy knows a lot about “life’s ability to find a way.” An obstetrician who defeated cancer a few years ago, but lost some stability in his hand as a result of treatment, he gave up his vocation and turned to his avocation – art – full time. Before cancer, his job was to deliver new life into the world. Literally. Today, he does the same thing, only a bit more figuratively, painting portraits of astonishing depth and beauty, images that radiate personality and soul. Despite a terrible setback at a relatively young age, Tommy persevered. And through his painting, life found a way.

Life always finds a way. And we are happiest, I think, when we’re part of the process . . . when we figure out our own special way of ushering it in, our unique way of serving as midwife.

Some people garden. Others raise animals. Or children. Some work as healers, or teachers, or ministers. Still others create art, helping birth beauty and awe into the world. My friend Debbi makes wonderful culinary creations . . . Mark strings words together like beads, his sentences like delicate bracelets . . . Donna takes photos of underwater creatures and translates them into abstract images that dazzle. Vic corrals a bunch of disparate voices – and personalities – into a harmonious choral ensemble, birthing sublime music into a sanctuary.

All of these pursuits pose their challenges.

But as my friend Tommy says, life is tenacious. It perseveres. Lay down a sidewalk, and wildflowers will sprout in the cracks. Put a man in prison, and he'll find God there. In the natural world and the world of the spirit, life finds a way. We can resist it – and in this age of collective contentiousness and distraction, there are plenty of ways to resist it – or we can be among those joyful midwives who help deliver it. The choice is ours to make, every day.