

Turn Right and Keep On Going
Sermon by Veda Lewis, Jan 5, 2020

Particles of Surprise
by Veda Lewis

Quantum Physics 101
Week one, string theory
Week two, particles of surprise

Surprises so powerful
they never fade
never shrink
only expand.

An unexpected card
or appearance
a handwritten letter
out of the blue.

Out of the blue
Out of the blue

The blue,
where particles of surprise
compare notes
accelerate outward
to put smiles on hearts and faces.

The Big Bang may have been
the bursting of these
molecules of joy.

We are all born with them.
Now matter how many we give away,
there are always plenty more.

Give some away today.
Sprinkle them on a loved one,
on a stranger.

Out of the blue

For a moment, let's put ourselves in the position of the Magi. They followed a star, found a newborn king, then were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. They were of one mind when they lay down to sleep that night, then "particles of surprise" visited them in their sleep. The next day "out of the blue" came the conviction to "return to their own country by another road".

Have you ever had an experience like that, where you suddenly realized you needed to "turn right and keep on going"?

I learned that phrase from abstract acrylic artist Bob Burrige. I first met Bob at a workshop at the community center many years ago. He graduated from art school with a bachelor's degree in industrial design and a minor in fine art painting. He had a very successful career as an industrial designer, running his own company and producing many designs, such as a hands-free automatic soap dispenser and hand dryer for public toilets. He holds 23 design, mechanical, and chemical patents.

During his almost 20 years in this field, however, nights and weekends he says he turned in to another person, a painter. Eventually, his passion consumed him. At age 43 he left industrial design and became a full-time painter and teacher. Now, at age 77, he continues to paint every day (a commitment he made to his wife, who manages their business), while exhibiting at galleries and teaching workshops all over the country.

With the energy of a second grader, he dives into a blank sheet of watercolor paper covered with gesso and applies a warm coat, a mid-tone like orange. The acrylic paint dries quickly and he adds more color, using brushes, sponges, forks and his finger. As he works, he shifts the tones and highlights often, while sticking to a concept and composition he has written in his journal before ever picking up a brush.

If the painting is not working out, he may wipe things out or make dramatic color changes. At this point, he tells his students to "Turn right and keep on going." "Turn right and keep on going." don't overthink it, take the action you know in your heart is what Rev. Curran mentioned a few Sundays ago as "the next right thing".

For me, and anyone who has received a cancer diagnosis, whether in remission or in active treatment as I am, there is a term called "scanxiety". Scanxiety is the anxiety that comes in the run-up to the next scan, doctor's visit, lab test, etc. The anxious questions are obvious- Has it come back? Is the treatment working? What are the options?

In a moment, life can be status quo or shift dramatically. Lately, I've been channeling my inner Bob Burrige, my inner Magi, and being ready to make that "right turn". For me, living my best life means charting a course every day.

Every day I know that in reality my sailboat is off-course most of the time and I must monitor the sails constantly and make corrections to stay on course. To do that, sometimes you have no choice but to ride out the storm.

Last year, a few weeks before I was diagnosed with a recurrence of my cancer, I wrote a poem for my loved ones on how to keep my everyday course, to live my best life, should I need to let go of the helm, turn right and keep on going. The poem is called, "If the time comes".

If the time comes
by Veda Lewis 2/17/19

If the time comes
when I have to do a lot of sitting
Because this wonderful body temple
has worn down and needs rest

If that time comes
place me near a window
where I can see the clouds
Watch the choreography
of their quiet wandering
across the sky

As a bonus,
I would love to see the hills too
Watching the shadows caress the treetops
wondering about the critters living there

If there's room for a tree or two or three
near the window
that would be wonderful
A native tree, not some ornamental
A native tree where the birds will come in spring
and eat the insects or the berries

A few flowers would be oh so nice
Let me water them, if I'm able

If none of these things are practical
my loved ones, not to worry
I am busy with the work
of committing these scenes to memory

I'm looking out my window as I write this
watching the silent clouds

cruise their masses across the skyscape
I'm listening to the hungry birds
at the feeders outside our window
happy the rain is watering the flowers,
for now

If none of these things are practical
my loved ones, not to worry.
I am busy going out into my world capturing memories,
smells and sights and physical sensations.

I am sketching the trees and the birds
to embed them in my mind.

I am taking pictures, writing poems,
having picnics, and listening to my flute notes
bounce off the walls of rockscapes
and underground parking garages.

If that time comes to this body
that the brain cannot recall the word for cloud
my loved ones, not to worry.

Make me a playlist of the sounds
from the world where I used to roam
Bring pictures of the cemetery my wife would clean
while I wrote poems and played my flute.
Bring me a bottle of sand from my favorite beach.

I'm counting on you, my loved ones,
to make some of these things happen.

If my loved ones are not available
I ask the same of you,
my caring caregiver.

Thank you in advance for trying to
place me near a window
pipe the sounds of the forest into my ears or
bring me a flowering plant.

I hope someone will do the same for you
if the time comes.

