

Faith, Hope and Fiction

Transitions

By Patricia Crisafulli

With the temperature only a few degrees above freezing it could hardly be called balmy, yet the sun shone through a hazy veil like light behind a screen. A large man walking a small dog greeted me as I jogged up the street, “Feels like spring today!” I replied with the perfunctory, “It will be here before we know it,” but as soon as I uttered those words I began to wonder about the truth in them.

A photograph would belie the meteorological optimism. Knee-high snow banks crouched on corners, and lawns remained covered in white with ugly gray clumps on the edges. The trees were stark; shrubbery wore caps of snow. And yet there was an unmistakable hint of something in the air as birds chirped loudly every time the sun appeared, and a light breeze carried a breath of warmth.

Here in the northern hemisphere we are in transition as the Earth rights herself toward Equinox, setting up paradoxes of winter coats and car windows rolled down a crack; snow banks and tiny shoots of plants in sheltered places; freezing at night and melting during the day. In the southern hemisphere the change is from waning summer to the start of fall. Virtually everywhere we are in the midst of starting one thing while not yet being done with another.

Transitions can be as messy as slushy puddles as we prepare for what is coming while coping with what has not yet left. March in Chicago absolutely typifies this phenomenon, as we shed layers throughout the day like molting creatures. Weather, however, is not the only juncture.

Life is full of such changes that are gradual, incremental. We bridge all sorts of stages as we get ready to leave a home, a job, a relationship. We are there, but not fully. Already, we have moved on, just not physically. We are in between, here and there, come and gone, on and off, yes and no.

In my life, I have entered a slow transition as my son, now in the second half of his junior year in high school, is beginning to look at colleges. From college visits this spring and summer, we will go to follow-ups and applications, acceptances and rejections, selections, preparation, and then departure. Talking about it now is exciting and yet the seeds of sadness form hard little lumps in my heart. I practice letting go in small ways to prepare for the day when I drop him off and drive away with an empty car. He is here most definitely, but I am also aware that the time is not so distant when he will not be.

Years ago I took a class in Tai-Chi. Standing in our flat-footed postures, we tried to mimic the instructor's movements with beautiful names like "eye of the tiger" and "march and play the drum." No matter how much I practiced, I had the most difficulty when we were to begin contracting while still expanding. It seemed impossible. I was used to crisp aerobic movements of out and back, and up and down; my arms snapping in one direction and then another. In Tai-Chi, the body moves like a wave, rising to a crest and then starting to break even before the peak is reached. When done properly, Tai-Chi

is beautiful, flowing like the water I tried to visualize. Although I never became accomplished, I could appreciate that the real art of the movement was in the transitions. And so it is with life.

No matter how sharp and clear I like the edges, I see the beauty of the transitions, which carry equal parts of beginning and ending. There is no need to rush; what comes next will be here soon enough. And yet we are aware that what is here does not last forever because something else is being made ready: a new phase, another day, the next season, as life in its steady rhythm moves steadily onward.