

**Thursday evening September 17, 2020**

### **A walk-about through the ashes**

Been a week since I sat to write notes.

So much has happened, time flows fast--yet drags like it has sand in its shoes.

We want each of you to know Nan and I are weathering well. Discovering how much has to be done-- wondering how much has to be done. Staying here in Salem at the hotel, we have discovered dear friends who are also here because, though they did not lose their homes, they had to evacuate until probably about a week from now. So we have been blessed to share stories, ideas, visions, sadness.

Last night, while eating at a restaurant, we shared a meal, by chance, with two friends who lost their marvelous log home in Mill City. Not only their home but also their business. We will call them Ed and Janet. Ed was a consummate restoration artist of cars. I was privileged to see at his shop, prior to the fire, some of the finest restored vehicles ever. Their loss was incredible, and yet they were rising up, talking about starting to clear their home site and begin the rebuilding process within two weeks.

Out of the ashes can rise opportunities of choice--never fear the choices--the fear or sadness will only lead to not making the best choice.

We have been working hard to begin compiling inventory lists. Fortunately, Nan has in the computer a complete list of all the art pieces we had purchased for the last twenty one years-- even the petrified turkey egg she bought at the Oregon State Fair in 2002--well it must be art to someone --artists, cost, from where, etc. She is the best!

Thoughts about that very thing:

On a daily, hourly, minute basis we walk through our homes, and for most of us, have accumulated a vast collection of past and present things that unknown to us, out of the corner of our eyes, bring us subliminal joy, comfort, warmth, security.

That gorgeous 90 year old crystal vase from a great grandmothers wedding--a picture of my dad leaning against a 1930 ford, dark pants, white shirt, sleeves rolled up, hair tousled, smile on his face--like he had the world in the palm of his hand--A book of stories the kids loved to hear read to them when they were little-- a most stunning art quilt bursting color into the room after a long day--so many others for each of us that on the surface, we really don't notice much.

But they are (were) there, silently providing love, support, energy for us to move through each day--reminders of a past--reminders of where our past has been--perhaps suggesting ideas about where we might go.

Having the time to stop that has been forced upon us, we sit and think about those silent sentinel--realizing too late that we didn't stop enough to smell the roses.

The family is starting to bounce back. They are all in their respective homes now but spend their days wondering how we are doing, what do we need, when can we come for dinner, offers of laundry service, meals cooked, and fellowship. 2000 texts later nan and I simply sit in wonder! And that's only in a two hour period!

Our days are filled with errands because the computer crashed and had to be fixed, a funny sound developed in the right front tire area of the car--had to have that checked--Nan buying new make-up--me doing a lot of thinking--working together to keep each other afloat in the sea of emotional white caps.

We have secured a home to live in. This has been a journey in itself. Housing rentals in Salem are somewhere between \$1000 a month for four walls enclosing a space I wouldn't put a rat into, to lovely dwellings for \$2500 to \$4000 per week (Air B&B).

But miracles do happen--yes they do. Yesterday a person we know through another dear friend called me and said-- "Gary, my husband and I have a home out in the Turner area, and it has been on the market but hasn't sold. We are going to Hawaii for the winter and wondered if you would like to rent it for six months while you re-group. It is fully (and I mean fully) furnished, with acreage and a small vineyard."

Well I hesitated a long time to make my decision--like the length of time it takes to swallow!--and so we will no longer be riding the Grand Hotel steamship line after Sunday. It will provide us a place where our souls can be nourished, our minds can be clearer in our thinking, and silence will offer up the clarity of vision for tomorrow.

Been to our property about five times--when I could get through the National Guard MP check points--each time I go there the feeling is a total mixed bag. I want to start cleaning up--not to happen yet.

There is the strangest feeling I get when I stand in the middle of the front porch area looking at a debris pile, burnt trees, black ground. There is a "pull"--a feeling that seems to say "here is where you create continuance".

Of course everyone, including the insurance folks, want to know if we are going to rebuild on the site--but you just don't go in and build. For us there are lots of other things to decide. We have assembled a little team of folks to help us gather perspectives to bring to the table including a forester, an architect, a builder, and a couple friends who we trust as thinkers.

The questions are simple to ask--the answers are difficult to find. But right now, looking at other options,--being there--where our history lies deeply planted in the soil beneath our feet--where the memories and voices filled with laughter echo in our minds--where we are pulled to be--it has to be a choice we must consider. Until this decision is made, none others can follow.

Kindness at an unimaginable level has filled out lives. Friends from near and far have taken time from their lives to touch in--offering thoughts, prayers, love, anything we need--what does one do with a fifty foot windmill?--

Yesterday a clerk at Best Buy spent over twenty minutes running off receipts showing the cost of everything we had ever bought there from 2012 to date.

Each day numerous people thanking me in the lobby, on the street--for the work I do as a firefighter. Each time it happens I pause to weigh the kindness that is seemingly pervading so much of our communities right now.

We have had lunch bought twice for us by strangers--tonight we had dinner at a local small downtown place--food excellent--waitress stepped into our discussion to inquire about how we were. She said "you look a little heavy and I want to make sure you two are OK"--conversation led to her asking additional questions including the one we were hoping she would not ask--"how is your home?"

Tears slowly fell from her eyes as we answered and we assured her of our survival. She left to go and work our order.

Our waiter, an older gentleman, who we could tell was very tired after a long day. When it came time for the check he simply said to us--"Dinner is on me."

Covid or not, he and I shook hands and I told him it wasn't about buying us dinner, it was the fact that he cared enough to do it.

He smiled--nodded--wiped his eyes on his apron--and went back to the kitchen.

Both Nan and I were very moved.

It was the living embodiment of how we make it through these kind of events.

So many touch ins--so many texts--the kindest of words--sharing of memories.--precious stories--each letter comprising love and energy that creates such a powerful brick in the building of a new direction

Tonight we are supposed to get rain--what a novel idea in the big plan of things--Forward takes on a new meaning--because in order to move forward, there has to be, at some level, a shedding of the past, the loss, the now--take a deep breath and buck it up buddy--

Tomorrow is just around the corner--and you are on the mystery tour bus whether you like it or not.

With deepest love and thankfulness to each,

Gary and Nancy