

THE TAO OF THE GIFT

It Ain't No Thing

(We are here only to be not here...)

'Oh he never returned ...no he never returned and his fate is still unlearned' The Kingston Trio crooned on the family record player perched in the 'Hunt Room' where my parents partied nightly in their old country home.

From the early 1950's into the late 1990's my parents reported to my brother and me that " there must be a prankster ghost moving things about in the house and that is why so many things go missing in the Hunt room" - hence the name...

"The Hunt Room" was the place to ' find, Stuff. Trinkets and Things'. However, The 'Hunt Room' was not necessarily a place to find 'The Cosmic Self', unless of course if you count the Kingston Trio's lyrics about 'He never returned, OH, He never returned" as a positive note. I personally think this might be a bit much to hope for in regard to coming off "The Wheel of Suffering".

*Upon second glance, I rather think it was my parents' bourbon that might have caused things to get misplaced.
But that is just me.*

(How about those birds?)

On things lost in the hunt room, I am reminded of the canary in the mine technique.

Our family canary flew into the mind shaft of our family brain often and with little results other than a lot of windy flapping noises.

For example, our beloved grandmother did say from time to time when looking at a Baltimore Oriole landing in the our yard.

*“ OH LOOK ! there is the state bird... a Maryland Canary”
No one ever told her that the Baltimore Oriole was not a Maryland Canary. Details were of little import back then, fuzzy reality was a way of life, plus there were more pressing issues for example the bandy chickens that nested in the cedar trees and dropped their eggs on anyone standing under them.*

The aforementioned Bandy hens rendered my parents eggless so they bought 'fresh country eggs'. It was at our egg selling neighbors that my father fell in love with Crazy Alice a calico kitten. He brought her home and she immediately disappeared into the house. Crazy Alice only came out when everyone was asleep. It is perhaps far too sane to consider Crazy Alice may

have swatted a few things under the furniture rendering them lost for the ages.

And so it goes...

As for me , I am 'The Maryland Canary' of gift giving in my family. I just never have gotten it right, except once, when I brought a tea set home from London.

My parents never really believed that I bought the antique silver tea set all by myself. I told them it was a law of averages thing, Everyone is bound to succeed once in a while.

The "P's" just shot looks at each other, drank their tea and eyed the bourbon in the decanter on table.

(No Fly Zones)

If I were to fly into any Retail Store - I would not return with any treasures.

But, just point me towards a flea market or an antique store and from a bird's eye view I spy 'one of a kind' items. With nostalgic tears running along my crinkled face back along my ears and down my chinless profile I pick up the item. I break into the big ugly cry at the thought of ...a "Littlest Angel" type of gift. You know, the 'Old Yeller' dog collar, a bird's nest and a couple of old stones in a beat up card board box that makes everyone weep copiously with sentiment. Never happens.

Speaking of things celestial like 'The Littlest Angel', it has been

said of the stars in the Milky Way that they are Mary Magdalen's tears of despair turned to joy. In my particular case the tear status is directly collated as to whether my UPS gift package has arrived at its destination. When I have receive the obligatory "thank you" call. "You really shouldn't have" takes on a whole new meaning here. My tears of joy turned once again to despair...maybe next year.

(Coming off "The Wheel of Suffering")

It was Midnight Mass, 1990 something:

The night had turned me out in despair into the rude cold air after I had exchanged gifts with some old friends. I was hunting for those ghosts of Christmas Past. My ancient childhood dry-cleaned memories revealed a glowing gossamer tree with contented smiling faces all aglow with the season .

I have heard denial can be a problem.

So there I was, out and about in my VW with no heat and frozen windshield wiper . I was so busy eye-balling the phantom wafts of snowy air which made ghost-like apparitions rise before my head lights on the road that I was clueless where I was going.

Suddenly, like a ‘homing - canary’, I saw a familiar old grey church emerging out of the mists . My brother was the priest there. I had already made my excuses about “not making it this year”... but there I was ‘calling the barge’ to carry me over the rolling winter fog to Midnight Mass. ...who knew I would be there after all ?

I walked into the back of the church.

There sat my niece, Amy huddled in the back pew. “I knew you’d be here” she twinkled as only Amy can shimmer with light.

15 minutes until Mass began... so we prayerfully filled them with our current topic, which was a lively discussion concerning if firecrackers could clear ‘bad energy’ and other equally deep philosophical thoughts. She said in the churchly whisper of a preacher’s kid “ so, where does one find firecrackers at Christmas?” My eyes rolled to the flat faced Charlie Brown looking companion with her, but she missed it.

The pudgy guy stared back at me with a vapid affect and said “ I’ll find you find some” then he looked to Amy to see if he had scored any points with her. I whispered down and aside to him “Great, Thanks”. However, I did not hold my breath.

I quietly saw that there were to be no firecrackers in Amy’s heart that Christmas’ ...but I get ahead of the turn of the Potter’s wheel. It would be a few years down the road before Amy fell really in love. And but for a turn of the wheel, I believe the firecrackers in their hearts will last a lifetime.

There in the soft candle light with a stubborn rebel snow flake melting on my cold nose, amidst Christmas Carols I spied twirled protectively into Amy's big wool coat, a blue pottery bowl. I said

“ Oh, you brought a bowl to church?”
Amy said “Yeah, I made this bowl”

(EMPTY CHAIR TECHNIQUE)

Allowing for the fact that half of her genes are from my side of the family, it was quite possible that she might have had a whim to bring a bowl along with her or what ever her caught her eye on the way out the door of her house.

I digress to a time I was about Amy's age. I met my mother at the local lunch room carrying my garbage bag. Mother was fine with it as I sat the bag on an empty chair.

“I forgot” I said.

Mother understood.

So? Amy brings a Bowl to church, it is all relative.

(Not Labeled for individual resale)

We all sat down and there sat Amy with this bowl. She said “ I have been taking pottery classes” “Oh” I said. Then it dawned

on me that she had said “I knew you would be here” and that perhaps “the bowl” was a Christmas gift for me.

I said, “really beautiful bowl” but something in her eyes told me the moment had passed. I shall never forget her tender face that night, soft from youth and Christmas glow.

I know that place of vulnerability. I know it well. It is the ‘iffy gift’ feeling, before taking the final plunge of releasing it to the recipient. I saw Amy shyly retreat into herself.

Notwithstanding, I believe I received Amy’s bowl that Christmas Eve, even though it never left the shelter of her coat.

(The Tao of gift giving)

Amy’s bowl was perfect. I am called to remember a tradition in India that a hand made object have a small imperfection in remembrance that only God is perfect.

I tell you now, Amy’s bowl was perfect in its unspoken intention just like the hollow of the bowl is intangible by its definition and yet you subliminally know the defining space.

The Gnosis of the gift where there is no giver and no receiver: just the alchemy of Agape .

It could not be otherwise.

As for the ultimate gift?

Perhaps in the Great Hunt Room of life Agape is found when

we realize that the real gift can never be “a thing”. Somehow we all know a gift is all about the alchemy of the moment.

A true gift can only be found in negative space , like the hollow of a bowl or the hollow of the alabaster jar that held Mary Magdalene’s perfume it is an intangible presence.

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Somewhere, in the ever changing present Amy’s bowl sits, either still in form or back to clay...it does not matter.

For me, its all about coming off “The Potter’s Wheel” and merging into the edge of ever expanding eternity.

I have come to believe that when despair chases us out into the night, we can turn a tearful eye up into the Milky Way.
Somewhere between the stars and between the beat of our heart.

We can find the timeless gift of Love

and it ain’t no thing