



ONE WITH THE LIGHT

Family and friends reflect
on joy, soul, and love

ERIC VAIKSNORAS
& MAYRA PORRATA



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on joy, soul, and love

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Let me keep company
always with those who say
“Look!”
and laugh in astonishment
and bow their heads.

Mary Oliver



Introduction

Life is a real symphony of vibrations. More and more there's a strong sense that we're at a big pivotal point in our world's soulful evolution. More and more we're noticing how everything around us is conspiring to help us see more clearly and deeply--beckoning us to connect with the divine wisdom that surrounds us all.

Sometime in January (2025), I (Eric) noticed something new myself. It all started after listening to a podcast on the Heart Coherence Collaborative channel on YouTube. This particular episode shared Eden Alexander's NDE (near death experience) and his tales of the afterlife.

It was truly a fascinating episode and had me thinking of a journal entry I had written earlier that month.

When I wrote it I was in a very peaceful, almost out-of-body feeling state, and the words felt like they came from "elsewhere". When I finished I re-read my own words. I felt that I had tapped into something that was familiar, yet new and on/in a deeper level.

It felt divine in every sense of the word. I felt like I wanted to feel some sort of pride because it felt so special, yet I felt none. What I felt instead was a feeling of "union" that felt infinitely "more everything" than pride.

Feeling deeply inspired, I reached out to fellow educator and writer friend Mayra to see what, if anything, she sensed was emerging or asking to become.

And here we are!



The soulful expressions shared in this publication represent the responses from friends and family members who reflected on any, or all, of the following:

- what connects me to my Higher Self, the divine, my Light?
- what brings me into a state of flow?
- what connects me to joy?

We hope these heartfelt entries inspire you to connect with the “more of everything” in you.

Eric & Mayra



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WHAT BRINGS OUT MY BEST SELF

I feel my best when I get enough sleep, eat regularly, drink plenty of water, do my stretches, walk each day, spend time with family and friends, and take as little medication as is necessary. All of the above help me keep my 'sunny side up' — (most of the time). Also, listening to my inner voice keeps me well aligned — keeps my inside and outside matching — so 'what you see is what you get'!

BY TERRY VAIKSNORAS,
CLEVELAND, OH

WHAT BRINGS ME JOY

First and foremost, it gives me great joy to be healthy!! To be able to see, hear, think, walk, and enjoy all of the beautiful things around me! There is not a day that goes by that I am not thankful for every minute of my full, long, life. And when the time comes that I cannot do some, or all of those things, then I will be grateful for having had the opportunity to live so long while being able to enjoy them.

Then there's my joy from:

- Taking pictures, sharing them, then looking at them again and again;
- Spending time with family and friends;
- Watching favorite television programs;
- Going for walks;
- Learning how to use, then using, new technology;
- Exploring nature/our garden;
- Attending plays and musicals;
- Giving others tips from the things I've learned over the years;
- (And all the other things that I'll remember when it's too late to include them)



BY DAVID SLAVICK,
CLEVELAND, OH

Being a product of my VERY extroverted mother, idle chit chat with strangers comes naturally to me. There's something about playfully engaging someone, ANYONE, that makes me feel... I don't know... maybe like I'm related to every human on the planet. Like we're all in this together, and I'm just making small talk with a team mate or distant relative.

I can be in line at a store, in a waiting room, or crossing paths with anyone anywhere and I automatically say something light, complimentary, or funny to them. I can't recall ever feeling like they didn't want to be bothered. They ALWAYS happily respond to whatever light-hearted comment I make. And it always becomes a conversation that lasts until one of us needs to move on.

I have a few favorite approaches that never fail: If I encounter a shopper with a child or children, I ask the children if they're good helpers? Or I say to the adult, "looks like you've got some good helpers there!" To which they reply, with a smile, something like... "Oh YAH, they'll tell me what to buy!" :-)

If it's one child in the shopping cart, and about 6 years old, I put on a serious face and ask if they have a license to drive that thing?

If I say "hi" to an adult and they reply, "how you doin'?" I give them a number, (usually an 8 or 9)-- or, I might reply, "Nobody's havin' more fun than me!"

I also like using the line, "Are we having fun yet?"

My newest thing is - If the person working near the exit doors at Walmart asks to see my receipt, I tell them that it'll cost them a hug. So far, they gladly pay and LOVE it!

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I’ve found my way into a beautiful, “win/win/win” niche. I play the guitar and sing very old songs at several retirement and assisted living facilities.

BY DAVID SLAVICK,
CLEVELAND, OH

Seeing and hearing the joy these old songs obviously bring to them makes me feel SO good inside! The more often I visit the same facility, the better things get. As we get to know each other better, I feel more and more like I’m part of their community/family. The joking and banter continue to increase, and with that, so does the joy it fills us with. Perhaps the nicest compliment I’ve had in my life is when a resident told me that I “radiate joy”.

My favorite story came when I’d just finished singing and was putting away my things. A woman pointed to another woman and proclaimed that she’s 101 years old! I responded, “God Bless you. I’ve never hugged a one-hundred-year-old. Can I give you a little hug?” She replied, “absolutely!”

The moment I put my arms around her shoulders, EVERY woman in the room (about 15 of them) all flung an arm in the air and yelled, “I’M A HUNDRED!, I’M A HUNDRED!” I couldn’t stop laughing as I went around the room and gave each of them a little hug. (Hey, I couldn’t call them liars!) :-)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



BY KLH

What gives me flow?

I am deeply focused, in an enjoyable mental state, completely immersed when I'm walking on a beach alone in search of beach glass. I can spend hours enjoying water, sun, walking, sitting... escaping my reality reminiscing pondering or not thinking at all. Holding a found piece of beach glass is comforting. The colors, the softness the mystery of where it came from, how long has it been tumbling in the lake & sand. Time flies by when doing this I am unaware of the time of day. I've often headed to the beach in the early morning hours and returned just before dark, truly not realizing the amount of time spent.

Joy is found in family and friends. I'm not a person who enjoys solitude in my normal everyday life. I cherish my children and grandchildren. Time spent with them is priceless. I long to create lasting memories so when I am gone they won't forget me.



Friends are a treasure! I've lost my best friend in my husband as well as sisters and dear friends. I cherish the friendships I have made over the years. I enjoy travel with friends as well as something as simple as a walk. Life is short. As James Taylor says: "Shower the People you love with love..."

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I often like to cook a meal in order to enter into a flow state. I do this because I am a therapist who specializes in trauma work and I know that I need a routine that allows me to change gears after hearing all the painful stories and witnessing such intense emotions from my clients. If I don't make this shift I can burn out and be useless to my clients when I return to work the next day.

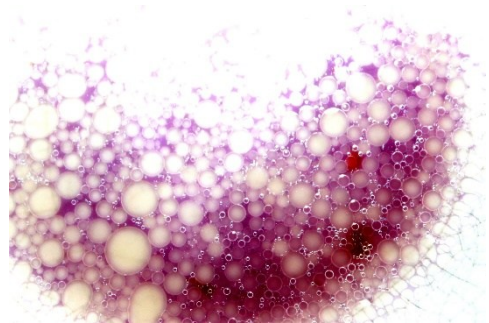
BY MIKE
HOVANCSEK

I try to prepare a meal in the most mindful way that I can, filling up my senses with as much sensory data as I can gather at once. The nice thing about this approach is that it turns an everyday activity into a lovely form of self-care. This way, I don't have to wait until I am on a beach in Hawaii to get into that peaceful state; I can get there while doing the normal activities that are already built into my day.

Imagine this scene:

I take out a deep, heavy pan and pour a little olive oil into it. Olive oil has a distinct scent when it is cold and it is a thick liquid that pours slowly, with a golden, transparent color.

The sound of the oil as it hits the pan is deep and velvety, as it cascades down, rhythmically glugging as it escapes the bottle. The pan also sings a bit, with a high voice, like a distant soprano as the oil makes contact with the pan.



Salad dressing, Mike Hovancsek

As the oil warms up, its scent changes. Now it has that earthy, fruity aroma that fills the air around me. I take a bell pepper out of the refrigerator. Its surface is cool from the refrigerator, and it immediately forms condensation on its skin as it is brought into the warm kitchen.



I look at the bell pepper. It has variations of red color on its surface, which are accented by the reflections of light that shine on the surface. I shake the pepper, and I feel the seeds rattling inside. When I put it on the cutting board and slice through it I hear the crunch of the cut and I feel tiny spatters of moisture land on my hand. The aroma of the pepper is amplified as I cut it open.

I toss the pieces of the pepper into the pan, and it immediately makes a sizzling sound that has a high hiss and a low gurgle. Soon, the aroma of the pepper and the warm olive oil mingle in the air. I can go on and on like this, introducing one element after another to the pan. It becomes a journey through my senses. Once the meal is prepared, I can eat it with the same mindful approach, noticing the colors, aroma, and texture of each bite.

Once I have entered into a flow state I feel calm and more willing to engage with the world. It is transporting and healing.

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My answer is pretty short, JESUS ...when I am in his word, listening to Christian music, walking/hiking outside in nature, praying and reflecting, going to church with my family, seeing my children seeking him... that is when I feel the most peace, joy.

BY MARIA
LODI, OHIO

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Joy - immersing with my kiddos
Flow - immersing in an art project
Higher self - immersing in mentoring

BY ANONYMOUS

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I'm a born-again Christian, and my joy comes from glorifying God. Right now, that looks like providing for and taking care of my wife and our newborn son. Every day, I'm thankful to be with them and watch my son grow and raise him together with my wife.

BY CHRIS NORRIS

I also feel closest to God through fellowship and being active. I love using the health He's given me to play sports and push myself physically. It's how I stay connected, grounded, and grateful.



BY MARY ELLEN
LAYMAN

I'm a Joyologist and a Certified Laughter Leader through The World Laughter Tour. With over 20 years' experience I work at being joyful and at helping others find more joy in their lives.

So what brings me joy? Everything!!!

I believe that there is joy in everyday. Some days it smacks you in the face and some days you have to think about it a work hard to find it, but it is there. Big joys come from spending time with family and friends. Little joys come from seeing dogs with their heads out the car window. I have even found joy in losing my mother to cancer when I was only seven years old (that one took time but I found it). I make a living as an activity director and in 2020 when my job went from creating fun and enjoyment for my residents living in a nursing home to bringing them to the window to see their loved ones, I knew I had to work harder to find joy. I started my first joy journal when I made note of every joy every day and I have been going strong ever since. Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



The poet Mary Oliver once wrote,
“Joy is not a crumb.”

She’s right. Joy is the cake,
à la mode.

Where do I find joy?

BY REGINA BRETT

It finds me. Every day I open my heart by starting the day in gratitude. Ever since surviving cancer in 1998, I start every day by thanking God for another day of life. Then I say, Bring it on! Whatever life brings me that day is my perfect joy.

Then I look in the mirror while brushing my teeth and give thanks for who I am, just as I am. When I take the dog out I stand on the Earth and feel my feet ground on this beautiful planet, inhale its scent and thank it for spinning.

Sometimes joy is in the rain or the snow. Sometimes it’s in the wait at the post office and watching loving connections happen. Sometimes it’s in the smiles of the sewer repair guys tearing up my front yard to lay new pipes as they stop to give my dog a scratch behind his ears.

It’s always in my grandchildren, in silly moments and special encounters, in hugs and laughter and funny observations they make that I log into a journal so I don’t forget them. It’s always in my daughter, when we sit to play a card game or dig up daisies or lug something home from a curb that one of us can use.

It’s always in the sky above me, so every night I look up and wave to the stars and the planets and say hello to the moon and hug the Universe goodnight.

Joy follows me everywhere and leads me everywhere.

It’s in the scent of the tangerine I peel. In the banana bite I just ate. In the hot cocoa with the extra whipped cream. In the flicker of the



fireplace warming me. In the soft pillow wishing me sweet dreams. It's in the simple act of taking pen to paper and letting the ink flow to create a new book or sentence or question to explore.

For me, it's not something to pursue in the grand bucket lists of places and adventures elsewhere.

Joy is everywhere. Right here. Right now.

Maybe Mary Oliver was wrong. Maybe joy is the cake *and* the crumbs, because when the brownies are all gone, the crumbs I lick off the plate are a perfect joy.

Regina is the author of NYT bestseller ***God Never Blinks***

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For me, a unique/new experience or a challenge brings out the best in me and gives me joy. I love uncovering my limits and pushing the boundaries, and I gain so much knowledge from trying new things. Whether it's travel, weightlifting, trying new sports; pushing myself out of my comfort zone into an unfamiliar or uncomfortable environment is what brings out the best in me, and it often brings out things that I didn't even know I had.

BY ASHER
SULLIVAN

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Things that bring me joy, flow, & connect me with my Higher Self?

BY KK

- Early morning alone time.
- Witnessing everyday miracles.
- Being by the water.
- Music.
- Laughter.
- Forgiving & being forgiven.
- Hearing *I Love You* and really feeling it.
- Memories of people close to me that have gone before me.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



BY ALEXIS
NORRIS

“My Greatest Blessing”

Being a mother is what brings me joy. I recently gave birth to my baby boy in November 2024, and he instantly became my whole world. The second he was placed on my chest I immediately fell in love with his little forehead wrinkles, his perfect scent, and his big blue eyes.

Becoming a mother has allowed me to slow down and cherish the small moments in life. When I’m rocking my baby to sleep and his tiny fingers reach up to grab my face, I know I am exactly where I’m meant to be.

Watching him grow and learn new things every single day has given me a deeper sense of purpose. Knowing that I’m the one my baby looks to for warmth and comfort fills my heart with joy in a way that nothing else can.

Motherhood has brought out a strength and patience in me I never knew existed. My baby inspires me to become a better person every single day. He is my answered prayer and my greatest blessing.

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What brings me joy and centers me is walking through the woods in the summertime. Engulfed in nature, I forget about everything and focus only on the energy around me – the old growth, the new growth, the decay, and the earth beneath my feet that’s over a million years old. I’m reminded that miracles are happening all of the time and I feel hopeful.

BY C.L. WHITNEY,
OHIO

I also enjoy looking up at the sky in the early morning hours after taking the dumpster(s) to the street on garbage day. I try discerning the many stars and constellations. In the vastness and magnificence of the sky, I’m reminded how very small and insignificant I am. But then, I’m reminded that I’m part of something huge and wonderful and that makes me feel hopeful.

And especially, I marvel at little children. Whenever I’m at the mall or out in public, I closely observe the children’s unbridled energy, their joy and laughter, their sadness and anger, their ease at expressing themselves while talking and playing – some of these things which I have lost in adulthood. Watching them, I feel young again and hopeful.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



BY BRIANNA VAIKSNORAS,
WILMINGTON, NC

Teaching brings me such joy. The privilege of having little humans call me their teacher for the past five years has brought me so much pride and happiness. Seeing their faces light up when they've realized they solved a math problem on their own, hearing them put letter sounds together to read a word for the first time, and watching their confidence grow throughout the year is amazing. Nothing beats having previous students stop by in the morning just for a hug, to tell you how much they miss you, or to let you know how great they did on their last spelling test. Even having such a small role in their journey through life leaves my heart full.

There's no denying that teaching is hard, but those moments make it more than worth it. I truly feel as though I was called to be a teacher, and I'm right where I need to be.

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Reflecting on joy: Recently, I have had major life changes with loss, but this void with loss and grief has been filled in with love and joy for my nieces and nephews and their children.

BY ALLA CHISTIK,
KIRTLAND, OH

The honesty and innocence of children just warm my heart. Their expression of affection just makes me melt when they seek my attention or comfort.

My sister and I had a six-month journey with Hospice to get our mom to her everlasting life and what a journey it was. Mom was diagnosed with a glioblastoma that the doctors couldn't seem to figure out for a long time and it was a long and frustrating experience. It was the hardest and saddest thing ever. My sister is a nurse and dealt with death her whole career I only heard about death and dealt with it through my patients as a dental hygienist. This was the saddest moments and also the funniest and at times some of the happiest moments because so many of our friends came to see us, and it brought all of us joy. I actually felt joy spending time with my sister we actually had fun during the hardest times of our journey. We reconnected again after many years of estrangement.

God works wonders when you let him. I think Mom's goal was to bring the family together and her parting gift was bringing the family back together and I truly have joy in my heart when I am with them and I have a newfound love to spend time with my sister and her family. Taking care of my mom also made me feel that I was able to put my best self forward and make her journey to her final resting place as comfortable as it could be.



Now comes the flow part as a dental hygienist for over 40 years, one of the hardest professions in the world because you connect with your patients on so many different levels, their personal fears, their anxiety, their personal struggles and tragedies,

their health concerns and making them happy and comfortable and bringing them to health. I experience their personal life and their ups and downs, I just always want so hard to help every situation but sometimes you can't, you just have to be there for them, this gives me a warmth inside that maybe I made a difference.

Recently, I had a patient come in for an appointment and as always, I asked about health and medical history and her answer was "yes" and then "I'm going to cry". At that moment, I knew it was not about her teeth, but about her. While waiting for our appointment she found out that her cancer had spread and they were considering hospice in the near future. As tragic as it sounded, we both cried and laughed, and she said she wanted her teeth clean because she still wanted to take care of herself because that's what she always does. I felt all I could do was offer my best self at that moment other instances in my profession are the patients with hopeless issues. We work together to get them healthy and when they notice it and they get excited to see me and to hear if they are doing a good job for keeping their teeth and gums healthy, I tell them it's what they do at home but they tell me it's what I taught them that made the difference and they couldn't do it without me. This is when I truly know I offered my best self to the world and made a positive impact.



Life never goes exactly as planned. Without some form of disappointment and pain there can be no joy.

By Gary Hennes

A life of pure joy, flow and deep connection with a higher self is a luxury that many pursue and many never achieve.

Without health you have nothing. Without family, life is less interesting and connective. Without purpose there is no reason to pursue the joys of life. Without service to others around us that need warmth the world can only seem colder.

Without passion nothing is meaningful, just flat. Goals even small ones can add dimension and structure to life and without perspective of yourself, where we possibly fit in and of those around us the world can seem less joyful, more stressful, more clogged up which prevents the flow and the quest for a higher self-unattainable for an ego that must be constantly fed will never be satisfied as the answers to life are within.

Forgiveness is essential as without it there is anger that festers and deteriorates the soul.

Without appreciativeness to some higher being and being thankful will result in never understanding one's self.

Humor is essential to put into perspective the absurdities of life. Without love dying is the only thing that will bring joy to those that cannot feel. The heart and soul are connected.

It's the journey not the destination that has all the stops and starts that create the joy, flow and connectivity to a higher self. Only the higher self can only be fed on the missteps that hurt and what one does to recover and bring everyone along for the ride of their lives.



What brings me joy? My family, friends, waking to a new day and to see the sunrise, loved ones that are no longer here that left a piece of them with me to care for, my ability to care, reach out and try to be connective to a higher self but know that that takes an enormous amount of flexibility as joy has no real definition that any two could agree with.

Overcoming setbacks, dealing with life in the moment. Being brave even when it's difficult. Once I stopped asking *why* it all became clearer. There is no answer to that question. Life is messy and complicated. That's the beauty of the joy of life.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



Things that bring me joy---seeing flowers blooming in Spring, spotting small gatherings of daffodils along the side of the road or in the forest where no other flowers are; seeing newborn babies (humans and animals alike); observing ducklings and goslings following behind their moms; watching babies laugh, stare, and smile as they explore their world; seeing families enjoying time together; looking at photos of my daughter and husband from when she was very young; feeding birds out of my hand. All of these things make me smile and put me in a good mood. They remind me of the amazing miracles of life.

BY SHEILA,
OH

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

What brings me joy is spending quality time and connecting with the people I love.

BY AINSLEY SULLIVAN
CLEVELAND, OH

I flow when I use my creativity and imagination to create something that I am passionate about. What connects me to my higher self is developing in skills/activities I enjoy and helping others do the same.



BY DAN ROLLER

What brings me joy?

Dancing with friends!

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

BY SARAH CANTER

What brings me joy, flow, and connects me to my Higher Self is being a mother to my two sons. There is nothing more beautiful, grounding, or soul-affirming than loving them and witnessing their growth, laughter, and curiosity each day.

I feel most connected when I have the time and space to rest and to simply be with them and enjoy life together. Nature also plays a big part in this connection—whether it's a walk among the trees or feeling the sun on my face, I'm reminded of the beauty and rhythm of life. And in quiet moments of prayer, I feel a deep, peaceful alignment with God.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



When was the last time you laughed so hard that you cried? Danced? Got lost in fun? Felt your heart soar? Your soul smile?

BY JOY BEHYMER

As my current days are very busy and the world is loud around us all, I find the small moments in daily life help ground and connect me. It reminds me to be more mindful on a daily basis -- until I have longer periods of time for devotion and self-care.

Often, I am blessed with daily mornings walks in my backyard under my trees, barefooted, to feed the birds, water my plants that I have cared for from seed. Any time that I can have my hands/feet in the dirt, sit on my deck in the sun with our beloved pets, have lunch Charcuterie board and wine with my husband, bake for my family, craft, read, write, play my guitar (even while bad at it), or hear *hello* from a friend, makes my soul smile.

I don't do all these things every day. No day is designed or suited for every passion. But the more joyful moments I find or create in and through my days, the greater my capacity for living life with deeper clarity and peace.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



BY MAYRA PORRATA

I turned 60 this year. Though I can't fully explain it, I feel different—as if something magical has finally clicked inside my heart.

While part of me still sees the world through the lens of a joyful 5-year-old, there's another part of me I'm remembering and slowly integrating into my days. What I once judged as estranged or separate, I now tenderly embrace and accept; like a wave who knows she's part of the ocean—rising and falling again and again, I'm beginning to see myself as a tiny part of God's infinite mystery, universe, and grace.

More and more I'm finding it difficult to escape the overwhelming joy of simply *being*. Every day is a new adventure. Every day is a new start to create or simply observe.

It reminds me of the feeling I had every single morning when my girls were babies. Every day felt like Christmas morning. Every single morning I would behold and hold the greatest gift of all — love.



Like beauty, love is in the eye of the beholder. It is both the wave and the ocean—ephemeral and eternal— like me, dancing to the rhythm of life's sweet song.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



I find joy in many ways. The dark times in my life have shown me that joy is everywhere if we simply choose to look deeper and open our hearts to it. That said, a few of my favorite “joy jolts” are being immersed in nature of all kinds but

BY JULIE NORMAN

especially in or near water. I also adore springs as the native plants are making their way through the soft earth to share their magnificence. My heart burst with joy being with my close friends and family over a yummy meal sharing memories and making new ones. My heart sings within my yoga/spiritual communities when we are moving and swaying in classes and kirtans. I’m overjoyed when I have the chance to make connections between people I love and respect knowing they will amplify each other's magic and help make this world a better place.

I am in the flow (embodying my Highest Self) most when I’m practicing. Each and every breath feels like a prayer. My soul weeps with gratitude for the body that enables it to experience this wonderful world, love my people and share its gifts. I am in the flow when teaching. When given the amazing grace to transform my darkness to light and nourish others with the wisdom of my own living. I am in in the flow when I’m learning through my teaching, through holding space and seeing Source reawaken in others. I am in the flow when I play! I especially love blazing through the woods on my mountain bike rolling logs and soaring over dirt jumps through the verdant tree canopy of our national park.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



BY BRIDGET

Joy / Happiness

- doing embroidery
- eating oranges
- learning new things that exercise my mind
- spending time with family & friends
- playing volleyball
- cooking

Flow

- growing plants
- going out into nature, being still/closing my eyes, & listening to the peaceful sounds of nature

Higher Self

- doing things that make my personal self happy rather than allowing others to change who I truly am.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~



BY ROBERT JACKSON
CONNEAUT, OH

To begin with and at the same time to be brief, without the details, which would take too much space & time that this space provides.

I would say, that after 28 plus years of marriage in which the last 10 years of our marriage were spent -- due to a brain bleed that would leave my wife, Helen, severely handicapped & needing 24 hours a day/7 days a week continued care, with the help of home health care professionals on a part time basis & then as her condition worsened later, becoming a patient at an acute care nursing home facility, until her death.

I learned early on that I would need a higher-Inner force & greater strength than anything within myself & my limited self-abilities. So as always, when faced with life's changing moments & events, (Helen & I both growing up in families of deeply rooted spiritual faith in Jesus & God our Heavenly Father) ... the natural & first thing to do would be to look to & seek God & the Bible for the help & guidance that would be desperately needed in the days, weeks, months & years ahead. The future, facing the trials & experiences of going through the valleys & the mountain tops, the victories & successes & accomplishments along with the setbacks, failures & defeats that would be a part of our daily life & travels down this new road & journey of life. Our new normal, that we were now traveling on together as husband & wife. Many times I would think of the quote of Winston Churchill, "If you're going through hell, keep going." And I would just keep on going!

The scripture verses that God had brought to my mind & remembrance & impressed upon me, which I would say was my, "defining moment & turning point" were: Matthew 25:40, Romans 15:1-7, & Jeremiah 29:11.



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Matthew 25:40-KJV

Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Romans 15:1-7-KJV

15 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2 Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.

3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written. The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope

5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

6 That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.



Jeremiah 29:11 - KJV

11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

= = = = = = =

God would use these verses, along with many others, to help give me the inner peace & comfort & strength to help me connect with my higher-self & to help me know & believe that as His children, & He, as our Heavenly Father, always has a perfect plan & way for us even when we may feel & think otherwise.

Through the daily circumstances, God helped me to play Hellen's favorite game, the "Pollyanna Glad Game". Through all this, I found the real & true way for me to achieve & experience my inner purpose & fulfillment & satisfaction, because of what these experiences taught me & the countless lessons I learned from them.

The Bill & Gloria Gaither Song, "Things That Last Forever", would come to my mind. They would sing about embracing the priceless things in life and giving ourselves to the events & things along life's journey & the experiences that we need to focus on, the lasting & important things. To know the lasting love & the blameless forgiveness & the peace that we can have, even under the pressure that life sometimes throws at us, while still living joyfully with the help & support & strength from our family & friends. To be able to give ourselves in helping & ministering to the one who is facing death. To help & encourage those in our path that have fallen down and to help lift them up. To enter into



the hurt & troubles of those who are going through hard & difficult times
& to take the time of effort to go the extra mile with those who need it.

In closing, to know within my heart & mind that I have the inner peace
& contentment, in being able to live with myself & my words & deeds
& actions. With the assurance & knowing that while failing & falling
short & missing the mark, many times, & the regrets of the missed
opportunities to get & do it right ... that tomorrow is a fresh new day, a
new beginning, a clean blank slate, to move on & forward. To keep
trying to make a difference in the lives of others, my fellow man &
traveler, on their journey & road of life. Having the knowledge that at
the end of everyday, that I can never run from myself, that I take myself
with me wherever I go. Every morning & night, as I look at myself &
face myself in the mirror -- that I can look at myself in the eye...and that
I can live with myself.

So for me... that is how I answer the question "What brings you Joy,
Flow, and Connects you to your Higher-Self."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



BY CVB,
CLEVELAND, OH

What brings me joy is time with my family or connecting with people. I feel joy eating food that nourishes me, and spending time in nature, especially feeling the sun on my skin.

I find myself in a flow state when I'm doing something I feel passionate about. For me being in a flow state is when I'm in the garden, pinching the tops of my basil, pulling weeds, and planting flowers in the hopes of beautiful blooms. I also find the flow state when arranging flowers, hands touching plants, designing something stunning. I also find this flow state belting out a song I love or dancing with zero inhibitions.



I feel connected to my higher self when my physical needs are met, I feel calm in my heart, and I am aware of the earth below and sky above. In this place of reflection I am able to witness all my senses working in overdrive and am overcome with gratitude.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



ANONYMOUS

Still today, I carry both the ache of loss and the gift of life. Losing my mother young carved a hole I thought would never fill, yet somehow, life kept blooming around it.

I think that when something tragic happens early in life, one of two things can happen: it can completely alienate you from God/your Higher Self, or it can bind you to it. You can either become bitter and angry, or you can take it as an experience to slowly digest and unpack.

I'm honestly grateful for the resilience her absence taught me, for the tenderness I now offer others, and for the quiet ways her love still guides me. Though grief shaped my entire life, hidden in its underbelly I was aware of the presence of joy, too. Every Mother's Day I not only honor her by living fully, but I honor life and God for the gift of knowing what I know today.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



ANONYMOUS
CALIFORNIA, MD

I feel myself entering the "flow state"
when...

Walking through the park; noticing the
little things along the way.

Drawing to my favorite music;
connecting with myself emotionally on a deep visual and auditory
level.

Pulling back my bow; lining up the perfect shot.

Feeling a warm wind blow across my face.

Smelling the rain lingering in the air after a heavy storm.

Sprinting at the end of an endurance run; feeling my body screaming
at me that I put forth all I can give.

Sharing moments of uncontrollable laughter with my friends; taking
comfort in the fact that others accept and love me by choice, not
obligation.

Reflecting on the fact that I am one of billions who have come before
me and who will come after. I am human like all others; I will live and
die like all others; for all the good and bad that come with it I am not
alone in my experience of life.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



DAVID VAIKSNORAS,
CLEVELAND, OH

“Art, Music, and Exercise”

I think of the flow state as a state of mind in which you feel so connected to an activity that almost everything else around you seems irrelevant.

For me, drawing is the closest thing to this feeling. I find that drawing while I am slightly tired allows me to enter this state more easily. For this reason, I enjoy drawing at night. When I get into this flow state, many hours can pass in the blink of an eye. I feel I create my best art when in this trance-like state.

Creating and listening to music is the only other activity I’ve experienced that compares to the flow state that I can get into when drawing. Listening to a new album for the first time is an experience like no other. Whenever I get the opportunity to listen to a brand-new record, I always make sure to have minimal distractions and allow myself to be as attuned with the album as I can. The feeling I get from listening to music is one of the greatest joys I experience, and I cherish each first listen very much. Since the feeling can be similar to what I experience when drawing, it makes drawing while listening to music a great pair.

I find I get into a similar yet different form of the flow state while running. It takes some time to get into the groove of a run, but after 10-20 minutes, I get into a space where I don’t think about moving each leg, each arm, and taking each breath. Once I get to this point, I have a period where I experience a “runner’s high”, which makes the run very enjoyable. Running becomes very freeing and mindless at this time. At some point, this switches, and I need to remind myself to keep my pace and to take controlled breaths. For that period in the middle of a run, I feel in a complete flow and I feel alive.



Every time I get into and get out of the flow state from any of these activities, it reminds me how passionate I am about them, and it gives me a form of purpose.

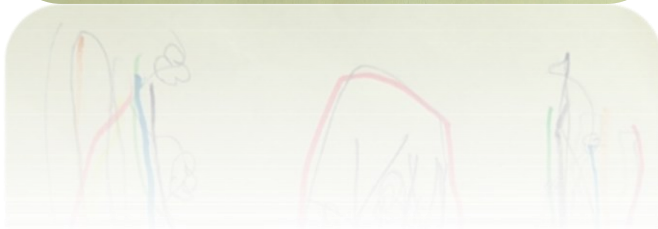
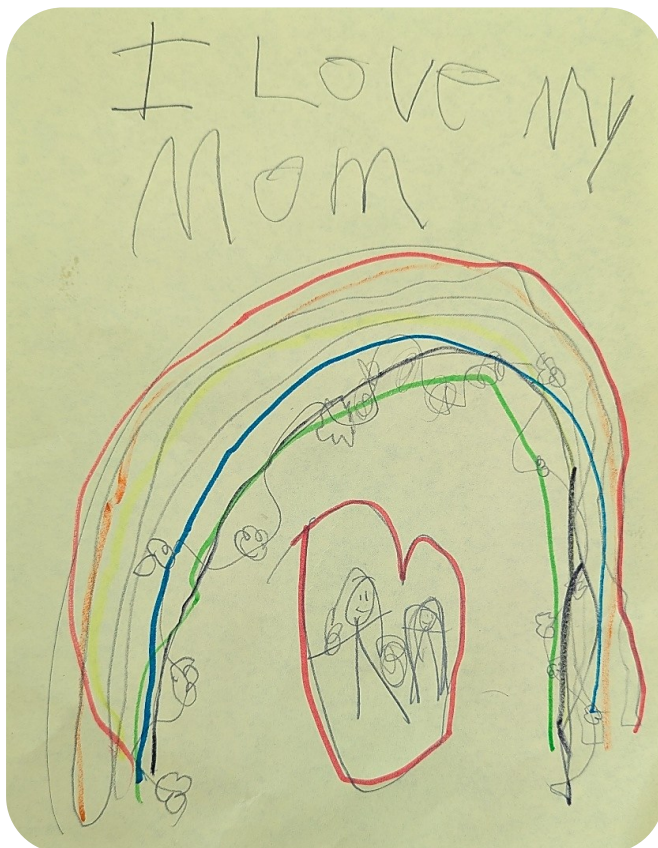


By David Vaiksnoras

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



ANONYMOUS







BY A.V.S





BY "SAVORING THE GOLDEN
THREADS",
CLEVELAND, OH

What's something that brings me joy, flow, and connects me to my higher-self?

Pickleball!

It all started in the early 2000's when I was first introduced to pickleball in a games class in college. I was a fan from the start, but the U.S. hadn't quite yet caught the bug, so there wasn't much opportunity to play outside of school. Pickleball didn't return to my life until nearly 20 years later. It grew in popularity at that time and began to take the U.S. by storm, and when it did, I was eager to jump on the bandwagon.

Pickleball appeals to me for several reasons. It's a multisensory game that engages numerous parts of my body and makes me feel so alive. The game is fast paced and is played on a medium sized court. Players must stay balanced and focused, work together, and move rapidly in order to get into position to cover an open space on the court to prepare for an incoming ball. As in life, the game requires constant adjustment. And as in life, the more graceful I am in making the adjustment, and in working with my partner, the greater the odds of a smooth and satisfying outcome.

The sound that is created when the paddle strikes the ball is another big part of the appeal. The sound is unique, rhythmic, and musical. When the hard ball strikes the hard surface of the paddle, an echoing percussion-type popping sound is formed. Reflecting upon this brings three things to mind.

The first is that the sound has an element to it that freezes time, much like the sound the shutter of a camera lens makes. It's a beautiful reminder to me to pay attention, be present, and "make my moments count". This is important to me because each moment of life is frozen



eternally in time. And it doesn't end there. Each moment is responsible for the evolution of the next moment.

The second thing the sound reminds me of is the sound that is so frequently made during a fireworks show. I'm talking about the sound that is heard when the firework is first launched, as it leaves Earth and rapidly soars into the sky. Can you hear that deep, powerful, launching sound in your mind? It feels exquisite to me. In that moment, time seems to be in an altered state, as the viewer waits in anticipation for the colorful and fleeting explosive reward. I love that part of life. The observation part. What marvelous thing is waiting to reveal itself? Only time and some patience will tell.

Lastly, the sound reminds me of a heartbeat. It's distinct, soothing, and filled with life.



The graphics on many paddles are colorful and attractive and appeal to my artistic nature. The image on my favorite paddle is one of a countryside skyline, with the sun barely present on the horizon. It has deep blue colored clouds and bright stars that fill the captivating sky. It's a brilliant image that I find myself gazing into often. It calms my nerves and routinely transports me to faraway lands. I find this to be a wonderful remedy during game play whenever I find myself getting too worked up. And the three-letter word that's printed in large letters on the center of my paddle completes the look. It reads, "Opa", which is a Greek Expression commonly used during

celebrations, dancing, or to express enthusiasm, shock, surprise...or after making a mistake. When things don't turn out well during game play, I often find myself gently placing my open palm over the text



message on my paddle, then excitedly and joyfully exclaiming, "Opa!". I've found that it's impossible to feel anything but happiness when exclaiming, "Opa!".

The ball is neon colored and begs to be played with. Did you ever drag a string across the floor, in an effort to entice a playful kitten? Well, that's how I'd describe it feels when the bright round ball is floating through the air towards me. Time stands still and I'm laser focused on the task. I feel flow. Flow. And more flow.

I'm easy-going but very competitive, and like in life, I love how a pickleball game "is not over until it's over". The winner of the game is the first team to get to 11 points (winning by at least 2 points). The beauty of the scoring system is that no matter how many points a team gets behind, a win is always still within reach. But of course a victory is not always the outcome, but that rarely takes away from the fun. Fortunately, pickleball is like pizza and other universally grand things - *- even if it's bad it's good!*

Everything about the game gives off playful vibes. Music is often played on the courts. Gameplay usually lasts about 10 minutes and consists of a 2 vs. 2 player match. Whichever team wins typically stays on the court, and the losing team rotates off and two new players join. The winning team is often required to separate, so that each person gets a new partner. This is a nice custom because it prevents a strong team from staying together and dominating the others, while also providing a great opportunity to meet and play with other players and personalities.

I very much appreciate the social part of the game. Throughout the course of a 2-3 hour evening of gameplay, it's great fun to interact with numerous players. There's also very few awkward moments, even when playing with someone I don't know, because of the nature of the game. Even if personalities clash a little off-court, during game play, I'm



almost always able to become a team with my teammate. I love that about Pickleball; it's the ultimate uniter.

And just when I thought I could not have more love for the game of pickleball, a new element and love of the game recently emerged. Oddly enough, it occurred as a result of reading a beautiful children's book called, "how diablo became Spirit". The story is based on the real life events of a leopard, and a woman named Anna who has the unique ability of being able to communicate with animals. Within the telling of the story, the reader learns the basic techniques Anna uses to speak with animals. This is significant to my pickleball story, so I'll take a moment and do my best to summarize her communication techniques here:

When speaking to any animal, Anna gets still and quiet. She imagines a golden thread going from her heart to the animal's heart. Through this thread, she introduces herself. She asks one question at a time such as, "is there anything you would like me to know?". Then she listens patiently. While listening, she advises not to assume you know the answer. Instead, remain curious and let the animal share their truth. Lastly, she gives thanks to the animal and gives thanks to her own heart.

I am in awe of her communication process and recognized that this form of active listening is incredibly powerful. So much so that after tucking my daughters into bed one recent evening, I stood outside their bedroom door and prayed. The praying part is a frequent occurrence, but on this particular evening, something new happened. Instead of my typical prayer, I got quiet and still and imagined a golden thread from my heart reaching far into the heavens. What happened next has had me glowing since. I started to connect with multiple loved ones who had passed. I could hardly believe it! And although I received numerous messages, each relative was very gracious and it felt very



unrushed. They each took a turn to leave me with a brief but relevant and comforting message.

One related message I feel compelled to share with you now was from my older brother Mickey. Mickey was born about a year before I was. Although Mickey was a perfectly healthy baby boy, I sadly never got to meet him. He arrived around the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, but died as a result of the hospital staff not being present to care for my mom and brother during his birth (they were gathered elsewhere, celebrating the new year). My parents were devastated.

Thankfully love never dies.

Fast forward back to the recent present.

As I quietly stood praying outside my daughter's bedroom door, I envisioned the golden thread, and guess who had a message for me?! My beloved older brother, Mickey. Interestingly, I still felt him as an older brother figure (meaning, I felt his presence as an adult who was still a year older than me). His energy, his spirit, was undeniably one of Family. Even though I never had the opportunity to have a relationship with him, in that moment, I feel extremely grateful to say that there is no doubt in my mind that I have an older brother and he is still present in my life. I felt my brother with me as clear as anything I've ever felt. And of all the things that he could have shared with me in that moment, guess what he chose to share?

He told me that he's with me, and he told me he has fun watching me play pickleball. This brings me to tears to write about and couldn't make me happier.



Over the course of these last few years I have enjoyed playing pickleball with numerous family members, and now I know that another extremely close member of my family likes to play, too!

I'll close with a final Mickey story. A few short days after this heartwarming interaction with my older brother, I arrived at a local indoor pickleball facility for some open game play with community members. When I walked in I noticed a game had just finished and two new players were needed, so I rotated onto the court, along with a new player that I had never met before. I introduced myself as we stepped out onto the court. She gave me a smile and told me her name was...Mickey.

Time stood still as the sweet sound of her name lingered and held my soul. I was in awe. After the game, I felt called to tell her the story about the significance of her name. She listened closely, her eyes sparkled, and with a great big and loving smile she replied, "there's God for you."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Pickleball invigorates and connects me.

It fills me with joy and constantly reminds me that one of the greatest gifts of life is *play*.

In my mind at this very moment I can hear the pop of the ball striking the paddle.

I wait with curiosity and excitement for what follows.

I wonder what life has in store next.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



BY SHARON S.
CLEVELAND, OHIO

What brings joy, flow, and connects me to
my Higher Self?

Springtime flowers with petals unfurling
before me.

Loving thoughts of family
and friends.

Candles burning brightly like beacons in the dark.

The silent wisdom that whispers from the trees, which my oldest son
taught me to pay attention to years ago.

Seeing wonder in the insects that surround me, a connection made
stronger after witnessing my younger son commune so deeply with
the insects in our yard.

All the heart-shapes found in nature, which my oldest daughter woke
my vision to.

Being in the sunlight while laughing to myself, a gift I mimic after
watching my youngest daughter find delight in this activity.

Watching my children laughing with their cousins and conversing with
their aunts and uncles.

Walking along the ocean, feeling the wet sand beneath my feet.

Looking at the horizon where the sunset meets the land.

Sharing an ornate meal presented at Disney World with the in-laws,
knowing how much effort went on behind-the-scenes to provide such
a blessed occasion.

Phone calls with my closest confidants and friends, reminding me
support is always there for the giving and receiving.

Drumming in the change of the seasons, prompting me to remember



there is an ebb and flow to life. Nothing is static, even if it seems that way.

Reuniting with distant relatives who are really only as far as a thought away. My extended family warms my heart in so many ways.

Cuddling up with a warm blanket in front of my faux fireplace on a cold winter's day, such a simple act to warm my skin, but more importantly to warm my heart, as I watch the flames dance in the darkness.

Feeling a sprinkler's gentle mist while out walking on a hot summer's day. Sharing laughter while skipping in the drops of water spitting out as it nourishes the ground and tickles the toes.

Lying on a blanket, looking up through the trees, and for a moment connecting with eternity.

Watching the solar eclipse with my family in our backyard, feeling linked to everyone everywhere who was experiencing this phenomenon.

Seeing the aurora borealis, knowing how majestic and powerful the lights are that we rarely see.

Looking at rainbows and seeing them as reminders of how magical the seen and unseen are.

Looking at the stars, imagining how connected I am to all that has come before me and all that will come after me.

Digging in my garden, considering how many stories the earth must hold; imagining what was here before my little patch of garden.

Looking at the moonlight with my beloved, thinking about how connected we are to the moon's energy.

Acknowledging how far away we feel but recognizing that in this great cosmos we are closer than we seem.



Feeling the healing energy that pulses through my hands as I center myself and invite that in which can be of service to others in the form of Reiki and other healing modalities.

Standing at a grave wanting so dearly to connect one last time on this earthly plane, while knowing there is a lasting connection if I acknowledge the presence of life beyond that which is felt with my fingers and seen with my eyes.

Sitting in my divine line, feeling the union of my higher self with my physical form, this most basic, yet essential activity, often brings forth the flow state within me.

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