

The Beauty of Life

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At this very moment, I can see the sun peeking through the clouds and lighting up the side of a tall oak tree. The tree itself reminds me that not one of them is the same as another. Just like the places in this world. Sometimes when I think about all that this life and this world have to offer, it overwhelms me. Occasionally, I will see something magnificent or do something extraordinary and the beauty of this life fills me up inside, giving me a rush and a high that no drug could ever match.

Many people say that infinity is in the afterlife. I beg to differ. I believe that infinity is right here, right now, on Earth. We just don't have the time here to experience it all. But, the memories that we create while experiencing this world, those are the things that live forever.

I'd like to say this without sounding overly trite. Family is one of those elements that creates beauty and gives us memories. I don't just mean caring for your family and visiting them on holidays and making sure that you remember to call them on their birthday. The beauty, for me, is in the little things that I remember about my friends and family because those recollections bring me the most peace. It's those endless conversations that go on into the night and no one wants to end them because they are afraid that they'll never be able to get those moments back. It's sitting up with my wife discussing vacation plans for hours, just the two of us. Sometimes I will glance over at my loved ones while they are doing something simple, something ordinary, and I become overwhelmed with affection. For example, my wife when she is sleeping; my father when he is mowing his lawn; my mother when she is cooking; my sister when she makes something for me or writes something for me; my grandparents when they are having a conversation, probably one that they have had a thousand times in the past fifty years. I look at these situations with more than the love I am almost obligated to feel for them. The love becomes authentic and very real. I look upon them during these times with admiration and respect because they are doing their best in life. These times also make me feel sorrow for those who choose to let life pass them by. It's the little things about family. Those are the things I will remember.

I think life is best experienced by seeing the world in which I live. To me, life is not something we are given, it is something we have to seek out on our own. We are given a body and the opportunity to do with it whatever we choose. We can hear what we want, see what we want, and feel whatever we want to. Simply to be born, grow old, and then die, is just a process. Living is something different. That is up to the individual, and I have chosen to live my life and not just wait to die.

Infinity is out there, but we are running out of time. The beauty in this life is everywhere, but still, it must be sought. It comes in the form of large cities, skyscrapers, oceans, palm trees, pyramids, Rushmore, snow, sunrise in Bar Harbor, country farm houses, bald eagles, covered bridges, the Alamo, Mount Fuji, Monument Valley, Arizona, and the rest of this infinite world. Obviously, it isn't really infinite. Common laws of logic and science tell us that. But in the short time that we are on this Earth, we can't possibly see it all, so the way I figure, it might as well be infinite. I will surely miss the things I didn't get to see. Odds are, I'll miss my chance to see the Aurora Borealis in the Arctic Circle, and I'll miss plenty of other magnificent worldly features as well. That is why the beauty of life, although plentiful, must be chased with haste.

One joy that I truly take advantage of is the beauty of music. Not just the sounds. Yes, the sounds are part of it but so much else is often forgotten. What people fail to think about when they listen to music is the long hours that the artist spent writing and perfecting the song. Who did they write the song for? Was it written because of some emotional wreck that has crashed into their lives? Maybe. Think about the cooperation it takes to compose music. Humans must work together, using the talents they were given to make one common statement and that statement is in the form of instruments being played in harmony. People forget all of those little details, but to me, those little details are the real beauty of music. We must remember to hear more than just songs. Once we listen to what the artist is saying, how they're saying it, and why they're saying it, then the beauty of music reveals itself. I remain in search of new musical artists, constantly. I want to hear what they have to say. Maybe I'll learn a little more about life.

How is it possible to organize and keep track of all this beauty that is experienced? For me, that answer is simple; by taking as many photographs as humanly possible. To experience a trip somewhere is a joy for a week, but to keep a photographic journal of that journey is a joy for a lifetime. There are two different kinds of photographers. There are those who simply snap pictures of people or birthday parties or something that they have visited. And then there are the truly devoted photographers. This is the category where I fit in. I believe that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and that beauty can be found in everything on Earth if it is glimpsed at just the right angle. Show me a flower or a cloud or a spider or a bus load of people and I will show you something beautiful about it. And sometimes an unexplained luck of fortune takes over a simple picture. Sometimes the sun will shine through the clouds in the shape of a cross or the moon will light on one side of an object and leave the other side shrouded in mystery. Once that shot is captured, it becomes beautiful forever and not just for that one instant that someone was lucky enough to see it. This world is put on display by the beauty of its images. Don't miss them.

If there's one thing more than anything else about life that fills me with pleasure and bliss, it is the changing of the seasons, especially when autumn rolls around. There is nothing on Earth that can match the peace and nostalgia of the fall for me. It is the time when school begins again and a new chance to do great things comes back around. The great American pastime of football kicks off on fields all over the country. It brings the changes in colors to the leaves that fall to the ground providing that crisp sound when walked upon that only crunchy leaves can make. The hues of the sky seem to become more brilliant as the darker season draws near. The smells of autumn can be experienced not by words on paper but by a stroll along a wooded path or down a neighborhood street. The fall brings October, my birth month, when the Halloween decorations are in full swing. Sometimes, the first flakes of snow fall to the ground with the promise of the holidays just around the corner. It is this time of the year that I look forward to. I feel as though it is a time that has been set aside just for me, and in the days of late August I reach a new level of excitement.

With the exception of my family, of all the things in this world that I will miss when I am gone, it is the promise of the fall coming around that I will miss most. Seeing different parts of the world and having long conversations with whomever, and the coming and going of new artists are all things that have their time in life. You experience them, briefly, and then they are gone, but not the changing of seasons. That is one of the few consistencies of the world in which I live. The fall always comes no matter what. If there is a war happening somewhere in the world, the fall still comes. If I've had a rough year and need to start over, the fall will come. If I've had a fantastic year and can't wait to do it again, the fall will let me. Sometimes it makes me a little sad when I realize that I only have a small number of falls left to experience. That's not to

say that I will leave this world any time soon, but in the grand scheme of things, it will still be a very small number of times. Maybe I will see fifty more falls, maybe only twenty, perhaps less than ten. Only time knows that answer. That is why we have to breathe in every experience with the deepest of breaths. Because when you think about it, life is really only one deep breath, and then you exhale.

Thinking about life on life's terms may seem at times to be a depressing thing to do. To think that we are only here a short period of time is somewhat disheartening, but we all know that dying is just one of those rules that we were given and nothing will change those rules. Shouldn't that make us angry and sad? No. Instead, I think it should make us appreciate every day we get; every moment with a loved one, every place we see and go, every song we hear, every photograph we take, and every new autumn that comes around. I would like to quote the character of Lester Burnham from the film, "American Beauty." His quote is a view on the passing of time and people, and it's a view that I share. He said, "How can I be angry when there is so much beauty in the world?" Am I trying to say that there is no dark side of life? Absolutely not. In fact, quite the contrary. Many times in life the events and circumstances that we experience are much darker than any bright day we can remember. Those days don't take away the beauty of the world; they just make it harder to see. That's why we have to spend each day trying to find it.

"An Italian sonnet about the end of life"

I'm looking up from where I gently lie
The day is gone and night has taken place
I'm running out of time to find my grace
By morning or before it I will die
The hour of my death is drawing nigh
Many have been summoned just in case
Worry is no longer on my face
And soon my spirit will be set to fly

As my loved ones wait they gather round
Their hearts have been prepared for coming grief
They talk to me while trying to pretend
But now I close my eyes eternal bound
It's much too late for any disbelief
This life of mine has finally reached the end