

## Who Fixed the Refrigerator?

by Wayne Muller

Many years ago I was living in a small, second-floor walk-up apartment in Cambridge, Massachusetts. One day my refrigerator stopped working. It still managed to store my food, but kept it warm rather than cold. When I called a repair shop they said it would cost fifty dollars just to send someone to look at it. As an impoverished graduate student with little disposable income, I resolved to fix the refrigerator myself.

First I went back to the used furniture guy who sold me the refrigerator. Based on my description of what happened, he said it probably needed an electrical part that cost only a few dollars, and told me where to buy it. I went to the electrical supply store, and the man behind the counter explained in intricate detail precisely how to take out the old part and replace it with the new part. Excited and rather pleased with myself, I headed home with my precious purchase. I managed to install it properly, without inflicting further damage to the refrigerator, or to me.

And when I plugged it in, the refrigerator worked.

I couldn't have been more proud. I had fixed my broken refrigerator all by myself. An epitome of American ingenuity and know-how, I was a picture of self-reliance, the Thoreau of my generation. I could take care of myself.

Later that day, as I continued to reflect upon my glorious achievement, a question arose in my mind - who really fixed the refrigerator? Was it really me - or was it the guy who told me which part to buy, and where I could find it? Or was it the man who sold me the part and patiently explained how to fix it? Was it those nameless people in some faraway factory who had actually made the part, without which my refrigerator could never have worked again, regardless how impressive my ingenuity? In the end, who fixed the refrigerator?

In truth, it is virtually inevitable that we all end up fixing the refrigerator. We are woven so intricately into the fabric of all beings everywhere, so deeply involved in this enormous, common web of interconnected life, that only fear and resistance and the illusion of separateness allow us to imagine we ever do anything by ourselves.

We completely depend on countless others every day for our food, our shelter, our electricity, water, clothing, transportation - for virtually every need we ever have, including care and affection, love, even life itself. While it is sometimes hard for us to feel that we belong anywhere, often the opposite is equally true: It requires an enormous amount of energy to remain separate from the rest of our human family.

Our separateness is a painful fiction. Each of us is necessary. When we isolate and withdraw from humanity through our technologies, our imagined differences, our fear of being hurt or rejected, we actually deny ourselves the very love, comfort and nurture so readily available from those who love and care for us. Even worse, we deny others our gifts, our wisdom, the fruits of our life that we have to offer, what we bring to the common table, for the common wealth of all.

Our global family aches for our companionship. As we seek political, social, economic, or ecological healing among peoples and species upon the earth, any authentic healing awaits the wisdom, the presence, the company, the love that only we can bring.

In the none of us is ever needed to fix whatever is wrong. We only need to know what is broken, or where to find the store, what part is missing, or how to put it in. Only when we are all together, gathered in a circle of trust and shared wisdom, can we ever hope to repair whatever we know must be healed in our work, in our lives, in the world.

Every moment, especially when all can seem so terribly bleak, and we are so very weary of being weary - the family of the earth stands in hopeful anticipation of our arrival.

All creation awaits our precious, spectacularly simple gifts.