

The Point of Being Alive by Rachel Stafford

□ A few weeks ago, I found myself in one of my favorite cities: Seattle, Washington. Within minutes of my arrival to Pike Place Market, I felt an overwhelming sensation that I was meant to be in that spot, at that moment, with my two children.

□ As we meandered around the colorful and lively market, I witnessed six connections, which I will refer to as “points of light” in the following post. These moments, later comprised as one remarkable collection, illuminated the beauty and importance of living life with open eyes, open hands, and an open heart.

□ This is my story ...

□ We had just reached the outskirts of Pike Place Market when it quickly occurred to me that I would not be dictating the pace or the sights of this excursion, but rather my children would.

□ As if pulled by some mysterious force, they both ran directly to one particular vendor whose table was located just outside the market. Prominently displayed beneath a sign that read “Fusion of Glass” was an array of brightly colored nuggets suspended on a leather cord.

□ The dapper young vendor spoke kindly to my daughters and informed them that there was a \$5 discount for “little people” and a \$5 discount for “those who had to put up with little people.” I instantly liked his clever marketing tactic.

□ I watched as he showed my 5 year old daughter how the medallion became brilliantly illuminated when placed against different articles of clothing. For the next ten minutes, she proceeded to pick up every vibrant oval within reach and place it against her jacket.

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□ “Look at this one shine, Mama!” she marveled again and again as each stone she selected radiated its own unique color tones while cupped in her small hands.

□ Little did I know the sparkling light of a glass pendant would be a precursor to the extraordinary events that were about to unfold.

□ Points of Light #1

□ After examining literally every medallion available at “Fusion of Glass,” my daughter decided it would be wise to see all the products the market had to offer before making her

final purchase.

□She took this task quite seriously, and we proceeded to visit every vendor table in the market so she could examine the unique items. She marveled at miniscule flowers made of clay, hand-painted hairpins, homemade soap, ornately beaded bracelets, silk scarves, and miniature oil paintings. The artists were extremely patient and informative, taking time to explain to my child exactly how their artwork was created.

□I must admit, I was as engrossed in the selection process as she was, but not by the artifacts—which were all exquisite—but rather by the facial expressions of my child and the artists as they interacted. I witnessed a tangible connection as the passion of one person merged with interest and appreciation of another.

□After an hour, I informed my daughter it was time to meet the rest of our family at the world famous fish market. As we made our way through the jovial, easy-going crowd, I noticed a troubled look on her face. I suspected she was trying to make a decision about what item from the market she would purchase.

□Sure enough she said sadly, “I don’t know what to buy.”

□“Oh, I bet. It is such a hard choice because there are so many neat things,” I agreed.

□“No, Mama,” she corrected, “I don’t know what to buy because I don’t want to hurt any of the artists’ feelings; they made all these things with their own hands.”

□What is the point of being alive if you fail to notice and applaud the beautiful efforts of someone pursuing a dream?

□Points of Light #2

□After delighting in seeing monstrous slabs of fresh salmon tossed around by fishmongers in white aprons and yellow rubber boots, we headed to the street along the edge of the market.

□At the same moment, every member of my family looked in the direction of a captivating sound drifting from a nearby corner. Much to our surprise, we spied a musician singing and playing the guitar while aptly balancing a hoola hoop around his waist.

□My daughters ran over and alternated between looks of awe and clicks of the camera—a spectacle they couldn’t wait to show their daddy upon return from the trip.

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□In a funky, Spin Doctor-esque style, the musician belted out a catchy tune called, “I Love My Mom.” It was impossible not to laugh or stand still as he amused the huge crowd that congregated around him.

□Suddenly a woman approached us and said, “Excuse me. I couldn’t help but notice these two little girls.”

□She smiled at my daughters who couldn’t tear their eyes away from the most original live entertainment they had seen in their life.

□“I just love how they are appreciating the musician and clearly enjoying themselves. It is just a beautiful sight.”

□What is the point in being alive if you cease to delight in life’s simple joys—like the wonder and excitement in a child’s face or the pleasing sound of live music on a crowded street corner?

□Points of Light #3

□We walked a few more minutes and discovered a group of musicians whose talent was so extraordinary, you couldn’t help but stop and stare. My 5 year old daughter, who plays the ukulele and loves to sing, was mesmerized by the gigantic upright bass, the tap dancing lead singer, and the fast-fingered banjo player.

□After watching intently for five minutes, I could tell my daughter was not planning to move on anytime soon, so I motioned for my sister to take my older daughter on ahead. I then squatted down on the sidewalk. Taking this as a sign to rest a bit, my 5 year old settled into my lap and soaked up the sounds with all her senses.

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□But after a few moments, her tapping foot suddenly stopped. She turned and whispered into my ear, “I don’t want to forget this.”

□What is the point of being alive if you neglect to engrain life’s most meaningful moments into your memory bank?

□Points of Light #4

□We caught up with my sister and older daughter and headed toward the place where our adventure started that day. While walking, we passed a homeless man in a dilapidated wheelchair. His right leg had been amputated and his left hand was covered in what had once appeared to be a bright pink bandage that was now covered in a dingy, gray film. Although he wore an empty expression on his face, his eyes were bright and alert.

□A few steps past, my 8 year old daughter suddenly stopped. She looked into my face with a mixture of conflict and determination and spoke.

□“I feel like I need to give him some money.”

□The words spilled from her lips as she began fumbling through her pink pocketbook. For the first time in her life, my rule-following first-born child did not ask for my permission to do such a bold deed. This indicated that I must stand back and let her do what she must do.

□I quickly noticed that unlike the other homeless people we had passed, this man did not have a money cup in his hand nor did he have a container for spare change sitting beside his chair. I wondered how my daughter would handle this obstacle.

□Without hesitation, she walked up and handed the crumpled the bills from her wallet to the man directly. I watched in awe as my child looked straight into his eyes and warmly acknowledged that he was seen, that he was not invisible to her, as he is to so many.

□I watched as he mouthed the words, “God bless you, sweet child,” and the cloak of despair lifted from his face for one brief moment.

□What is the point in being alive if you have no compassion for a brother or sister in need and ignore the urgings of your heart?

□Points of Light #5

□As we neared our final meeting place, I could see my parents waiting in the distance. We had almost reached them when a fragile elderly man, being escorted by his grown son, stopped right in the middle of the sidewalk to greet my younger daughter.

□“Hello!” he called out warmly to her as if addressing a longtime neighbor across the street.

□He opened his wrinkle-lined eyelids a bit wider and took in my child’s strawberry-blond curls, freckled face, and clear blue eyes. She looked directly into his face and smiled her “sunflower on steroids” smile to which he quietly said, “You are beautiful.”

□As my child stood below him basking in the glory of his adoration, his eyes filled with tears. I knew that my child’s face had triggered a memory, perhaps transporting him to an earlier time or to the presence of someone he used to know and love dearly.

□Desperately trying to control the emotion that threatened my ability to speak, I whispered in her ear, “I think you remind him of someone.”

□And then as if instinctively knowing what he needed, she reached out her small, porcelain hand and offered it to him. His shaky hand, covered with protruding veins and age spots, grasped hers as a tear silently slipped down his weathered face.

□What is the point in being alive if you neglect to extend a loving hand to the young, the feeble, the weak, and the lost?

□Points of Light Merge

□A few feet away was the place where it all started.

□“Fusion of Glass.”

□My younger daughter ran up to the familiar merchant and excitedly announced, “I’m back!” as if he had been hopelessly waiting for her return.

□We assured the kind man we had looked at EVERY item available at Pike’s Place Market only to realize THIS is what made her heart sing ... THIS is what she wanted to keep forever.

□My daughter picked up the medallion she had been eyeing earlier and held it up for purchase. The man showed her how to shorten the adjustable strap, and then tenderly placed the jewel around her neck.

□The pendant hung just to the right of her heart, and oh how it shined! It shined like the light of two souls merging along a busy street ... it shined like two souls merging along the busyness of life.

□The light of human connection ...

□It is in the artist's smile when her creation is admired.

□It is in the musician's heart when people stop to listen, tap their feet, and soak up his gift.

□It is in the children's faces and in their words when they are listened to and loved.

□It is in the lost, the broken, and the hopeless when someone looks them in the eye and regards them as a human being.

□It is in the elderly, in their deep facial lines, their precious memories, and that twinkle in the eye when treated with respect and kindness.

□The light of human connection—it is right at our fingertips, right in our line of vision, but so often untouched and unseen beneath the veil of distraction,

□beneath the hurry,

□beneath the excessive stimulation,

□beneath the technology, the to-do lists, the futile attempts at perfection.

□But the light is there, and it is ours for the taking when we allow our soul to merge with another.

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□What is the point in being alive if you fail to see the light?

□See it today.

□See it in a child.

□See it in a loved one.

□See it in a friend or even a stranger.

□And once you see it, let that marvelous light spill across your heart and bring what really matters clearly into focus.

□Believe me when I say the light of human connection is so powerful it can stop you in your tracks—even on a crowded street corner—and make you grateful to be alive.