

Serious Fun by Carolyn North

I have a wonderful photograph on my altar of several of us at Red Clover a few summers ago, standing in front of a lilac bush in full bloom and laughing our heads off. My brother had just made some wry joke, no doubt spoken out of the side of his mouth, and the shutter clicked just as everyone broke into full laughter, while he and I exchanged a private grin. Probably none of us can remember what was so funny at the time, but there it is, the bemused essence of this quiet guy caught on film, surrounded by folks who adored him.

I call it the 'Cosmic Crack-up.'

Leon was a renegade even as a little kid, and bless him, lived a successful life doing it his own way. He came of draft age exactly as America was entering the war in Vietnam, told us he had no intention of getting drafted and then made good on his promise by baking bread for members of the Draft Board the morning he had to appear. There, he ceremoniously cut his loaf into generous slices and handed each member of the Board a well-buttered slice, telling them that his reasons for wanting Conscientious Objector status was baked into his bread!

"I could try and say it in words," he told them, "but tasting my bread will say it much better than I could."

Amazingly, he got off!

He later insisted to us that his interview was just before the lunch break and they were hungry...

Then he quit school, took to the road with his guitar on his back, and went looking for 'home.' And found it in the backwoods of Vermont where he settled down with a group of new friends, made a garden and greenhouse, and began to grow food and flowers.

He already understood that creating the 'good' was much more effective than fighting the 'bad.'

Like a natural healer he was living the antidote rather than attacking the disease, and for over forty years this city boy lived a quiet country life with his family, farming the land, becoming a fine guitarist/songwriter, researching ancient Egyptian Trigonometry (!) and getting elected to the local school board.

He died not long after doing his last pruning of the apple and peach orchard on the hillside above the farmhouse, where he had quietly lived his whole adult life, and lived it well.

So I've been thinking a lot about the wisdom of taking on what is right in our world instead of waging war on what is clearly wrong. I prefer the idea of hitching rides on magic carpets, dreaming dreams with other folks who know how to work hard and play hard, creating a much more interesting world than what we've been handed. I know that's where the real action is, anyway, where effective change is happening, and where our open hearts are cherished and creative fun and true friendship are the name of the game.

It's where we can experiment with new ideas and allow our minds to erase old boxes, where we can feel how everything connects to everything and where Time is ephemeral and opens easily into synchronicities. It's where creativity grabs us up and beauty pours out even when we're not trying; it's where we can grow sunflowers that rise to twice our height - as my brother has done - and where we can learn to relax under pressure so that even going to the dentist can be interesting!

The day after Leon died I spent the morning listening to his music - especially my favorite song that makes me cry every time I hear it, about watching butterflies on a summer afternoon, a song he wrote for our mother as she lay dying.

"I've been talking to the Monarchs...I've been talking to the Painted Ladies...I've been talking to the Admirals...all afternoon...spread your wings and let your soul fly..."

Sobbing, I went out into the garden to weep beneath the fig tree he had pruned last time he was out here, and noticed a large Monarch flitting around the flowering butterfly sage bush. I think I murmured an apology to it about milkweeds not being in season, but then realized that the Monarchs weren't in season either!

No wonder there was only one. When I looked again, it was gone. What was going on? The next morning the same thing: a single large Monarch flitted back and forth near where I was sitting, touching in on one bush after another and then disappearing over the fence.

Again the next day, one Monarch butterfly showed up by my chair, but not the next day. Nor the next. Nor the next...

The Monarch had moved on.

My brother, shapeshifting his way through the realms...?

Bayo Akomolafe - by mutual consent a brother/son of mine - reminds us that enchantment is never in short supply, even now when the world is in such turmoil around us. That if we can 'go fugitive' in these rushed times and learn to slow down and 'receive rather than impose, feel rather than think,' we can listen for what lies deeper than all this surface madness and be ready when it's time to break out of our limited belief systems - for breaking out of our limited understandings is what it will take.

Bayo urges us to ask what the universe needs from us and to listen for the answers with open hearts, willing to learn how to love and allow ourselves to be fully entangled with the vast, many-dimensioned universe, body, mind and spirit. No matter what! It is our birthright to know the full joy of this world and our privilege to passionately embrace it.

Even when all may seem lost.

There is an old Zen story of a man being chased by a wild bear to the edge of a cliff, and below on the cliff face is a hungry tiger laying in wait ready to eat him up.

If he goes over, he is lost; if he stays on the ledge he is lost. But amidst the rocks below is a scrawny berry bush with a single ripe berry on it. He has no choice but to go over, but as he falls he grabs onto the prickly stem of the bush and plucks the berry, popping it into his mouth as he tumbles towards his fate. The fruit is sweet and tart, the juice bursting on his tongue just as his end is near.

“Ah-h!” he cries, tasting the single berry with deep pleasure, “How delicious!”

This is serious fun.