



I love the land on which I live. And, this is my favorite season. I am surrounded by trees each telling a different story as they drop their leaves and needles. Like many before me I am enthralled by the incense of burning piles of leaves and refreshed by the changing winds of autumn. And I think I deserve this pleasure. I have done things to make this world a better place. I have a right to be care-free. Or, do I?

A local editor I respect, recently described the larger community which surrounds me as, *"A liberal county not focused on serious is-*

sues.” How many of us have chosen to live in an emotionally gated community? We paid our dues. We did our bit. Now we have a right to kick back and enjoy life and a glass of wine. Or, do we?

Let’s look at that right to be carefree. “Care” has been in the English language a long time. The Old Saxon root of “care” is *kara*, which is the word for “lament.” As early as A.D. 725 the word “care” was used in *Beowulf*. But “carefree” did not appear until about 1800. Attempting to live without care is a decidedly modern folly — and one connected with privilege.

Our Thanksgiving feasts are not far off. In my house and undoubtedly in yours some planning is going on. But on the other side of the globe men women and children are intentionally being starved into submission. The Syrian government uses a medieval quaintness to describe its policy, “*Starve or kneel.*” Much closer to my home, families who come to our little food pantry are trying to absorb the loss of a government subsidy that helped feed their families. A New York Times columnist tries to alert us that in the complex political structure of our age there is “*a war against the poor.*” What right does he have to trouble our serenity with such pronouncements?

Years ago, when we here at Starcross first began to care for children with AIDS, we found the indifference of the public to be very painful. We could understand in those early days people who might fear that we were somehow increasing their personal risk. But we had trouble understanding those who simply did not want the image of our area to be seen in a “bad light.” Those of us old enough to have been involved, even in a small way, in the Civil Rights

struggle would have often heard multiple variations on the theme, *"Life is good, don't rock the boat."*

In the county where I live about 30% of the people are of Latino background. Yet they have remained largely invisible and silent. Until a 13-year old Chicano-American boy carrying a BB gun was shot and killed by a deputy sheriff who thought the gun was real and threatening. Then, as is often the case, the young people who shared the boy's background found their voice. And, they were heard around the world. The BBC carried the story. Friends in Europe and Africa asked us how did that happen. More and more groups joined in the protests. Their agendas are varied, with limited attempts to find common ground. How it will play out is an open question. But what the young people were saying will not be forgotten. As Alejandra, a classmate put it, *"He wasn't supposed to die."* She was heard by the adult world which had disappointed her.

What can each do about the enormous problems that surround us? I've had enough international experience to know I am too old to be directly involved with the ghastly and rapidly deteriorating situation in Syria. I would only be a liability. But the process of making the world a better place begins with all of us understanding that indifference is not an option. That is the foundation of any solution.

And, I also think it helps to forget about being entitled to a carefree life in this deeply troubled world.

Brother Toby