

## HOPE AFTER SADNESS

I feel sad. At times it's okay to feel sad, in fact it's dishonest to hide it. I think I'm sad because the world is turning. I miss friends who have gone across the river. People with whom I shared dreams — like sister Marti.

I'm sad when a young person says to me that things which move me greatly, like the Civil Rights Struggle or the Holocaust, have nothing to do with them because that was during my time.

I'm also sad because a tree I planted has been pruned to nothing. It needed it, but will it survive? And I'm sad because the swallows are not here. Every year for the past 41 years they have flown 6000 miles to come to Starcross to build their nests and raise their young until they can make



the flight back to South America. What courage it takes for these important guests. But this year they did not come. Something has changed in their world. I also miss the young people who leave their nests and their time with us to fly, as they must. I hate empty chairs.

Once, years ago, I was sitting next to Carl Rogers (1902–1987), probably the most eminent humanistic psychologist of that time, and I asked him what were the problems that we would face in the future. Carl immediately answered, *“Change itself, and especially the rapidly increasing pace of change.”* He was right.

I miss the family farms. When I was young, 45% of the American population was involved with some aspect of farming and lived a rural life. It was the place where they made their home. Now 4% are involved with some aspect of farming and it doesn't include making a home. It is simply part of making a business. I miss the green lanes where children could walk safely and all those sylvan areas that are now parking lots.

But most of all I miss the sense of decency and compassion which has been submerged in a toxic sea of greed and privilege.



I asked several of my friends to tell me some of the things from the past they wish hadn't changed. They all wrote about the care that people gave to each other, in material and emotional ways. One person wrote about what it was like to have grown up in a farm family,

*I wish families today were there for each other as much as they were in the*

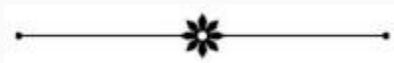
*past... My grandfather had a room in his house that always had staples: flour, sugar, coffee, spices, lard and other nonperishables. He wanted to make sure no one in his farming community or extended family ever went hungry. Farmers helped each other in so many ways. There is always room at the table for one more person.*

Several friends talked about having more siblings, where the family really was the domestic school in which people learned how to share and how to respect each other.



That theme of “respect” came up a number of times. I couldn't help but think of the Hindu greeting and parting “Namaste”— which sort of means “*I recognize and respect the same divine spark which is in you and in me.*” I remembered my parents urging me to “*be sure and show respect*” when I was on my way to meet a teacher, a shopkeeper, or just about any adult. That is surely missing now in what one of my friends calls “the Age of Trump.”

If I had to put all their comments together it would be that in the social contract we used to have with each other there was the provision of looking out for each other. That is definitely missing today. At the same time I sense that more and more people are feeling that loss and doing what they can to fill the void.



Andrew Yarrow recently wrote in the *Baltimore Sun* that we are in real danger

in this age of disbelief,

*It's not surprising that at a time when it's hard to trust Facebook, the president and Congress that truths we once found self-evident have given way to disbelief. Many Americans have discarded once take-for-granted beliefs in democracy, science, God, hard work, refutable information, patriotism, marriage and good manners. Some of these currents cross class, age and party lines, although they are especially common among younger Americans the less educated and those on the political extremes.*



That is a pretty grim outlook though I believe many people hold it today. Parts of that statement are very true. But there is nonetheless a quest for some kind of authentic spiritual compass that many people, including many young people, are searching for. Some find it in themselves, their friends, the universe itself, nascent

movements of resistance and revolution, or in ecology, astrology — or a hundred “ologies” in between.



Literally as I write, the swallows are coming! The swallows are coming! It doesn't look like there will be as many and they are definitely late. But just the sight of these birds flying around the fields and fluttering around their nests encourages me to believe that things I have missed may, or will, be on their way.



***Brother Toby***

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Starcross Monastic Community 34500 Annapolis Rd. Annapolis, CA 95412

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