

I Wish I Were a Bird

I wish I were a bird. I wish we all were birds. What I mean is that I wish we, in certain times of awful distress, all had the non-conscious, forward pointing psyche of a bird. That is, the kind of mentality that remembers no past and countenances no future. The kind of mentality that says, "Here is what is, what was is no more. There never was a was." I wish it but I know it can't be so.

I am thinking of the terrible events, just recently, where a little girl and her father left this world in a most unintentional manner along Highway 16, leaving the rest of us to wonder and hope and believe and grieve and shout to no one in particular, remarking on the pain of it and flirting with despair. At least I flirted with despair. We non-believers face that problem. It's a choice we make and a choice we often reconsider.

This is the season of hatches and fledglings, the season of new fliers and old teachers. I guess the passing of a teacher and his protégé makes it even more poignant. I have watched, in the past few days, young robins and blue birds and wrens and orioles hatch and grow and squawk and fly. They all have their pace of learning, different for each, but a pace that is astounding in the scheme of things. The speed at which they learn the essentials is breath taking. The time in which they acquire the skills of an adult is an instant in our terms.

But it all goes too soon doesn't it? Whether human or avian the time we have here is brief. Four years old or ninety-four years old, our time is not of our own choosing. There is a world of seemingly infinite random occurrences that conspires to reduce those of us left here to mourn the departed, on our own, without excuses for their passing. Please remember I am speaking of us non-believers, those of us who see nothing at the end but the end. We possess a certain smug security about the finality of it all. And that is all we possess. We are cold and alone as a result. So there it is.

But on this farm I am surrounded with the promise of life. Here I encounter at dawn every day the boundless gamble of life on the wing. These young creatures, just out of the shell, just new to the air, just unveiled to their neighbors, leap and bound and flap to their frantic perches returning home just to try it again. Sometimes it doesn't work out, it just doesn't.

I walked into a broken down shed the other day to find a phoebe's nest crashed to the floor, three chicks strewn about, lifeless and still. I don't know why, predator or bad luck, it doesn't much matter. I laid them to rest and went about the business of the living. Gone they were and not coming back. Not too long after, I went back to the shed and saw a new nest, on a nearby rafter, with phoebe herself sitting another hatch, going about the business of going on. I wish I were a bird. They make it seem simple.

The young wrens chatter to their parents in the indomitable spirit that all wrens possess. Sleepy robin chicks, far too big for the nest, nod and wait for their next frantic meal. Young bluebirds flap from their box to our clothesline practicing the darts and pounces that will snatch their meals for the rest of their lives. These little beauties did not meet the same fate as their phoebe counterparts. So far they are fortunate, a tough world still surrounding them. So far they lead the life that makes the young seem immortal. So far their story is one of mornings and promises.

Our own grand daughter is with us this week. She is eight and beautiful and smart and quite a handful. I have not told her about those events on the road to Rushford. I will someday and I hope I do it gracefully. My telling will not be the bird's telling. My telling will be one with my own peculiar shading and reasons. My telling will try to smooth out harsh reality. My telling will take a very long time to get around to the part where we move on with our lives. I am not a bird and can never be so.

But sometimes I wish I were.