

## A Bucket List

Nowadays, lots of people are making “bucket lists;” lists of things they want to do; places they want to visit; people they want to meet; goals they want to achieve; tasks they want to accomplish; achievements they want to experience; try things they never tried. Often, the bucket is filled with holes that allow the wishes, hopes, dreams and “to do’s” lists evaporate into nothingness.

On retirement some years ago, former parishioners began to ask me, “What are you going to do in retirement?” So, I added some things to my own bucket list. My first was to be able to give back something to the local community I was born into. Through that community, the Lord called me to be a priest. I was ordained in the same church I was baptized in, made my Communion in and was Confirmed in. Now, in retirement, I am having the opportunity of giving back by celebrating weekend Mass for the faithful who still remain steadfast in the faith.

Secondly, looking at my local community, decimated by emigration, I felt an obligation to challenge it to form new ways of thinking that might transform the malaise of defeatism that infected it into new challenges that would generate hope for the future. That struggle continues.

Another item on my bucket list was to become earthy again; to get down and dirty in the dirt and generative power of nature. Shaping and transforming the half-acre of land behind my house became a welcome task and challenge. Planting strange sounding shrubs, apple, birch, alder, blackcurrant, damson trees as well as a large vegetable garden became an ongoing task of trying to tame weeds and propagate food for the family table.

Like some people’s bucket lists, I have no great desire to travel to faraway places or exotic destinations. Instead, I enjoy more and more the opportunities that life presents to me now, namely to travel within, to engage in soulful encounters with the Other; to discover that Other in times and places that were so easy to bypass when engaging life with a hectic pace before.

Recently, I read a book called "Taking heaven lightly." it is the story of a very prominent young woman who, at an early age, had a brain haemorrhage and a resulting NDE (near death experience.) As a result, she turned that adversity into a passion and appreciation for life in all its richness. She began to realize that when she stood back from life, she discovered that the only value that mattered was that of being a loving person and sharing that love with other people so that their lives might be enriched. She said that she was blessed to have the chance to look death straight in the eye and be given a second chance at life where she could integrate and share love.

She went on to say that "if we choose to focus on the past, rationalizing our behavior patterns and blaming others for the pain in our lives; then that is what we continue to re-create. If we focus on the future, postponing our happiness until expectations are met, then we will never be happy. All of our power exists right here right now. If we focus on living life from the heart, we are empowered."

The book reminds me Carol King’s song called “Tapestry.” One of its verses goes like this:

My life had been a tapestry of rich and royal hue.  
An everlasting vision of an every-changing view.  
A wondrous woven magic in bits of blue and gold.  
A tapestry to feel and see, impossible to hold.

As I think of my bucket list, I encounter a tapestry, impossible to hold; only to be shared and celebrated with love, hope and joy. I am reminded of something that Albert Einstein once said: "There are only two ways to live your life. One is though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is." I just hope that I will continue to have miraculous encounters with my bucket list.