

STOP LOOK LISTEN

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When was the last time you did nothing? Do you ever just sit anymore? Do you ever just lay on your back in new mown grass and watch the clouds dance by? Do you ever chase after butterflies, trying to give them a message to carry? Or dangle your toes in a pond or watch kids dash through a

sprinkler?

Do you ever sit on a porch or patio and smell the grass, the flowers, the air? Do you even have a porch or patio and do you know what sitting means? Do you own a rocking chair and if so, when was the last time you sat in it? Have you read a book that wasn't non-fiction of "technical" in the last 10 years, 10 months, 10 days?



Do you have magazine subscriptions that serve only to decorate your coffee table or have you actually read one of them, cover to cover, in the last year? Is there a clock in every room, more than 3 calendars in your life and how many watches do you own? Has the refrigerator become the "Message Center" in your home? Do you have a cell phone, fax machine, pager, email and call waiting? Do you have a home office and an office you "go to"? Do you have your sprinklers on a water timer, your lights on a night timer and your life on a DayTimer?



Does everyone in your life have a computer? How many computers are in your home? Do you write Thank You Notes on email and when was the last time you actually *spoke*

to your best friend? Do you have a checkbook and a time worn cookbook or recipe box or has your life become electronic? Is everything in your life computerized or supersized?

When was the last time you let a popsicle melt inside your mouth or watch a caterpillar make its journey across the sidewalk? When was the last time you felt like soaking in a warm bath or standing in a steamy shower, mindless of the water bill? Are you on a “fixed income” both financially and emotionally?

When did you stop dreaming and start running? When did the world end and the nightmare begin?

We're too busy or too tired or too hurt just to sit anymore. Sitting has become a lost art, cast aside in the modern, fast food, quick stop, email, fax message world. Sitting has become a sin.

Dogs sit. Birds sit (well, perch). Babies sit. Kids sit. Grownups DO. Even if you used to sit, you probably gave it up as you joined the bereaved world. Sitting just becomes too painful. Sitting leads to thinking. Thinking leads to remembering. Remembering leads, too often, to tears and who needs those?

Sometimes, in our grief, we try to escape the hurt and the horrible by picking up the speed of our existence. We add activities, places to go, things to do, as if keeping BUSY will keep the hurt away. We run faster and faster, trying to outdistance the memories, the pain, the very thoughts that keep us connected to the horror of our loved one's death. If we stop too long, if we sit, we might begin to remember and to feel again and what is there left to feel and remember except the hurt?



We become afraid of the dark, the daylight, the twilight and everything in between. We grow anxious for no particular reason. Our pulse quickens, our hands

feel moist and our breath grows short. If only we could have a heart attack and die! But even that wish seems to elude us and we begin to realize we aren't going to die, but have to figure out how to live through all of this grief.

It seems safer to keep moving.

We're not the only ones running, however. The whole world seems to have speeded up lately. Is everyone running TO or FROM something? We seem to be chasing something or hiding from something. Half the world seems to be too future-focused while the other half can't seem to let go of the past. "IF ONLY" and "WHAT IF" have become the watchwords of our culture.

We find ourselves wallowing in self-pity and despair. We become caught in the web of grief and it seems too hard to break the threads of hurt. I sometimes think we are afraid to break those threads because we begin to fear that hurt is only connection we still have with our loved one. We get too focused on what we've lost to ever inventory or treasure what we had and have. Sometimes we don't even look at the pictures because we only experience pain and renewed grief.

Sometimes we miss WHAT IS because we only search for WHAT WAS.

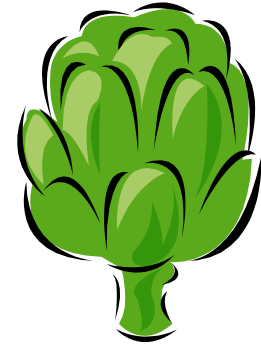
Grow quiet. Be still. Learn to listen. Begin to hear. Somewhere deep inside us is the one voice we never listen to. Somewhere deep within our being are the answers to our fears, our prayers, our hopes. We spend so much time chasing after others' advice when right within our self lie the secrets of survival. Scientists call it instinct. Some call it faith. I call it truth. Each species KNOWS what it needs to survive and only when we can come to the quietness of our self, can we begin to hear.



We carry souvenirs of our hurts, each stored away until time to add them to the next hurt, thus piling up one hurt after another, all to be carried forever in our being. Each hurt adds a new layer to our outer shell and eventually we begin to resemble a rather large onion, made up of layer upon layer of hurt. These hurts leave scars,

some big, some small, but all significant in their pain. Each scar must have a place in our being, so we become a carefully organized mass of layers, each with a symbol or with some "stuff" that represents it.

I'm not sure an onion is the perfect example of grief, however. After sitting for some time and thinking about all of this, I have decided that an artichoke is a better image of me. When you peel an onion down, removing every single layer (hurt), all you end up with are tears. An artichoke, on the other hand, has layers like an onion, except each leaf (layer) has a tiny picker on the end-just like life does. But when I peel an artichoke, removing each layer, when I finally get to the end, there's a heart. And that's right!



No matter how hurried I get, no matter how fast I run or how far away from the inner me I get, there is still a heart. Whatever hurt we are carrying begins to weave itself into our very being and eventually becomes a part of our history-a part of us. It's in the heart that hurt is stored, but that is also where hope and healing begin.



So, sometime in your journey, take the time to just SIT. Turn on the answering machine and run away-to within. Dance in daisy fields; wade in icy streams and blow bubbles in the afternoon. Don't get lost in the hurry of today; don't get too busy with "stuff" to cherish what is within you. Nothing is lost. It is all there, waiting for you to retrieve it, hold it, experience it again and then, to let it place itself wherever it needs to, within you. We lose nothing, although some things seem far away.

You don't stop loving someone just because they died and we don't forget them just because we hurt a little less as healing begins to come. Finally, as we stop, look, listen and hear, the knowledge comes.

Even though death comes, love never goes away.

Grow quiet. Sit a spell and reconnect to the magic, the wonder and the joy that dwells within. Trust me. You have it inside you. They loved us. We loved them. We still do.

Shhhhhhhhhhhhh Love is trying to speak.

