

April 18, 2021

### *Nature Nurtures*

Dear Friends,

*“The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely, or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles.” - Anne Frank*

There was one spectacularly gorgeous day last week when I decided to go for a hike in Deep Cut Park in Middletown. I grew up next door to the park, and I longed to see some of the familiar beauty of my childhood. I was pleasantly surprised to see that the place I was familiar with had only gotten more beautiful over time through the efforts of the Monmouth County Park System. The first thing that gave me a rush throughout my body was seeing the spectacular colors of the multitude of tulips. As I walked further noticing the pink blossoming fruit trees, the bright yellow Daffodils and Forsythia, the red-breasted Robins popping about, the lush green fields, and the newly sculpted gardens, I was moved to tears and often I had to sit and let it all sink in. Memories rushed in and out of my brain, wonderful memories of childhood and family, many of whom are no longer here. I welcomed the memories and the tears. I was only sad in missing so many loved ones I have not seen for so long, but I also had a deep happiness, one infused with gratitude for having had such wonderful people in my life, and such a special and gorgeous place for those memories to have been created. When I left the park that day, I felt re-energized and renewed. This feeling remained with me the entire week as I shared my experience with most of my groups.

Nature nurtures us. If we allow it. Sometimes it's just not possible, however, because it's just not the right time in our grieving process. “Spring's energy can seem cruel when we are grieving. We may find the bursting of new life incongruent with the deadness we still feel inside. We may feel that nature's reawakening is disrespectful or hard to stomach.” (Alan Wolfelt- *Grief*)

*One Day at a Time*) There are many people who could never understand what Wolfelt is talking about here because they don't understand, in fact they can't understand, how we are feeling inside. When what is outside does not sync up with what is inside us, it can be very hard to function; the very air can be a trigger for our deepest grief. When everyone else around us (including me) is saying, 'wow it's a beautiful day,' depending on where we are in grief, we may want to pull down the shades and get under the covers. And even though many of the people we know may not understand such a reaction, we who are grieving certainly do. And it's ok.

In light of this understanding, however, I do want to continue to create a gentle, loving nudge for us to contemplate the possibility to allow nature to nurture us through these difficult and painful times. Sometimes we need a nudge, or a shove, or a kick in the .... And like most things, we won't know if it helps until we try it. Humans have had a profound connection with nature since prehistoric times. Today, however, we frequently spend most of our days indoors in artificially lit rooms while staring at screens. Since the pandemic emerged, many of us have spent much more time online and inside our homes. Now more than ever, perhaps, it is important that we take advantage of all of nature's healing effects on the mind and body. We don't have to go outside for long in order for nature to start doing it's thing to help improve our mood, not to mention our overall health and wellbeing. Research shows that being exposed to natural environments and greenspace reduces the bodies stress hormones. It helps to try to be present to the present while we take ourselves outside, we need to get our brains to actually notice the nature rather than to be continually preoccupied by our pain and loss. Allow yourself the opportunity to smell the air and the flowers, to see and drink in the colors, to feel the breeze and the sun on your skin, to smile at the chipmunk or rabbit as it hops by, and to 'drink it in.' Allow yourself to feel whatever it is that you are feeling at that given moment. As Albert Einstein said, "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

Peace and Serenity,

Kevin