



Parkbench Perspectives

By Wayne Visser

I.

It's only when I actually stop - like now, taking time out, sitting on this bench - that I notice how fast the world is spinning. Or have I got it the wrong way round? Is it me spinning and the world standing still? More likely. Like a hamster running on its wheel - no wonder everything's a blur. I suppose it's not called the rat race for nothing. But you have to wonder, are things really speeding up, or does it just feel that way? And even if the pace is quickening, does that just mean we're getting nowhere faster?

Well, not today, or at least not for these five minutes. There's no pressure to be somewhere else. No deadlines to chase, or things to follow up. Not even a guilty conscience about being away from Lynda, spending quality time. She's happily dug in on the couch, watching that cooking program that, for reasons beyond me, she seems never to grow tired of.

And I'm off doing my husbandly duty, taking the dogs for a walk. So, for this unique wormhole in time, everything seems to be in balance, like the planets perfectly aligned. Even the dogs fit the picture of idyllic harmony, happily in their element, charging from one invisibly scented hotspot to the next, excitedly catching up with the latest doggie gossip from around the neighbourhood, and, of course, squeezing out their drop's worth of news to add to the mix.

Something about their carefree spirit echoes the joy of this moment for me, with the morning sun, warm against my upturned face, a gentle breeze rustling through the branches of the red-gum tree. It's about being in the moment, isn't it? They say that about animals - that they live totally in the present. Which is why they apparently don't worry, or fear death, the way we humans do. They have no sense of the future, no imagination to conjure up disaster scenarios or start stressing about how things may or may not work out. There's something to be said for that.

Although, I suppose it's no great epiphany. That's what Buddhism has been teaching for thousands of years. Meditation, yoga, what are they about if not taming our monkey minds to focus on the here and now, the ever elusive eternal present. All very well in theory, but quite another thing to put into practice. I should know. There was a time when the so-called path to enlightenment was almost an obsession for me. Thinking back, it almost seems surreal, those young days of my all-consuming quest to find a spiritual master, to search for answers to all the big questions.

I remember promising myself that I'd never lose that sense of clarity about what is really important in life. Now look at me! What happened? It was only, what, less than fifteen years ago? I guess that's life. Or, at least, that's what happens when "the default option" takes over - the default being the course society expects us to take: get through school, go to university, then get serious, start your career, after which, the treadmill of earning to pay bills pretty much takes over, with a bit of pressure thrown in, the imperative to achieve something (results, promotion, whatever).





There I go, back to thinking about work. How did I get onto that? Oh yes, *carpe dieme*, "sieve the day!" Reminds me of that brilliant movie with Robin Williams, what was it called again? Oh yes, *Dead Poets Society*. All about being brave enough to follow your dream. And to die for it, if I remember correctly. Yeah, right. I remember coming out of the cinema, all fired up and ready to hand in my resignation the next day, in order that I could pursue my real passion – "follow my bliss", as that great mythologist Joseph Campbell would say. And then what happened?

Inertia, that's what happened. Or was it just fear? Who would leap out of an aeroplane without even having a parachute? It was easy enough to rationalise my lack of courage - there is the bond to pay, it would totally freak Lynda out (she can't handle uncertainty, especially when it comes to financial security), and neither of our families would understand; they would just think it was totally irresponsible of me. But I know those are really just excuses. If I truly, in my heart of hearts, believed in doing something different, I would live my philosophy for a change, and trust the process of life - fate, destiny, whatever you want to call it.

Well, the dogs don't have any doubts about my purpose - to continue with their walk of course! Oh, if only life could be so simple. But then again, maybe it is. For what else have I been doing for the last thirty-odd years other than putting one foot ahead of the other, and hoping for the best, trusting that some higher power knows what's going on, and is, somehow (very subtly I might add, and far too inconspicuously for my liking) leading, or probably pushing, me in the right direction. Alright, pups, let's go. You lead the way.



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