

Tom's Clocks

The Privilege and Opportunity of Time

There are those deeply magical places that we all recall as a kid; those places that seem misty, mysteriously surreal and yet warmly captivating. Those places that you'd love to savor again, even if you know they weren't quite as real as you had imagined them being. If you're lucky enough, they continue to hold some small bit of magic even as an adult. If you're even luckier, you might find them to just as real as when you were a kid with the sifting of adulthood having left them entirely untouched and just as magical.

Tom's passion was clocks. He collected them, repaired them, restored them and doted over them as something like a gentle father caring for pricelessly adored children. Indeed, clocks were his passion. He teased out of them something much more than simply the marking of time and passing hours celebrated with chimes and enchanting melodies; something so very much more.

Tom collected hundreds of clocks; clocks of every type, shape, color and design. The variety of clocks was indeed unimaginable. Some of them were wonderfully captivating, others were intriguing and curious, and yet others were simply mind boggling. Tom's home was filled to the brim with them as some sort of invasion of time pieces, each diligently marking the passing of time in their unique way.

Yet there was something magical in Tom's house. It wasn't simply the marking of time as it passed. That was too sterile to describe it all. It was much more the celebration of what time measured. Time simply marked the gift that we call life, providing us a means to measure life; to have a way to parcel it out, sift it with care and manage it with discernment and discretion. In Tom's house it wasn't about time. It wasn't the clocks themselves, but the honor and respect that Tom lavished on what they measured. In Tom's house, life was a joy and a celebration. The passing of time as illustrated in the faces and displays of hundreds of clocks simply marked the celebration of life itself.

In Tom's house, there were many things time was not. Time was not something to be captured, pursued, wrested into obedience or slowed. It was not to be feared, fled from or watched with frustration. Time was not a thief that was bent on stealing away youth, robbing one of opportunities, or pilfering second chances because it left no time for them. Neither was it an adversary or sort of bully that flaunted the fact that it was invincible and couldn't be stopped even in the most desperate of situations. It simply gave us a means to track the gift of life, a way to establish markers and memorials to celebrate it as well as provide a framework within which to dream, plan and bring dreams to life itself.

How Do We View Time?

In our culture, we have viewed time as that 'thing' that we work against, or more aptly, works against us. We don't appear to have identified what that 'thing' is other than it will not heed our control, we seem to have too little of it, it seems to slip right through our fingers and when it's gone there's no getting it back. We are in competition with time, cramming as much of anything and everything into it that we can. We can't control its passing, but we can control how much we can cram into it as it passes. And cram we most certainly do.

So time becomes something that we engage in in an adversarial sort of relationship. We work against it as we feel it works against us. We chase it and attempt to fill it as full as we can before it's gone. We are in diligent pursuit of it as it diligently runs from us. Time becomes stressful and stress filled.

Time as a Gift

We would do better to see time as marking the gift of life. Life is a gift. We are afforded this one opportunity that is itself filled with multiple opportunities. These multiple opportunities open up yet other opportunities if we only cultivate the opportunities that we have been granted. Life affords us both the space and the resources to make something of the life that we have been offered. Life is not static nor is it flat and one-dimensional. Rather, it is rich with possibilities. Time provides a sturdy framework within which to accurately and consistently mark out life; to plan it, manage it, maximize it, and mark off seasons to celebrate it. Time gives us framework to wisely manage the gift of life.

Precious Means Limited

Because life is limited, time is also limited. Because it is, we shouldn't approach life with some sort of panic as we watch the minutes and hours of our lives tick themselves off. Rather, a gift is to be savored as much as it is to be used; time marking something of privilege rather than being something that induces panic in its passing. We abuse life by chasing it in some sort of panicked frenzy because it's limited. In those times of panic all we are doing is attempting to hoard the privilege of life; creating for ourselves some illusion that we can hold onto something that we can't hold onto. Rather, we should see life as a gift to be handled in keeping with the immense value of the gift itself. In attempting to hoard life, we would be abusing it as much, or maybe more as we would by letting it slip by empty, unused and squandered. In reality, we should do neither.

As the Bible wisely says, "teach us to number our days aright, that we might gain a heart of wisdom." Use your time wisely, not by chasing or squandering it, but by recognizing the gift that it is. Use your time by recognizing that time grants equal space for work and play as well as sacrifice and slumber. Time affords us all that we need to be everything that we can be.

Tom himself died many years ago. However, his clocks tick on, reminding me of the preciousness of life which they measure; a space within which I can work, celebrate, play, ponder, dream and act on those dreams. Time is not your enemy. It simply marks the precious gift given to you. Think about how you will use this gift, and how within this gift you can make your life a gift to others.