

THE INKWELL

By Lynn Berry

Guest Contributor Chris Sedmeyer

In the aftermath (afterglow?) of the arrival of Lynn's Twins, she has found herself in the midst of the ancient ritual of the newborn: the half-sleep-walking 2:00 AM feedings, a tsunami of diapers, and at the end the quiet breathing on your chest as a tiny hand closes on your shirt in sleep before it starts all over again. As Lynn adjusts to her new ones, she has asked me to step in and act as an interim for the Inkwell. As soon as she is able, she will return with her familiar style, no doubt babies on hip, to share her insights on her new life.

As I look over Lynn's shoulder and watch the overwhelming range of obligations and emotions that come with newborns, I am struck by the fact that although the work and the stress involved is immense, Lynn is happy. Tired, taxed, maybe even mildly traumatized (she jumps at each squeak on the monitor, not knowing which one will become a roar), Lynn is nevertheless content and happy in her life. However, by every standard we usually use to measure happiness, Lynn should be miserable. For the most part, our society measures happiness in leisure time, money, possessions, food, entertainment or, at least, the lack of anything unpleasant, uncomfortable, or challenging.

Happiness (like love) is a choice more than a feeling. We choose what makes us happy and that choice makes all the difference in who we are and what we make of this world. True happiness comes from using our freedom to fulfill our spiritual

yearnings, not our material ones. This is often uncomfortable but not unhappy. Carol Sawyer, local resident and published poet, uses a series of stark, evocative images and a powerful visual format in her poem, "Gross National Happiness" to raise the question to the reader--what should we be using to measure our happiness? Her title makes allusion to the GNP or Gross National Product, which is used to measure the financial strength of a country based on its gross wealth. From this title, Sawyer suggests that a nation's strength or success should be measured not by the merely material GNP but by a more intimate measurement in the human heart--in the love and compassion its citizens have for each other:

Couldn't the Official Policy of
that high
Himalayan Kingdom
Teach us
Quietly
about

Trusting
in that
spark of
Heart
in our
Simple
Temporary
Sacks of
Flesh?

Look into my eyes, my brother (1-15).

-----Carol Sawyer

For Sawyer, the alternative to this "Trusting/ in that/ Spark of/ Heart" is the continuing isolation, fear, and

repression that keeps us struggling to find happiness in things and searching for our personal meaning and purpose in the empty and unfulfilling images of leisure, wealth, and excitement that come to us each night on the millions of TV screens she powerfully describes as the "flickering/ Blue/ Indoortwilight" (24).

Realizing that our happiness comes not from what we have or do but from how we live and what we do for others, it becomes critical for us to examine how our lives are being narrowed by the isolating fantasy of materialism and entertainment and how we can broaden our lives to include compassion for others and the striving for our own deepest purpose. In pursuing our own meaning, we may not always be comfortable but we certainly will be happy, and those we touch and the world we shape will be the better for it.

---**Writer's Idea:** Write a piece that describes your values--what makes you happy, what gives your life purpose.

---**Writer's Tip:** Try to change the look of your poem and emphasize critical images or statements by changing how the lines or words are arranged on the page. No one said a poem has to rhyme or be written in blocks of lines, so experiment.

---Please send your original submissions to, (or if you would like a copy of any of the published poems in their entirety), InkwellVernonia@gmail.com or by mail: PO Box 333 Vernonia, OR 97064. Please include your name and contact information. Write—Express—Expand.

Chris Sedmeyer holds an M.A. in English, specializing in archetypal criticism and medieval spirituality. He has published an article in the American Benedictine Review and is currently at work on a new article examining the practice of lectio divina in light of Carl Jung's structure of the psyche.

CAT Builds Energy Efficient Home in Vernonia *continued from page 9*

Earth Advantage works with Energy Trust of Oregon in order to determine the energy performance of the home. The home received energy star certification from Earth Advantage which means that the home will be at a minimum 15% more efficient than a home built to Oregon building code. This home exceeds the minimum energy star rating with an energy performance score of 32.

Ryan Shanahan, a Builder Outreach Specialist from Earth advantage, explained what this rating means is that this home will use 32 million BTU of

energy per year yet without the improvements this exact house would have used 50 million BTU of energy per year. This totals a 36% reduction in energy use for the homeowner. At the open house, Ryan also explained the first thing you want to do is conserve energy and the first step toward energy conservation is with the shell of the home.

The house was built with advanced framing on two foot centers using less lumber but equaling more insulation. The shell of the Fifth Ave. home has 2 inch poly-iso insulation; the best

rigid insulation you can get on the exterior. The poly-iso forms a continuous layer which interrupts thermal bridging that happens through wall studs. More insulation lowers the heat load of the house. This allows you to use products such as mini split heaters that run super quiet and super efficiently providing both heating and cooling year round by exchanging energy molecules in the air.

The house has an energy recovery ventilator that continuously brings in fresh air while extracting some of the heat energy from air inside the house

before it exchanges. It is also equipped with a tank-less water heater which removes the need to spend energy keeping tank water hot. Other features of the home are an insulated front door; a kitchen equipped with energy star appliances, and LED canned lights that use 1/13th of the energy that a normal light would use.

To learn more about Community Action Team go to www.cat-team.org and to learn more about Earth Advantage Institute go to www.earthadvantage.org.

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