

Life Lessons



The View from the Basket

by Susannah Eanes

One of my daughters has had a fascination with photography since toddlerhood. She owns an assortment of cameras, digital and conventional, and has made it her business to record holiday get-togethers, the first buds of spring, butterflies in the chicken yard, and of course, close-ups of the facial expressions of all her friends. These get plastered at MySpace, Photobucket, and decorate the refrigerator as well as the door to her room. So it didn't surprise me to look out the kitchen window one sunny afternoon recently and see her sitting under the laundry line, her face intent behind the device she held in her upraised hands, finger poised purposefully on top. I peered again, and suddenly I felt a bubble of mirth rising in my throat, the corners of my eyes crinkling in delighted amusement. She was sitting in the laundry basket.

As I walked up to her, still chuckling, she turned and smiled at me. "Come here," she said, beckoning. "Come sit here, Mommie –you can see *everything*."

"I don't think I can fit in the laundry basket, dearie."

"Yes, you can. Try it." And she promptly rose and gestured toward the empty basket. But as I looked at the line, I noted the sheets were dry so I said, "I really need to take in the laundry. When the temperature drops they will get damp again, and it's getting late."

"Mommie, sit!" she commanded. I shook my head slightly and looked down at the willow-rush container critically, noting that it was wider than I'd first thought. I shrugged, and then stepped into the remarkably accommodating seat and leaned back, looking in the direction she was pointing.

Before me stretched a vista I have admired many, many times, indeed the first time I saw the beautiful field of rye planted behind the house I thought, "Oooooohhhh.... No neighbors. Land. What an incredible view." And it was, and is. But what my daughter had discovered was, from the low vantage point just underneath the billowing laundry, the vista was remarkably framed in the low-growing bush and bracken of the little copse of trees between the laundry line and the edge of the field. And bordered by the branches, the view had metamorphosed into something completely disarming. The tips of the grasses waved gently directly in the line of sight, the tree trunks seemed to step forward and dance in the

distant, shimmering light as the sun dropped lower and lower on the horizon. Overhead, the sheets dipped and waved, reflecting a pale pink light across the budding green. As I sat there taking it all in I noted bluebirds swooping in and out again in a flash among the leaves in the copse, and a patch of purplish wildflowers just breaking into bud, their low-growing blush too faint to have been seen from normal height.

“Well,” I said slowly, nodding in understanding. “Did you take a picture of this?” I looked up and saw she was holding the camera pointed right on me. I was caught, and shut my eyes in a grimace just as she pressed the button and crowed,

“Gotcha!”

I shook my head ruefully, but didn’t move. “Yes, you got me. You stinker. But I think I’ve still got the best seat in the house, thank you very much!”

She cackled out loud, and said, “Yes. I thought so too. Look,” and she handed me the camera. Pressing the review button, I satisfied my curiosity about what she had preserved for our edification. The edges of a fluttering pink silk nightdress, creamy cotton pillowcases, and a white linen skirt that glowed luminously against the backdrop of endless sky. The rippling velvet of the verdant field ahead, framed just as I’d seen it. A bluebird on the back fence just to our left, his mate about to alight beside him. Nodding, spring-kissed spearmint fronds at the tips of tall poplars tickling the bellies of puffy white clouds as they floated toward dusk against the periwinkle sky. Dozens and dozens of pictures, all taken from the vantage point of a willow basket below a string of drying clothes and household linens. Each one fine, each one memorable, unique, worthy of comment. I had wondered what had caused her to think of sitting there, but that question was lost in appreciation of what that action had wrought.

Sometimes we need to look at our surroundings with a new eye, from a new direction. Doing so releases our prismatic vision from inhibition and fear of extremes, and sometimes reveals surprising information and valuable insight. This is old and common advice, but even the known world must be seen from a fresh angle sometimes. Hanging out laundry is free and healthful, we all know that. But what else can be said to be gained by eschewing easy technological answers to life’s simple questions? After experiencing that “view from the basket,” I know I’ll go back there from time to time, because more than anything else it gave me a feeling of supreme calm to pause and look more closely at my familiar world, to lean back against the willow enclosure and breathe deep, to trail my fingers in the grass and feel the cool tingle of rising damp against my skin. It stopped the familiar in its tracks; it wreathed my very breathing with inquisitiveness, and so gave me a new set of thoughts to consider about my surroundings. Even though I spend a lot of time outside and consider hanging out the clothes a form of therapy, a time ripe for communing with God and nature, still, I had missed the whole picture. Before getting into that basket, I honestly didn’t know we had bluebirds in our backyard, nor that the colors of the afternoon sun coupled with the beloved green backdrop of a hundred acres of rye turned the subjects of a common task into an earthly work of art.