

Inside Out

An Athlete Ponders Some of the Choices We Make

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By Dominique Larocque

As an outdoor sport enthusiast, personal trainer and counselor, I am boggled by the number of individuals who choose to train indoors on stationary bikes, treadmills and stair climbing machines instead of playing outside. Don't get me wrong! I agree, our Canadian winters often make the gym a wonderful refuge from our bone-chilling minus 40 degree temperatures. The so called "torture racks" used by many also play a very important role in the medical rehabilitation field. I speak from experience. For five years I have worked with seniors as a therapeutic recreation coordinator and I had to introduce artificial fitness regimens to my frail clientele. That is how I learned my most important lesson in life – that the human spirit is limitless in what we can accomplish, but that we do remain prisoners of our own bodies and our minds. It is only in the process of dying do we *truly* understand living. It is only by dying that we truly understand the meaning of eternity.

I cannot express how uninspired I felt when I visited a local health club last week on a typical late "summer" day. I repeat, "summer" day. The scene as I entered the gym was of a dozen or more middle-aged individuals running on treadmills and using stationary bikes, their eyes glued to the 20 plus television sets that line the wall. To me, these individuals looked like robots, soul-less bodies performing a routine job, "technological homosapiens" mechanically working out. What concerns the ecopsychologist in me is how much this form of physical activity encourages our "disconnection with nature", or what Theodore Roszak refers to as a healthy "person/planet" relationship.

What also concerns me is the loss of spirit in the hearts of people, the lack of belief in creating one's own personal "happy" destiny. I believe that the greatest danger of religion or of the New Age movement is that it makes us believe in a superior being, a God or a Universe, that will grant us our wishes just with prayer, by having blind faith or by participating in spirituality workshops that offer no practical, concrete or rational tools. Unfortunately, life is not all that simple. Conscious living, loving and dying is "hard work". I do not consider myself a religious person but much can be learned from the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi or of Saint Hildegard of Bingen. These saints did much more than pray. They "acted" upon their strongest convictions. They taught with action.

What we need is a belief in the "creative spirit", a platform upon which we are supported, to be our own unique individual/self without shame or fear and with the deep understanding that we are all interconnected. Deepak Chopra expressed it well when he said that the world will only become a better place when we all start to "see the world in our self, instead of our self in the world."

At this point I must acknowledge my digression. This article was supposed to be on the splendors and wonders of Gatineau park during the autumn season, but as I look around

myself, I feel only a deep frustration with the media brainwashing us with false ideologies which distance us further and further from our inner truth and wisdom. Our endless, consuming habits confirm that we live in complete denial of the fact that our whole existence depends upon a healthy person/planet relationship. Our food does not come from Loblaws. President's Choice is not Mother Earth. What we need now is an "enlightened ecology".

How often did I hear individuals during the January Ice Storm express their deep concern for all the broken trees. We still feel the scars in our souls from the ravages of the storm. What lessons did we learn from nature? When will be the next environmental disaster? Will we be spiritually ready? Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, well renowned for her best-selling book on death and dying, wrote in her last book *The Wheel of Life*, "weapons, greed, materialism, destructiveness. They have become the catechism of life, the mantra of generations whose meditations on the meaning of life have gone dangerously awry. I believe Earth will soon correct these misdeeds because of what mankind has done, for what it has forgotten. What other way is there to teach respect for nature and the necessity of spirituality."

If you do not plan to make a trip to the Gatineau Park this autumn to pay homage to the greatest painter of all, I simply ask you to step out of your car and experience her palette of colors with a "green awareness". Pay her the respect she so well deserves by walking, hiking, canoeing, running, cycling, in-line skating and golfing. Take the time to stop and smell the crisp autumn air, to see how detailed her work of art is. Feel with your touch the rocks and the leaves. Hear the geese flying south or the murmur of the streams. Mystics and shamans are not the only ones who were given the gift of hearing how nature speaks to us. We are *all* blessed with the gift of intuition because we were all born with a soul.

If you encounter children on your excursions, listen to their laughter, appreciate their sense of wonder with the natural world, recognize their innocence and remember the wise native philosophy that we must live everyday for the next seven generations to follow. We live in the most beautiful country in the world. Celebrate "on foot" what it means to be Canadian, to be human, to be alive and to be a creator during the most colorful season of the year.