

*In Praise of
Life and Liberty:*

IMPRESSIONS AND
DIGRESSIONS

MARÍA ALEJANDRA BENAVENT

IMPRESSUM

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A token of gratitude to those who inspire me as time ticks away.

*Dedicated to my sons, my friends and family,
my silent stranger, the vulnerable and helpless creatures
of the universe and the kindred spirits
who may happen to cross my path.*

Introduction

Time is a teacher. Though metaphysically elusive, it builds the foundation of human experience on earth. Civil strife and wars are rooted in the curse of collective amnesia. It is when we ignore or fail to apprehend the lessons of history, that we indulge the very same flawed patterns of behavior which ignite conflict and generate widespread misery.

Let us take a moment to practice the art of introspection. Let us look back and make a fresh start as we embrace the seeds of life. Just consider a baby's fragility and the sublime goodness within.

Behold the toddler, a traveler eager to explore the world. Not even a nasty fall will deter the little one from picking itself up and trying all over again. Age notwithstanding, those who honor life don't bow to fear.

Being unable to perceive or convey any form of racial or religious bias, children open up to the beauty of life like the blossoms in springtime. They don't know what hatred is, for their mere presence epitomizes love.

May your thoughts meet mine to ponder peace. As we take our first steps, let us embrace the pristine nature of the child within.





Back to Basics

WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY HAS TAKEN CENTER STAGE.

Our mighty gadgets dominate our lives from dawn to dusk. And there is no end to what IT experts can come up with just to keep us hooked up.

The world has become smaller thanks to the advent of the digital era. Unfortunately, though, many of us have failed to keep pace with the technological revolution. Others have become addicted to an array of devices: iPhones, iPads and laptops. Unwilling to unplug, they have lost touch with the essence of life itself.

Unable to handle these omnipresent objects, I often feel like the last surviving member of a species on the verge of extinction. Dependent on my kids for some basic IT guidelines, I find myself lost at sea. But my frustration is short-lived. It just gives way to the joy of remaining unscathed, unspoiled and unconditionally free.

Despite our many technological achievements, we have not managed to solve mankind's most pressing problems. We are not capable of averting wars, of fighting poverty, of saving the rainforest.

Human trafficking thrives and in many corners of the planet people do not even have access to clean water and sanitation. Helpless children are vegetating in refugee camps, not far from their abandoned homes in Syria. They are the innocent victims of one of the many ruthless conflicts we have failed to avert. We have not learned to treat animals with the dignity and respect that they rightfully deserve.

OUR TECHNOLOGY VERY OFTEN STANDS IN THE WAY OF OUR INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.

We do not have time for face-to-face communication anymore.

We do not write love letters anymore.

We do not read poems anymore.

And kids do not find books exciting anymore. They are too busy texting or sitting in front of their laptops, which consume every single second of their spare time. Adults are by no means better. Overscheduled and out of breath, we are always running our rat race, with no time left for meaningful communication.

*“What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.”*

WILLIAM HENRY DAVIES “Leisure”

All things considered, I assume we still have a long way to go before we learn to use technology in a more sensible way. Yet we could make huge strides if we abandoned our frivolous lifestyles altogether.

Why don't we take a deep breath and enjoy the beauty of nature? Why don't we strengthen our souls with art and music? Why don't we harness the humanizing power of literature? Wells of wisdom will guide us through life's twists and turns.

Oscar Wilde provides us with this kind of inspirational message in „The Portrait of Dorian Gray“:

„The aim of life is self-development. To realise one's own nature perfectly -that is what each of us is here for.

People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to oneself.

Of course they are charitable. They feed the hungry and clothe the beggar. But their souls starve and are naked.“

So let us fill our souls with the beauty and wisdom of the written word. Let us use our knowledge, our perception of the world, to pursue a righteous cause. Life is too precious to be wasted on trivial technological obsessions. Let us take this single, mighty chance to make a difference on earth.
(2013/2014)

Facing One's Fate

"Your house shall be not an anchor but a mast!"

KAHLIL GIBRAN

Fate rules with an iron fist. It rules over our birthplace and over the course our lives may follow thereafter. As we venture into this world, we may literally become helpless creatures drifting out to sea, like the countless innocent souls that perish in search of a better future.

Each and every single precious life lost to a dream; each and every single survivor facing new hurdles. Fate can be merciless.

Conversely, if born under a lucky star, we may wake up to find ourselves resting on a tranquil golden beach. Exploring our privileged environment, we discover the sights, sounds and scents of a place we call home.

Being social creatures, though, we are also expected to ascribe to an abstract creed, an amorphous collective mindset and a set of patriotic tenets. Simply said, we are called upon to pledge unconditional allegiance to the country where our birth happens to be registered in, thus becoming bearers of a national identity.

Sadly, as we surrender to a national creed, we often fail to find our space and mission within a larger community, namely the place where borders become blurred.

As I first attended a creative writing workshop in the heart of New York City, participants were asked to craft a brief essay under the heading: „I am from....“ As the teacher spelled out the three unpretentious words, tangled memories of a tortuous life set my mind racing through the past. Mystified by the daunting task, I was faced with a quandary.

Naming my birthplace would immediately prime the reader for the hackneyed stereotype of a tango-loving woman deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of the vast expanse of America’s southernmost country. Delving into my family’s past, on the other hand, might blur those images in favor of a more realistic portrait: the depiction of a single individual, a tiny little star among myriad stars within a universal constellation of living creatures.

Fortuitously born in Buenos Aires, the descendant of Spanish immigrants, I can picture my roots strewn over the Old Continent and even farther away. My Valencian grandparents crossed paths and fell in love on a transatlantic journey which would take them to their final destination in South America.

The Galician ones had a romantic „rendezvous“ in Avenida de Mayo, our „Little Spain“ in downtown Buenos Aires, and got engaged shortly thereafter. Having left their own

families behind and facing an uncertain future, both couples encountered challenges at every turn.

However, compared to the wretched lot of over 68.5 million* displaced people, I reckon my grandparents were born under a lucky star. My ancestry traces back to Galicia and Valencia - two completely different regions with unique historical, cultural and linguistic features.

My father, one of seven siblings born to Valencian parents, would tell us legendary tales of a shared Moorish past. Chances are that Sephardic Jewish blood might be running through our veins.

From my mother's side, my sister and I share a Celtic/Galician past. It is common knowledge that Spain is a country whose cultural heritage draws heavily from Jewish, Muslim and Catholic influences.

It thus follows that I happened to come into being as an exotic specimen. Someone conceived for the flight, a freedom-loving bird of no fixed abode. The quest for my roots would haunt me through my tender years, particularly as a teenage girl vainly seeking to adjust to what used to be my social environment. A desperate soul in search of identity, I resolutely set out to conquer unexplored territory.

*Update: According to the UNHCR, the number of displaced people worldwide in 2020 "surpassed 80 million at mid-year".

At the age of 17, I settled down on a farm in North Bangor – a snow-clad village in rural Upper New York – to finish high-school as an exchange student from Buenos Aires. The experience was fleeting but profoundly meaningful. It was not hard for me to feel at ease with my host-family and my school friends. Apart from being a student, I was there as a self-appointed diplomat, giving presentations on Argentina – a country regarded as a real melting pot of European immigrant communities.

It was at the age of 24 that my „permanent alien“ status painfully started to crystallize out of the ashes of a tormented quest. It all began with a journey to Spain, the cradle of my ancestry. It all ended up in a love-affair with an Austrian young man, my prospective spouse – now ex-husband – and the father of our precious grown-up sons. Having spent 30 years of my life in Vienna did by no means tame my rebellious self. Although I learned German diligently and committed myself to adjusting to Austrian society, I seem doomed to be nothing more than a citizen of the world. No matter where the twists and turns of life take me, I am and will always remain a perpetual expat.

A winding path has led me to conclude that home is a place with no name, a dimension with no boundaries. Home is the sweet-scented flowers in spring; a stroll in the Vienna woods as the day wanes; an invigorating cup of coffee as the day breaks; my favorite newspaper lying on my doorstep. Home is Piazzolla's „Adiós Nonino“; Bruch's „Concert for Violin

and Orchestra N 1 in G minor, op. 26“; John Coltrane’s „After the Rain“; Rodrigo’s „Concierto de Aranjuez.“ Home is Neruda’s and Shakespeare’s love sonnets; Whitman’s „Song of Myself“; Borges’ labyrinthine works... Home is Meister Klimt’s „Poppy Fields“; Van Gogh’s „Roses and Irises.“

While it wouldn’t be wise to break with the cultural, historical or personal bonds which enable us to relate to our ancestry, we are called upon to engage with the moment. Aren’t our acts and omissions embedded in the book of life, in the very fabric of history?

In a world where religious and political conflicts trigger wars and massive displacements; in a world where bigotry and selfish national interests trump compassion, universal cohesion is worth striving for. Fostering cultural diplomacy and joining global forces to protect the environment would certainly help us find a common denominator as members of a family called humanity.

Unconditionally free to embrace diversity, I have finally learned to accept my lot as a child of the universe. A freedom-loving soul in praise of life and liberty. (2015)





Home

*Home is a place
where whispers fade
into soothing silence,
two hearts beating
blind to the maddening mob.*

*Home is a place
where skins and souls
melt into scented solitude,
breathless dreams intertwined.*

*Home is a blind bard:
Milton's yearning and
Borges' magic maze,
adrift in time and space.*

*Home is love:
Ephesus' blazing sun,
dazzling days and
moonlit nights,
molten in eternal bliss.*

*Home is love:
freedom from pain and strain;
vast, boundless plains
and a cosmic chaos of secret hues
flowing unbridled.*

*Love is home,
Yours and Mine:
A black oleander,
a red rose.*



Halfway through Life

Often misused when referring to those within my age group, the phrase „midlife-crisis“ can be compared to a tag attached to products close to their sell-by-date. Those who have inexorably joined the ranks of the „pre-senior (plus)“ may be exposed to all kinds of hilarious remarks concerning reckless behavior and hormone-related outpourings of emotion.

In any case, there is a natural inclination to label human actions according to the actors' age. Just consider those poor kids who approach puberty. No matter what they do or say, they are bound to be judged by „their hormones.“

It thus follows that people like me may end up sharing some of the traits of those who are barely 15. No wonder that even the numbers are basically the same. Whether you are 15 or 51, you just feel the transformations taking place in your mind and body, thus becoming more vulnerable to your environment. Furthermore, both groups share a sense of urgency for a world in agony.

Changing the world is a challenge increasingly younger people are eager to face these days. Joshua Wong masterminded the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong as he