

Manifesto for a Resurrection

This is about something that used to be. Used to be, and maybe still can be. If we can figure out how.

There was a time when summer was of mythic proportions. It was all things wonderful, spoken of in reverent tones. It was the subject of dreams and hopes, and was the beacon that got us through the rest of the year. Its end was a cause of deep grieving. It was a vast expanse of liberated time and territory. It had activities, but not merely the activities made it mythic -- it was the totality of the glorious immersion that did that. It was larger than life. In short, it was the time when summer was Summer.

If you do not recognize this Summer, it may not have existed for you, and what follows may not be very useful. But for many of us who do, the recognition resonates immediately and deeply. And, with the same certainty that we recognize this Summer, we can say that it is gone.

Where did it go? When did Summer end? Each of us will have a different answer. For some it was jobs, for others, family changes or responsibilities. It may have been gradual or sudden, but eventually we got engaged, distracted, and attracted to other worlds that, while offering their own rewards, do not admit of Summer.

It may be said that those of us without Summer are not totally bereft, because we have the Weekend and the Vacation. Much could be written about each, but the central fact, as concerns us here, is that both are miserable substitutes for Summer. And we know this. They are too short, have too many demands on their time, and often remain too structured. So when they end, we are sometimes left frustrated by their inadequacy as a substitute for Summer. They are just enough to remind us of what was, but not enough to provide the same fulfillment.

Some of us live in ways that enable us to retain Summer, but for those who do not, to recall Summer is simultaneously to feel a pang of loss, as if seeing a photo of a lost loved one. Skilled storytellers, lyricists, and other artists can conjure up Summer for us, and make us feel that pang of loss. That sort of nostalgia is important because it helps keep the resonance of Summer alive, by preserving where we have been and the warmth of those memories. But it is also disempowering and paralyzing, because rarely do

artists intend to do more than bring forth that reaction. They make us resonate, but then leave us ringing hollowly with only the pang.

My aim is not that. I must go beyond the past, beyond nostalgia and its melancholy discontent. True living is in the present and future. And so I start without compromise, by stating boldly: *Summer may be gone, but I want it back*. For this search, the yearnings caused by nostalgia can provide only motivation. By itself, nostalgia does not resurrect, it merely unseals the coffin and gives us a whiff of how badly decomposed the contents really are.

And, to leave no doubt, resurrection is indeed my aim.

For this, we must leave the artists behind and take matters into our own hands. It's an imposing task. Where to start? We must start where we are, with the tools available. The most available tool is ourselves.

To revive Summer, we should become as familiar with it as possible, and this we may best do through memory. I mean memory at a level beyond casual recollection, into deep immersion, what I call memory diving. This involves focused periods of time spent in conscious, intentional summoning of detail about persons, places, and objects. What did they look like, sound like, smell like? What did you do there, not just once, but what were all the things you ever did there? Who else was there, and what did you do with them, how did they talk, what did they say? The more you dive, the more you find, and each find points the way to another. At the extreme, it has been for a moment as if I was again the person in that time and place, fully as he was then; a memory with my entire being of everything I was and felt.

In memory diving for Summer, talk to the people you spent time with, and let them tell you how you were and what you did. Look at photos, mementos, and souvenirs. Make lists of what you did each summer and who your friends were. Remember what you did and why you did it, but don't just remember events, remember how they felt. Remember how you felt when school let out in June; on a hot morning with insects whirring; when you thought about and longed for Summer. Remember what it was like to be then.

I must warn you that exploring these memories will inevitably lead to contact with your sense of loss. That sense may lessen in time, but there is undeniably a risk that memory diving will lead to greater despair over people and places forever lost. This must be faced. Many good things in our lives have been forever lost, but their biggest contribution to our present life comes if we use them for all they are worth today. Our memory is one of

the few tools that is genuinely and uniquely our own. To forego its use, by abandoning positive memories, is to limit the potential of our present and future. To abandon the memories is to surrender prematurely to their inevitable end.

With these memories of Summer collected, we are able, from our current perspective, to see better than we did at the time what made summer Summer. And, now more in touch with what Summer was, we can turn to how Summer could still be. The world around us will not change at our command to allow for Summer. Instead, we must change ourselves. To succeed will require a kind of sorcery, an alchemy of the mind. It may require changes in activities and attitudes, and maybe even physical changes. In these things, and in all matters of Summer, the key element is to be aware of their Summerness, to be tapping the connection between that present moment and all of Summer you have known.

For inspiration, I offer a list of possible access points, but obviously you will have to find your own: Go barefoot. Camp in the backyard. Build a treehouse. Skinny-dip. Sail. Stop to watch thunderstorms. If your hair used to be longer or shorter in the summer, it can be again. You can reclaim an old camp nickname. Blow bubbles. Chase fireflies. Fly kites. Ride bikes. Run through sprinklers. Read old Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew stories. Commute in summer clothes. (Your suit looks fine with sandals.) Go to baseball games, whether little or major league. Listen to old pop music, especially in the car. Drive with the windows down. Sleep on the porch. Go to the beach, the mountains, the farm, or the lake. See music or theatre outdoors, or go to a drive-in. Eat summer foods, and chase after the ice cream truck when necessary.

If you have contact with kids, you have a ready source of ideas and inspiration. Tap into their Summer, share it with them -- join them. And while you're at it, help make their summers mythic and memorable, so they will know what to go diving for later.

Whatever methods you try, carry the sense of Summer through the day as much as possible. It may still be that much of your time will be spent in the same activities you have usually done. But by doing them with awareness of all the Summer you can find in them, you may transform them. And you.

If we can perform this kind of sorcery, without changing the basic structures of our lives, the potential of our lives has been expanded. The

extent of that expansion could become radical. This sorcery is not just for Summer, because there is a capitalized, mythic version of every season. It could go beyond season and become constant in ways only you can discover. Summer was never really about what happened on the outside -- it was all on the inside. And what's inside is still ours. Summer never really left us. We just forgot how to do it.

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