



A Star-Studded Sky

“To persons standing alone on a hill during a clear midnight such as this, the roll of the world eastward is almost a palpable movement. The sensation may be caused by the panoramic glide of the stars past earthly objects, which is perceptible in a few minutes of stillness, or by the better outlook upon space that a hill affords, or by the wind, or by the solitude; but whatever be its origin the impression of riding along is vivid and abiding. The poetry of motion is a phrase much in use, and to enjoy the epic form of that gratification it is necessary to stand on a hill at a small hour of the night, and, having first expended with a sense of difference from the mass of civilized mankind, who are dreamwapt and disregardful of all such proceedings at this time, long and quietly watch your stately progress through the stars. After such a nocturnal reconnoitre it is hard to get back to earth, and to believe that the consciousness of such majestic speeding is derived from a tiny human frame.”

Thomas Hardy from “Far From the Madding Crowd” (published in 1874)

At a recent book club gathering, where we were discussing the Thomas Harding book, we talked about the use of words and while some were of the opinion that fewer words were better than more words, I feel that we sometimes lose out if we do not have prose such as the above. It paints a picture and invokes a feeling that would be lost if Hardy had just said “a person standing on a hill under a star-studded sky” and then moved on with the story.

Today, we seem to want everything to happen in a hurry and that includes our use of language. We shorten words to mere letters, often using icons to replace words, text messages replace person to person conversations. We are reducing our world to nano-bytes.

What is the reason that we are saving our time? Are we using these saved moments to help our fellow mankind in moments of need? Are we spending more time protecting that which needs protection – people or our world? These are all good and noble pursuits but often, the saved time just becomes wasted time.

Take time to let words take you away, to kick-start your imagination, to see and hear and smell what is not right in front of you. Take time to enjoy.

And to end, a favourite piece of prose written by Evelyn Richardson in her book, “We Keep A Light” published in 1945.

“The chain of human life unrolls as limitless as the waves in the sea that laps all shores; it is good to know of those who went this way before and to think of those who will come after. The spots of earth we call our own, as we take our place in the life continuity, never actually belong to any of us; what are really ours are the eyes and ears to see and hear, and the soul to love and understand the beauties around us. Who could sell or buy the sea among the rocks, the winds rippling the fields of grass, the moon’s lustrous path across the surging water, or the star-studded bowl of the night sky? They are without price, and priceless, and will be here for those who follow us. Then the work of our hands, those insignificant scratches on the face of the earth, may serve to remind others of our passing, as the tiny heaps of stones, laboriously gathered a hundred years ago, bring to our minds those who preceded us at this tiny speck in time and place.”

*Reading gives us someplace to go
When we have to stay where we are.*
Mason Cooley