

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Who are we? Who am I and who are you? Questions of identity always fascinate, don't they? Are we really the person we present to our surrounding world each day? Or is there another *us*, another secret person in us begging to be released?

This latter description would seem to describe Susan Boyle, the forty-seven year old unemployed charity worker from a small village in Scotland who wowed the world with her singing recently on the U.K. Television show, *Britain's Got Talent*.

The key to her sudden fame is the marked contrast between the way she presented herself on the show and the impression she made once she started singing.

What's interesting about Susan Boyle is that she's been singing since she was twelve. More still, voice coach, Fred O'Neil worked with her for years. In fact, it was Fred who encouraged her to audition.

So it's not like someone somewhere didn't know Susan had a quality voice. The image Susan Boyle had chosen to present to the world didn't equate much with her self-presentation. Walking on stage, she looked more than a little ordinary, with her frizzy hair and noticeable handles around the midriff. She looked anything but modern and *with it*.

With over thirty-five million viewers having clicked on to her YouTube video in the first few days, what does all of this mean?

Destined for more? What's perhaps most surprising in this is not that Susan Boyle has a wonderful, angelic voice, but that we're so caught up in it all. Why is it that we *love it so* when the ordinary is suddenly transmuted to extraordinary?

Like the journeyman baseball or football player who lands with a new team and is suddenly, with a fresh start and an opportunity to play, a rising star. Or the college drop out who falters in the classroom but, through a keen business sense, is now an enviable success in the outside world.

Isn't there a spark in each of us that thinks we, too, have a success gene roaming our gene pool somewhere? And that if we just had the right opportunity, the right situation, success would come knocking on our door as well?

Why do we love to root for the underdog, the one least projected to succeed or win? And how else do we explain the goose bumps we feel when someone like Susan Boyle knocks down the barriers of our stereotypes once she opens her mouth and starts to sing?

The world of possibility, tinged as it is with hope and promise, draws us in, doesn't it? Whether it ever happens or not, isn't there a glimmer in all of us that likes to think *we're destined for more?*

Triumph of the spirit. Part of what we learn in the Susan Boyle happening is that, in order to succeed, sometimes we have to risk failing. Susan could have walked out on the stage and bombed. Surely, that's what the majority thought was in store for her on first impressions.

If we seldom risk anything, how can we ever really know who we are? At this point, I like the Nike motto: *Just do it!*

If given a chance, the human spirit is indeed a wonder to behold. Whenever any of us overcomes the odds against us, whenever we rise up when expectations and assumptions would have us fall down, whenever we triumph in the face of certain defeat, it's a victory for human beings everywhere.

At the end of the day, we don't know to what heights we can soar unless we give ourselves to the process—the competition, the performance, the development, whatever it is. Moreover, we never know what success story or achievement lies within us just waiting to be realized.

Susan Boyle, wherever you are: keep singing. And don't worry too much about the hair or the extra pounds. They're not what it's really about anyway. What it's about is *going for it in life*, reaching for the heavens and, perchance, riding the winds of destiny along the way.

Somewhere, every day, there's an ordinary somebody waiting to burst into the realm of the extraordinary. Call it destiny; call it self-discovery. But always, it's a triumph of the human spirit that encourages us all.